AGU

THRIVING EARTH EXCHANGE

Media Toolkit

Segal Communications

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How to Build and Execute a PR Plan

I. INTRODUCTION

What is Public Relations?

To officially define PR, we go directly to the source — the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA):

Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and the public.

The primary way PR professionals communicate information about an organization to the public is through the media. That includes traditional platforms like television, radio, and newspapers, as well as digital platforms like websites, podcasts, and social media.

Why is it important?

If you're trying to change something, you need to make people care by articulating a story that resonates. PR is the art of telling that story — whether your audience is local residents, government officials, or the public.

How can I effectively do it on my own?

Public relations is an art, not a science. With the right tools, resources and effort, anyone can build an impactful public relations campaign and execute it.

II. IDENTIFY YOUR NEWSWORTHY ANGLE

The first — and most important — step is to craft your story. Your newsworthy angle is derived from your project. While your project's main product might be a study or report, your newsworthy angle is the most important thing you learned from that study or report, and who (or what) is (or will be) affected.

For example, LEAD Agency created a map that showed what happened when the Tar Creek Superfund Site flooded. They discovered that there were piles of toxic mining waste directly in the floodplain of Ottawa County, Oklahoma. When Tar Creek flooded, the contaminated water seeped into residential neighborhoods.

While the map is supporting material for your outreach, the newsworthy angle is not the map itself, it's the flooding and its potential to poison local residents.

That is the story they needed to tell.

PR Pro Tip: Find members of the impacted community willing to share their stories. Reporters are always looking for ways to personalize a story to make it more relatable.

PR Pro Tip: To make your story even more newsworthy, consider planning a live event. Television and radio reporters in particular love events where they can capture interesting footage. Channel your inner film director and think cinematically! In the case of LEAD Agency, community leads held a "toxic tour" of the Superfund Site so reporters and the public could go and see the contaminated area for themselves.

Here are a few more real-life examples:

- Friends of the Pinole Creek Watershed released a report about the amount of trash in Pinole Creek. They plan to host a trash clean-up day to get local residents involved, which is also a great opportunity for the media to come to see the problem — and the solution!

- The American Venice Civic Association designed a new living shoreline to combat erosion. A great news moment could be inviting the media down to see them break ground on the project.

III. WRITE YOUR PRESS RELEASE

Now that you've established your newsworthy angle, you're ready to write your press release. A press release is your organization's official statement about your project and its findings findings. You can distribute your press release over a newswire such as PR Newswire or Businesswire, which will reach a large audience. Additionally, you can add it to your website on a press page and include it in email pitches to reporters for more context.If you put out a press release be sure to share your plans with partners, participants, and Thriving Earth Exchange.

A note about newswires:

What is a newswire? A newswire is a distribution service that shares a press release to newsrooms - locally, nationally, and internationally. When working with a wire service, you will decide where you want your press release will go. Most press releases that big businesses are distributed on the US1 distribution which is the most comprehensive circuit.

Wire services will send you a report of where your press release was picked-up. These are the news outlets that republish your article verbatim.

Using a wire service is expensive and not always appropriate for your project. YES, you should still write a press release, but if you have developed a list of appropriate media contacts, you can use the pitch within your email pitch.

PR Pro Tip: If relevant, include the project's location in your headline, as this will help your press release pick up. Many news outlets have algorithms that auto post news about their city or state.

There are dozens of services that offer this outreach below are several to consider if you are seeing this kind of amplification. Included are links to their pricing guides.

PR Newswire
Business Wire
Accesswire
MARKETERSMedia
PRNob
PRWeb
EINPresswire
Newswire
eReleases

Press Release Example

To get a sense of what your press release might look like, here is an example from LEAD Agency:

Contact Name
Title
Email and Phone

L.E.A.D.
AGENCY, INC.
LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION DEMANDED

OKLAHOMA FLOODS THREATEN TO BRING TOXIC WASTE STRAIGHT TO RESIDENTS' BACKYARDS

Environmentalists in Ottawa County team up with community science nonprofit to map the Tar Creek floodplain, warning authorities and residents of health risks

OTTAWA COUNTY, OKLAHOMA, OCTOBER 4, 2022 — For decades, the residents of Ottawa County, Oklahoma have contended with contaminated water, air, and soil from the Tar Creek Superfund Site, one of the oldest of these sites in the nation. New data released today show that risks are even greater than previously thought. According to a comprehensive GIS map created by environmental justice organization Local Environmental Action Demanded (LEAD) Agency through support from science nonprofit American Geophysical Union's Thriving Earth Exchange, huge piles of toxic mining waste currently lie within the Tar Creek floodplain, leaving the county even more vulnerable to heavy metals contamination.

"The town of Miami, Oklahoma will not exist if flooding increases — which it will," said Rebecca Jim, Executive Director of LEAD Agency, which she founded with activist Earl Hatley in 1997 to educate and organize the community around environmental concerns. "This is a question of environmental justice."

More than 120 years of active mining and unremediated contamination within the Tar Creek Superfund Site have led to a public health crisis among the area's 31,200 residents, many of whom are low-income members of the region's nine tribal nations. For decades, toxic mining waste has oozed heavy metals like lead, zinc, and cadmium into Tar Creek, which has made the list of the 10 most endangered rivers in the country for two years running. The contamination has led to confirmed cases of lead poisoning and other health issues among the local population. The former towns of Picher and Cardin took a federal buyout in 2010 and no longer exist; the towns that remain are in grave danger.

LEAD Agency's new map shows that when Tar Creek floods, the county not only suffers the impact of toxic creekwater, but also direct contamination from towers of toxic waste known as "chat," which loom up to 200 feet over the landscape. The region has experienced increased flooding in recent years and will likely see more due to climate change.

The map project began in 2020, when Jim, a member of the Cherokee Nation, partnered with Thriving Earth Exchange to create a tool that could visually showcase what happens when Tar Creek floods. Jim's primary collaborator was Community Science Fellow Jessica Tran, who worked with environmental scientists and cartographers to develop the interactive map that includes the specific locations of chat, aquifers, and groundwater wells, as well as the locations of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) assessed properties. Tran and Jim hope the map will spur the EPA to clean up Tar Creek, and alert local residents to imminent risks.

"Homes that have been remediated may very well be re-contaminated, and climate change will continue to make things worse," said Tran. "With more frequent and unpredictable flooding, we need to clean up Tar Creek, so it is safe for residents of Ottawa County."

The map is currently available here. To make the information accessible to local residents who may not have internet access, LEAD Agency also plans to distribute a

PDF version on flash drives at their annual Tar Creek Conference on October 12-13, at NEO College in Miami, Oklahoma. Held every year since 1998, the Tar Creek Conference brings together scientists, tribal leaders, government agencies, and local residents to discuss current environmental issues. Attendees this year will include federal and state environmental agencies, tribal officials, researchers, and community members.

For more information about the Tar Creek Conference, please visit leadagency.org.

About LEAD Agency
LEAD Agency is an environmental justice organization in northeastern Oklahoma that seeks to raise awareness about the effects of contamination on human health and the environment. Through public education, outreach, action, involvement with appropriate government agencies, and litigation, LEAD works to organize a citizen response toward cleanup and restoration of environmental harms, while striving for pollution prevention and environmental sustainability. To learn more, please visit leadagency.org.

###

Press Release Template

Now that you have an idea of what a press release looks and sounds like, use this template to write your own:

YOUR LOGO

(Including your organization's logo at the top quickly informs readers about who the press release is from. Any logos included in a press release need approval from their organization, as including their logo implies that the press release is published on their behalf. Partners should not use Thriving Earth or AGU logos.)

HEADLINE: YOUR NEWSWORTHY ANGLE
Subhead (optional): Additional details to engage readers

CITY, STATE, MONTH DAY, YEAR — [Paragraph #1 - most important information] Sentence 1: Hook - what is the newsworthy angle? Sentence 2: who, what, when, where? Sentence 3: Why is this important?

[Paragraph #2 - background on issue]

Sentence 1: General background on the issue. Sentence 2: Additional background, including any relevant statistics. Sentence 3: What are the stakes if nothing is done about this?

Quote #1: From community, lead addressing the importance of the project

[Paragraph #3 - background on project]

Sentence 1: When did this project begin? Sentence 2: Who is involved? (introduce Thriving Earth Exchange lead). Sentence 3: What are the relevant details of the project? Sentence 4: Who is the audience for this project?

Quote #2: From community lead or community science fellow on what they hope to have happen

[Paragraph #4 (optional) - any additional information]

About
Your organization's boilerplate. This is a brief summary of your organization's main goals, and link to a website. Thriving Earth projects should not use a summary of AGU or Thriving Earth here, as that implies AGU/TEX are jointly releasing the press release

Media Contact
Contact name
Email
Phone number

PR Pro Tip: Do not use a personal phone number, and ask the wire service that any number you provide is only visible to reporters.

###

Best Practices

Now you should have a pretty good idea of what a press release is and how to write one. Here are a few more tips to help you create the best release possible:

- **Write an attention-grabbing headline**: This is your chance to grab the reader's attention. Think about the article you would want to be written about your project. What is the headline? Use it for your press release.

- **Use some memorable quotes**: Quotes are your opportunity to add color and bring the story to life. Ensure your quotes read like something someone said, not something they wrote.

- **Get to the point**: Frontload the most important information. A reporter might not read the whole release, so make sure they get what they need to know right away. And on that note…

- **Keep it short**: Like all of us, reporters have a lot to do and aren't going to spend much time reading a long press release. Ideally, your press release should be one page with two pages being the absolute max.

- **Add visuals**: Relevant photos, charts, and other graphics are a great way to add interest, especially for visual mediums like TV. (Note: wire services charge additional fees to include images but graphics and image elements can improve coverage)

IV. CREATE A SOCIAL MEDIA PLAN

Don't forget to post about your project on your own social media channels! Social media is your own personal news outlet where you can say exactly what you want to people who already know and care about your issue. Social media also allows your community to help you spread awareness by sharing your posts with their own networks.

Here are a few best practices for social posting:

- **Tagging**: When you mention organizations or partners in your posts, you must check if they have active accounts on that platform for you to tag. When you tag a partner, they'll be notified, which allows them to engage with the post.

- **Hashtags**: People use hashtags to find content that is relevant to them on social media. You'll want to use a range of hashtags, some general and some more specific and descriptive. For Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, three hashtags are plenty, and for Instagram, five to ten is a good rule of thumb. Here are some examples of hashtags Lead Agency used when posting about their map project: #interactivemap #floodingzone #oklahoma #science #water #contamination

- **Readability**: When drafting posts, it's important to break up your text into small paragraphs ranging from one to two sentences. This makes readability much easier. See the examples below.

- **Length**: Social media posts are concise and straightforward, so keep your text under 200 words. If your posts are longer, consider re-reading to see what can be removed. Then utilize the removed information to build another post!

With all that in mind, you're ready to create a social media plan to promote your project. Here's a basic template you can use:

- **Pre-Announcement Post:** This post comes out before you announce your project/findings in a press release — think of it a teaser to get people excited. It should look like this:

  *We're so excited to announce that our *add project name and details here* will be available this week! Stay tuned for more information!*

- **Announcement Post #1:** This is when you reveal the project and/or your findings in detail. You might want to include quotes from the press release or thought leaders in your organization. Also, make sure to add a call to action at the end, indicating what you want readers to do (i.e. "click on this link to learn more.")

  Here's an example from LEAD Agency:

  Today we are excited to share a project that we have been working on with support from our friends at AmericanGeophysicalUnion's Thriving Earth Exchange. To illustrate the dangers of the Tar Creek Superfund Site, we created a map that shows what happens when the area floods — an increasingly common occurrence.

  What we discovered is that there are chat piles within the floodplain that are further contaminating the water and poisoning our community.

  We will use this map to alert residents and urge decision-makers to clean up the Tar Creek Superfund Site. We encourage you to check out the map and share it with your community.

  bit.ly/3y5Zoj7

- **Announcement Post #2:** Since some followers might not have seen your first post, you'll want to do at least one more announcement. This post can be similar to the first post, but you should vary it slightly, perhaps with a different quote.

Here's another example from LEAD Agency:

To create our interactive map of the Tar Creek floodplain, we worked with Jessica Tran, a community science fellow at AmericanGeophysicalUnion's Thriving Earth Exchange. Here's what Jessica had to say about what we discovered:

"Homes that have been remediated may very well be re-contaminated, and climate change will continue to make things worse. With more frequent and unpredictable flooding, we need to clean up Tar Creek, so it is safe for residents of Ottawa County."

Have you explored the map yet? Check it out here: bit.ly/3y5Zoj7.

- **Partner Post:** We recommend asking partners and friendly organizations (like AGU/Thriving Earth Exchange) to post about your project/findings. This will greatly increase your project's visibility and reach on social media.

  Here's what LEAD Agency sent to partner organizations:

  Our friends at L.E.A.D. Agency, Inc. have created a map to show what happens when Oklahoma's Tar Creek floods.

  The Tar Creek Superfund Site is one of the oldest superfund sites in the nation and has been contaminating Ottawa County's water, air, and soil for decades.

  The new map shows that piles of toxic mining waste lie directly in the floodplain, further contaminating the water and poisoning the community.

  You can check out the map here: bit.ly/3y5Zoj7.

V. BUILD YOUR MEDIA LIST

What is a media list?

A media list is a way to organize the names and contact information of journalists and other media members who might be interested in your story. These are the people you will eventually pitch. Here's how to put one together:

Step 1: Define your target audience

- Think about who you want to read/see/hear about your story. Some examples might be local residents, people who care about the environment, or government officials.
- Next, think about what kind of media these people are likely to consume. Examples could include local news publications or national outlets that cover a specific topic like science or the environment.

Step 2: Identify relevant publications and journalists

Publications
- Use Google or another search engine to find media outlets your audience will likely consume. Your search can be as simple as "Top 10 Science Publications."
- By researching key outlets, you can then use their site to look for specific contacts.

PR Pro Tip: You can also include newsletters, podcasts, broadcast news, or blogs in your search.

Journalists
- To find journalists who have written about your topic or related topics, search the desired subject and scan through the articles.
- When reading an article, clicking on the journalist's name in a byline should take you to their author page, where an email will be listed. Note that you might have to click on an email icon for the address to pop up.
- If you cannot find a journalist's email address, most publications will have a "Staff Info" or "Contact" page where you can find their email address.
- If you cannot find a journalist's email address, you can either (A) do an organic search to see if you can find it online or (B) use the outlet's general editor email address i.e. editor@fastcompany.com.

PR Pro Tip: Most reporters are active on Twitter and will often include their contact information on their profile. You can also check their Twitter bio to see if they would welcome a direct message., which you can send if you follow them and their DMs are "open." Sending a simple message like "Hi, I see that you write about [topic]. [Organization] has some important news coming out on [date] do you have an email address I can send information to? Thank you, [name + email]

Step 3: Verify media contacts
- You can do a new search with the journalist's name to see if they have their own website, double-checking to make sure that the email listed on their author page matches their personal website.

- This is especially useful for freelance journalists, as they may have multiple emails corresponding to different outlets.

Step 4: Record contact information

Media contacts can be documented in a spreadsheet or columned Word document for easy access. Always triple-check that the email address and name are spelled correctly. Information should include:

- First and last name
- Name of publication
- Email address
- Role/Title
- Phone number (if available)
- Social media handles (if available)
- Notes column

Media List Best Practices:

- Update your media list regularly, as journalists may change their beat or place of work.
- Document your correspondence and outreach efforts to track when you have reached out and followed up if the journalist is out of the office, the email address bounced, etc.
- Include multiple contacts per outlet on your list if an email bounces or someone never responds.

PR Pro Tip: Your first email distribution will result in some emails that "bounce" or don't make it to the intended recipient. In these cases, we recommend going back to the news outlet to identify an alternative target. There is a lot of turnover in media so a media list you create will be outdated within a month or two.

PR Pro Tip: Set up Google Alerts about your topic. Google Alerts will send you daily or weekly emails of articles written about your subject. You will have to fine tune these alerts as you go to weed out inappropriate articles.

PR Pro Tip: Use the articles you source using Google Alerts to highlight other work in your space. It is also a very good idea to follow all the reporters you have included on your media list on Twitter and post about any interesting articles they write (before you ask them to cover your news). Reporters rarely get kudos for their work. A simple "Interesting article written by @[reporterhandle] about [topic]..." helps establish a relationship with them over time. If you are lucky, they may even follow you back!

VI. CRAFT YOUR MEDIA PITCHES

What is a media pitch?

A media pitch is the way you're presenting your story idea to media outlets. Once your press release is prepared and your media list is built, it's time to write your pitch. As the cliché goes, you only have one chance to make a first impression.

You should take some time to prepare your pitch in a way that will be sure to grab its target's attention to maximize your chances that your story will get coverage.

Customize your media pitch

If you want to make as much impact as possible, customize your media pitch as specifically as you can to your media contact. Customized pitches can be made for individual reporters and editors or specific types of outlets (i.e. local news, environmental news, etc).

- **Individuals:** When you're reaching out to a media contact you have worked with before or crafting a pitch for a high-value contact, consider personalizing the pitch specific to that contact. If the reporter wrote an article in your subject area, reference that article by telling them that you saw it or appreciated it and thought they might be interested in another story related to that topic.

- **Outlets**: As discussed earlier, different media outlets have different audiences for their stories. Remember what is most interesting and important to the type of outlet you are pitching, so you can tailor your pitch accordingly. For example, you will want to create a different pitch for local journalists compared to your pitch for national outlets, who will probably need more background. Media pitches for broadcast stations might also be different from pitches to print publications, highlighting any opportunities to gather video footage.

Media pitch best practices

- **Remember your newsworthy angle**: To grab the attention of the journalist or reporter your pitch is targeting, you must let them know as succinctly as possible why their audience should care about your story. Similar to a press release, don't bury the lead.
- **Consider your target**: While drafting your pitch, consider the audience your targeted publication is attempting to reach. This helps you adjust your newsworthy angle to increase your chances of success.

VII. PRACTICE FOR INTERVIEWS

Dos:

- **Do** familiarize yourself with the reporter, their writing style, and specific areas of interest. This will help you walk into conversations prepared (don't mention your sleuthing). If no photograph was provided of attending media, journalists can typically be identified by any credentials they're wearing, a notebook in hand, or a photo/video camera. Formal media events will feature a check-in table, which will make it easier to identify journalists.

- **Do** consider who the best person on your project would be for the interview. Whose interests overlap with the media outlet? Who can best speak to the topics the journalist said they want to cover? Who is most comfortable in front of the camera? Who might the audience best respond to?

- **Do** open up the discussion with light, casual conversation and use the reporter's first name to create a genuine atmosphere. Try to find commonality by looking at the reporter's LinkedIn or social profiles before the interview. This will "connect" you to the reporter in a meaningful way that will solidify your relationship and increase the likelihood of positive coverage.

- **Do** feel free to ask questions and solicit feedback. These opportunities with media should be treated as conversations – while the reporter will likely ask a majority of the questions, there is an opportunity to learn about what their editorial interests are and share different ways in which you could be relevant for their publication or outlet. Remember, though, that you're on the record.

- **Do** remember that some media may not be familiar with your organization's history or strategy. Be prepared to tailor your conversation to meet the particular educational and informational needs of people who may have never been introduced to you.

- **Do** repeat questions before answering frame the context for the reporter and create "sound bites."

    - **Don't do this:**

        - **Reporter:** Where did you grow up?
        - **Interviewee:** Boston

    - **Do this:**

        - **Reporter:** Where did you grow up?
        - **Interviewee:** I grew up in Boston.

- **Do** feel free to go back to previous questions or conversation points to clarify if needed.

- **Do** share personal anecdotes to add additional color to your conversation with media and humanize the organization.

- **Do** have the last word. Many reporters will ask if there's anything else you'd like to share before wrapping up the conversation. This is an opportunity to touch on any points you feel were missed or reiterate key messages. We recommend going to any interview with no more than three key messages you want to get across.

- **Do** encourage media to reach out to you or your team for any follow-up questions or opportunities, and be sure to exchange contact information (e.g. business cards) before wrapping up the conversation.

- **Do** lightly tease any updates that may be coming about your project without giving away the news. "We expect to have some additional news/results from this project in [month]. I'd love to share those with you when the time comes." They will try to get you to divulge more information but stand stong and let them know they will be on the top of your list to call but cannot provide details at this time. Get them on the hook!

- **Do** HAVE FUN! This is the time to show the media what sets your organization apart. Bring energy and enthusiasm to your project. Reporters like to interview interesting people, not accountants (apologies to all the vivacious accountants). Help them drink the Kool-Aid!

- **Do** have an understanding of what information can or cannot be shared with media, such as financial facts, figures or any other sensitivities. If you're unsure, listen to your gut – don't be afraid to let the reporter know that you'll need to confirm the information and get back to them.

- **Do** understand that if a PR representative is present, that representative's role in these conversations is to act as a facilitator — not as an active participant. Typically, the representative will make some quick introductions up-front, then stand by to take notes on any follow-up needs, stepping in occasionally only to:

    - Help guide the conversation through potential trouble spots;

    - Remind you of certain points that may have been overlooked;

    - Keep track of the time;

    - Let the representative step in if the reporter presses on questions you can't address.

Don'ts:

- **Don't** stay in the background during media events. Whether approached by a media representative or actively seeking out media conversations, beengaged and use this opportunity to build relationships and showcase whatyour organization and your team offer.
- **Don't** feel compelled to have the answer to every question. If there's a question that you don't have the answer to, let the reporter know that you'll need to confirm the correct answer and get back to them. It's better to delay the response than provide an incorrect answer.
- **Don't** say "No comment." This statement makes it sound as if you are hiding something; always defer to reaching back out at a later time when you're able to source the appropriate response on behalf of yourorganization.
- **Don't** presume that anything is "off the record." Whatever you say, either on or off the record, cannot be unsaid. If you don't want it to appear, don't mention it in any capacity of the conversation.
- **Don't** assume that some media are more important than others. You may contact bloggers, mainstream media, or digital newspaper representatives, all of who report to various audiences. Treat everyone equally, with courtesy and respect.
- **Don't** volunteer information about previous or subsequent meetings with other media.
- **Don't** be afraid to speak with multiple media at once – if you find yourself in a conversation with more than one journalist, don't feel that you need to focus on one person at a time. These conversations can be more friendly and casual, which leads to increased comfort for all parties.
- **Don't** ask to see the article draft. Journalists are not typically allowed to share drafts of stories beforehand. But you can ask when they expect the piece to go live.

VIII. MONITOR AND RECORD YOUR RESULTS

Whew — the hard work of pitching and doing interviews is done! But your job isn't quite finished. Now it's time to track and record your coverage. Here's how:

- **Search for stories**: Use Google News to find recent stories using keywords related to your project. You can also set up a Google alert using those same keywords to ensure you don't miss anything.

- **Follow up**: If you did an interview or provided information to a reporter, but don't see an article within the time frame discussed during your interview, email them to find out when it will go live. It's okay to email them repeatedly, but try to offer new valuable information each time.

- **Find TV clips**: There are special services that allow you to download broadcast clips. Here is a list of clipping services to consider (some will do one-time clips):
    - 360 MediaWatch
    - TVEyes
    - MediaMonkeyBiz
    - National Aircheck
    - News Exposure
    - TV Video Clips
    - Universal Clipping

  If you want to use one of these providers, set up your account *before* your news goes live. If you can't use one, you can look for the clip on the TV station's website or Youtube channel. You can also ask your media contact to send a clip, though they don't always have the bandwidth to do this.

- **Correct errors**: When you do see a story about your project, scan it for errors. If information is *factually inaccurate,* email the reporter the correct information as soon as possible. Note that reporters will not typically change quotes. Remember to be polite!

- **Share your hits**: Repost any coverage on your social channels and tag the outlet and/or reporter.

- **Keep a record**: Document your coverage in a spreadsheet for stakeholders. This will also help you keep track of reporters who have covered your project, so you can reach out to them again about any new initiatives.

IX. REPEAT

Congratulations! Now you know how to execute a PR campaign. Use these steps to promote your project and any future initiatives.

You are doing incredible work. Make sure the world knows about it!