

HOW TO DEVELOP A PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM

What is public relations?

- A planned and sustained effort to establish mutual understanding between an organization and its public.
- An organized effort to understand what the public wants and to tailor services and messages to meet those needs.

FOUR BASIC STEPS TOWARD GOOD PUBLIC RELATIONS

I. Research

A. Study the community.

1. Who are your public — students, teachers, staff, administrators, board members, parents, other professionals (i.e., public librarians), taxpayers?
2. Consider the demographics — income levels, ethnic backgrounds, occupations, religions, interests, etc.

B. Evaluate the media center's current status. Make an effort to find out what people think of the services you provide.

1. Find out when teachers have free periods — go talk with them.
2. Have students participate in a poster or essay contest on the theme "what the library means to me."
3. Devise a questionnaire about library media services.

II. Planning

A. Make the public relations program part of the total media center program. Develop a PR policy or service philosophy. Have it approved by the administration and communicated to all teachers and staff.

B. Get your entire staff involved.

1. Make sure your internal communication system works before you start a publicity program.
2. Be sure you can deliver all that you promise.

C. Take an objective look at your library. Is bright, comfortable, and welcoming? If not, make some changes.

D. Plan programs — draw ideas from available resources. Keep up with the professional journals and participate in professional organizations so you can stay fresh and find new inspiration.

III. Communicating

A. Become aware of all existing communication channels and use them — i.e., school newspaper, staff newsletters, PTA or PTO publications, the community press (radio, television, and newspapers) bulletin boards and even the school inter-com system.

B. Create new communication channels — start a newsletter for teachers and staff in your building. Report on how the media center is being used by teachers. Give news of TV specials or community affairs that can be tied in to the teaching program.

C. Combine imagination with common sense to choose or create the most effective publicity.

1. Use posters, flyers, bookmarks, balloons, etc.
 - a. Use ALA (or commercial) graphics and tailor them to your local program.
 - b. Be sure your posters are posted outside the media center.
 - c. Don't spend more time producing posters than you spend planning the program.
 - d. Plan exhibits — remember, they don't have to be in the media center.

D. Participate in school and community activities — be visible, interested, alive, and contributing. Volunteer to speak to parents and community groups.

IV. Evaluation

A. Always take time to assess the success of your efforts — try to be objective.

B. Continue to measure response to the media center and to take readings on your image.