



Public relations (PR), in this context, concerns the promotion of community groups and local voluntary. Public relations is as important to the community/voluntary sector as it is to any other sector. It is about communicating with everyone outside the organisation – its members, the general public, the media and other organisations.

It is important to make the best use of PR opportunities as this will ensure that information is available to as wide a range of people as possible and will also create further interest in the community group or proposed project. PR can take many different forms, such as:

- Community advertisements and press release in local newspapers/local radio
- Community newsletter
- Printed literature such as posters, flyers/notices distributed by post, through the local schools, in shops, community facilities and other public venues
- Meetings with/talks to local organisations
- Publications
- Promotional gifts

In addition to being informative, publicity materials must be interesting, jargon free and of a high quality.

## Activity

In small groups, generate ideas for the skills and information necessary to publicise the community group. Share this in the larger group.

## Ideas generation

This is an exercise to generate ideas. Participants call out all their ideas related to the topic without discussion and these are listed on a flipchart. It is best to generate as many contributions as possible and all ideas are welcomed at this stage. The merits of each suggestion can be discussed later.

## Why should a community group promote itself?

Access	To get more people involved in the group. Telling local people about the group, letting them know meeting times, contact names and phone numbers.
Information	To tell people what the group is doing. Letting them know about particular events, campaigns or fundraising activities.
Raising awareness	Provoking interest in a particular topic or issue the group is involved in.
Credibility	To let people know what the group is good at, to share success stories, improve the group's reputation and also to influence.

When considering how best to communicate the message to the target audience the community group should consider:

- What is the best way of reaching the audience?
- What age group are they?
- Where do they live or work?
- What papers are they likely to read?
- What places are they likely to visit?
- What TV and radio programmes are they likely to watch and listen to?

## How to use public relations to promote a community group

Good publicity requires the community group to get a message across to the right people in the right way at the right time. Some issues are topical and if an opportunity is not seized then it may be lost. The community group will need to approach different people in different ways – finding the best way for the target audience to hear the message is essential.

Target Audience	Message	Means of Communication
Wider community	Details of community events	Community newsletter Posters Flyers/notices Community advertisement in local newspaper and on local radio station
District Council	Communication of community views on proposed economic development	Meeting with Economic Development Officer Presentation to council meeting and economic sub-committee meeting



## Examples of Publicity Material

### Newsletter

A monthly or quarterly newsletter to members helps keep them informed about what the group is doing. This can be a simple A4 page that can be photocopied. It should be informative, eye catching and well designed. Text should be laid out in two or three columns down the page as this is read more easily than lines of text spread across the whole page. It should also be broken up into small sections with bold headings. Remember it does not need to be glossy or expensive. This can also be sent to editors of local papers and radio stations as well as to other relevant community organisations.

### Community Newspaper

This may be an extension of the newsletter, or a newspaper in its own right, with copies being delivered to every household in the neighbourhood. The same basic guidelines on layout and design apply for a community newspaper as for a community newsletter.

### Leaflets

Leaflets can be developed to advertise a programme of events or a new service. Make sure the name of the group, the date, time and place of the event is clear. The text should be well spaced with bold headings and kept brief but accurate.

### Posters

The group needs to think about what is being advertised, what pictures will be used and where the posters will be displayed. The image they will create is important and the most appropriate size for display purposes should be selected. If the poster is to be displayed outside, ensure the quality of paper is suitable for outdoors or is laminated.

### Display Boards

Display boards can often be borrowed from larger voluntary organisations, for example, the local Rural Support Networks or Rural Community Network, for specific community group events including

information roadshows and Annual General Meetings.

### Other Forms of Publicity

Effective publicity does not have to cost a community group a lot of money, however if there is a budget for publicity materials some more ambitious ideas include:- Video, PowerPoint presentations, websites, car-stickers, badges, balloons, audio tapes, pens, pencils and T-shirts.

Remember to keep any publicity material:

- Simple
- Brief
- Accurate
- Positive
- Enthusiastic
- Sincere

### Contacting the Media

Get to know useful people in the media (personal contact with those who deal with community issues is best). Keep them informed of newsworthy activities. Watch/read/listen to the media you intend to approach so that you develop a feel for the sorts of stories that will be attractive to them.

### Writing and Issuing a Press Release

- Be concise and to the point - who, what, when, where and why in the first paragraph.
- Write an interesting, but short headline - however many journalists will write their own for an informative article.
- Use quotes which add life to a story and strength to the opinions they contain. Quotes should be brief and lively.
- Sell the local angle of your story.
- Detail the contact names and telephone numbers of members who will be available to talk to the media (home telephone numbers and mobile numbers).

- Press releases should be in the region of one to two pages 1½ line spacing with wide margins for editors to make notes on.
- Mark 'EMBARGO' on the press release (with the date and time for release) if it is confidential until a certain time.
- Add a photograph as this will help ensure the press release is printed. Ensure the photograph is captioned with details and names.
- Issue press releases in good time and remember journalists are working to tight deadlines.
- Build up a personal contact with local newspaper, radio stations, etc. If sending to particular reporters, address it to them personally as well as to the editor.
- Ensure the community group is geared to cope with the response.
- Send to local radio stations also – they may decide to contact you for a radio interview.
- Be persistent. Issue the press release and follow up with a telephone call.