

Publicizing Your Unit

What Is Public Relations?

Webster's Dictionary defines public relations (PR) as “those functions of a corporation, organization, etc., concerned with attempting to create favorable public opinion for itself.” Generally, those functions include communicating within and outside of the organization. Examples might include publishing a newsletter, talking with a reporter, or speaking at a public event. While the goal is to develop a positive public image for a company or group, public relations professionals know that it's always easier to create a bad public image than a good one. Newspaper and television reporters seem to focus mostly on bad or negative news, so it's important to remember that effective public relations means planning and managing your public relations activities to build a positive image for your unit.

Why Public Relations?

Public relations is often an excellent way to help sell the Scouting program to boys and parents in your community. Positive publicity can have a direct impact on your unit's membership, recruiting and fund-raising efforts. In addition, it can often provide a boost to your advancement program by publicly recognizing the hard work, fun, and accomplishments of boys in your unit.

The intent of these *guidelines* is to help each unit create and sustain its own active and successful public relations program. Your questions, improvement suggestions to these guidelines, and update revisions to the attachments are most welcome. Send your written suggestions to the Redwood Empire Council, Attention: Vice President Marketing.

Think PUBLICITY all the time!

District and Unit Impact on Positive Publicity

Each district and unit in your council must help focus on promoting positive public relations every day in your local communities. And we must tell Scouting's story as often as possible.

Thousands of Scouting articles and photos carry a strong, positive message each month about the presence and vitality of the Boy Scouts of America and its impact in local communities.

We need your help in getting the word out. What can you do to help? The answer is simple. You can provide local media with information that communicates the fun and values of Scouting.

A newspaper is a business, and like most businesses, it is operated to produce a profit. At the same time, the newspaper's editors also recognize their responsibility to serve the people of the community and are always looking for items with local relevance. The people in your community want to know about Scouting. They want to read the articles about their neighbor earning his Eagle Scout Award and the Cub Scout pack collecting thousands of cans of food for the hungry. They also want to see the photo of Troop 272 setting up a neighborhood watch program as part of achieving the Crime Prevention merit badge. Therefore, your community newspaper is interested in reporting Scouting news about your pack, troop, team, or crew. Odds are that if you have a good story, it will be reported.

We have pulled together some practical, low-tech resources to help you tell the positive story of Scouting in your council. There might never be a more important time than now to let the public know that Scouting still believes in America's young people, and those children are worth the investment of both time and dollars. While today's children make up only 20 percent of the population, they are 100 percent of our future!

How Do We Get Started?

The following are some ideas that have been found to lead to successful unit public relations:

- A. Recruit a unit PR chairperson volunteer. It's great if you can recruit a professional PR practitioner from your unit. Ideally this person will also agree to take pictures, when appropriate. The chairperson needs to be able to obtain volunteer assistance (create a PR committee) if needed.
- B. Develop a plan. The unit leader, unit or activities committee, and the PR committee should develop a public relations plan listing what activities you'd like to publicize, as well as when and how they'll be publicized. Attempt to include only newsworthy activities in the plan. There's no guarantee that what you submit to a newspaper will be published, so you want to limit your submissions to items that the paper's readership will be interested in. Also, submissions more often than approximately every one or two months may wear out your welcome.
- C. Determine which media outlets are appropriate for your community and the item you're trying to publicize. Newspapers, particularly local papers, are generally receptive to community activities, including Scouting. Some radio stations and local cable TV stations also report on certain community events; however, their reach is usually more limited than local newspapers. Also, consider publicizing your activities to your chartered organization. Your chartered organization may also have a newsletter you can use. Don't forget to send releases to nontraditional media outlets such as church, educational, community, and corporate newsletters.
- D. Call the papers or stations to verify/determine who you should be dealing with, e.g., editor, community bulletin board editor, etc. Introduce yourself and explain what you're trying to do. A good rapport with the media can increase the chances your material will get used.
- E. Determine or verify the paper's deadline day and time for submitting articles. Also, find out how the paper prefers to receive your submission. If you will be submitting text only, the paper may welcome faxes. Personal deliveries are usually the best way to be sure your material gets to the right person on time.
- F. Establish a process within your unit for submitting and reviewing articles. The unit leader or unit committee may want to review articles prior to their submission.

How Do We Prepare an Article or News Release?

Before you prepare your first draft, review the proper format for articles:

- Type your write-up.
- Double space.
- Use 8 1/2" x 11" white paper.
- Use photos when possible.
- Label your write-up as a "NEWS RELEASE."
- If appropriate, name the specific section of the paper you would like the release to be included in.
- Be sure to include a contact person's name and phone number at the end of your write-up to answer any questions the paper may have.
- Type "####" at the end of your release.

When writing your first draft:

- Begin your write-up with the most newsworthy items.
- Follow with less important information.
- Answer the 5 W's and 1 H: Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How.
- Use short sentences.
- Stick with the facts; avoid opinions.
- When individual names are used, spell them correctly.

Once you've completed your first draft:

- Review it again.
- Eliminate any unnecessary words. Read it out loud. Is it clear?
- Have a friend read it. Does it make sense? Is it interesting?
- Revise/rewrite to obtain maximum clarity with brevity.

Should We Take a Picture?

The old saying “A picture is worth a thousand words” is especially true when working with the media. Given a choice between two similar stories, newspapers will often choose the one with an accompanying photograph.

In some cases, a newspaper may offer to send a photographer to your activity. It's suggested that you plan on taking your own pictures just in case the photographer doesn't show up. Find out if the paper has a preference for black and white or color pictures.

In your photos:

- Limit the number of subjects so you can be close enough to see faces clearly.
- Limit the background clutter; try for high contrast like a plain wall or trees.
- Avoid glass or mirrors in your background; the reflection can ruin a photo.
- When possible, take close-up action shots with smiling faces (to show Scouting is FUN).
- Remember, some newspapers may not accept digital photos, so be sure to contact them in advance for their requirements.

What About a Caption?

Often, a well-taken photo with a good caption will get a reader's attention and get your message across. In the caption:

- Include a picture title and a sufficient description of what's happening.
- Include names of subject(s) in the photo.
- Tape your typed caption to the back of the photo, or just submit the photo and caption together in an envelope. DO NOT write directly on the back of the photo (this can ruin it). Also, don't staple or paper clip it to your article, as that can also damage the photo.
- Include your name and contact phone number with the caption.

Additional Tips for Submitting Releases

- If pictures and/or a write-up are planned for after the activity, submit it as quickly as possible. Old news is less interesting and is less likely to get published.
- Submit a news release about an upcoming event one to two weeks in advance of the activity.
- When there's not enough time to write a news release, the media alert comes in handy. It takes only a short time to write and can be faxed to your media source. It can also serve as an announcement of an important upcoming event; planning ahead allows the paper to reserve a prominent space for your article. In this case, you may want to send a media alert two to three weeks prior to the event and follow up with the news release one to two weeks prior to the event. Sample formats for the news release and media alert are included in this guide.
- Find the “hook” or “angle.” Each news medium identifies reporters that cover an area; for example, one reporter may be assigned to sports and another to finance, family, religion, entertainment, etc. This will allow you to contact different reporters with fresh ideas and pitches. Send only one release per story to each publication. If for some reason you do furnish duplicate releases, let the recipients know, for example, note, "Also sent to sports editor."
- Send copies of releases and clippings to your local council's marketing director. • Thank the reporter. Send a personal note after the story runs. Don't say "thank you" as if the reporter did you a favor; acknowledge the reporter for "doing a good job in covering the topic."

” Why Not Send Our Story to the "Big Papers"?

Most weekly community newspapers are devoted to reporting on community events, making them ideal for Scouting-related announcements and articles. Daily papers, on the other hand, usually focus their attention on national and international news, as well as major stories in the region or area. Community events and local stories are not the primary focus of daily newspapers. In addition, daily papers serve a larger area than local papers and, therefore, couldn't possibly report on every unit's activities or events. As a result, daily newspapers will rarely publish a story generated by a single Scout unit.

On occasion, however, significant or unusual Scouting stories may warrant submission to a daily paper. The council office usually generates many of these stories. For example, daily newspapers have published stories about Scouts who have saved lives, and about council-wide events or activities. As a result, the council maintains relationships with daily newspapers in the area and can often assist you in cases when you believe an article should be submitted to a daily paper. For example, council public relations may know of similar stories that could be combined into a single article, or may be able to tie your story into a larger Scouting story more likely to be published.

If you're interested in submitting a story to a daily newspaper, first consider the following:

- Is your article or story appropriate for a daily paper? For the most part, daily newspapers don't publish prepared articles. They pay a staff of professional reporters to develop and write articles - your story needs to be significant or unusual enough for the paper to want to assign to a reporter.
- Professional reporters are paid to find “angles” that you might not want included in your story. For example, you could suddenly find that a write-up about your unit's door-to-door fund-raising campaign is included in a larger, negative story about fraudulent door-to-door solicitors. Remember that you have little or no control over how a reporter might use your story.
- What benefits would publication in a daily paper provide that publication in a local weekly paper wouldn't provide?

If you believe your story should be submitted to a daily newspaper, contact your District Executive to discuss your idea.

What About Cable Television?

Most cable TV systems offer bulletin boards, which provide **short** community service statements aired for nonprofit organizations. Cable bulletin boards are best used for simple announcements of broad community interest, such as fund-raising activities. A cable bulletin board is a good place to announce a car wash or pancake breakfast, but is not the most effective way to announce your open house for new members.

Before submitting to a bulletin board, consider the following:

- Is your message appropriate for a cable TV bulletin board? Can you communicate what you need to in the limited space available?
- Will your message be seen by the audience you're trying to reach? Not every home has access to or subscribes to cable television.
- Does the cable company broadcast in the right areas or communities? Some companies only reach parts of a county or area. Some cities and towns have several cable systems serving their residents.

To use a bulletin board, keep in mind:

- Type your announcement.
- Double space it.
- Usually there is a seven-line maximum and six words (approximately 32 characters) per line.
- Include a contact person's name and phone number after the message.
- Include the beginning and end date for the message. Usually there is a one-month maximum duration. If possible, give a two-week lead time to start airing.

Tips for Effective Public Relations

1. Make sure you really have news. As simple as it sounds, too often people submit articles that just aren't interesting or newsworthy enough for the media to use. Learn to look at your article objectively by putting yourself in a reporter or editor's shoes. Given a choice between an article about a Scout group that attends a high-adventure camp, or one about a similar group that spends a weekend at a local campground, which will readers find more interesting? That's not to say you shouldn't try to publicize your group's activities, but you should limit your submissions to "cream of the crop" activities and events.
2. Consider combining events and activities into a single article. Although a community service project carried out by your unit may not be significant enough on its own, it could be included in an article about your unit's plans for the next few months, or in a more general article about your unit's overall contributions to the community.
3. Be careful not to wear out your welcome with the media. This is particularly important when dealing with "major" media (e.g. daily newspapers, radio stations, etc.). Dozens of Scout units simultaneously submitting articles to a newspaper can quickly diminish an editor's willingness to publish any Scouting-related articles.
4. Treat every submission differently. A common public relations mistake is to assume that because a newspaper prints your article on the front page, all your articles will receive similar treatment. Publication decisions are made each week or each day based on the newsworthiness, quantity, and content of all submissions received. A busy news day or a major story can quickly push your submission to the bottom of the list.
5. Don't forget to regularly thank the publisher/editor or other appropriate individuals responsible for printing or airing your material. Your unit may want to annually present them with a thank-you certificate or plaque. And if appropriate, invite them to be your guest at a fund-raising activity like a pancake breakfast, spaghetti dinner, or car wash.

Handling (and Avoiding) Negative Publicity.

Although negative news stories about Scouts or Scouting are very rare, it's important to be prepared in case a situation arises that could result in negative publicity. While there's sometimes no way to prevent bad news from reaching the public, **early and effective planning can help minimize the effects of negative publicity.**

If a situation arises within your unit or with one of its members that you even think could result in negative publicity, it's critical to contact the Redwood Empire Council immediately (you can contact the Scout Executive or your District Executive with any of these concerns). Some situations that could result in bad publicity include:

- A serious accident or life-threatening situation occurs during a Scouting event or activity.
- A Scouting activity or event results in a number of complaints from parents, the chartered organization, or the general public.
- A member of your unit or chartered organization is charged with or suspected of criminal activity, particularly if it occurred during or in connection with a Scouting activity or event.
- A reporter contacts you to discuss any Scouting activities, events, programs, or guidelines. Unless a reporter calls for clarification in direct response to an article you've submitted, calls from the media should be referred to the Redwood Empire Council.

Other Ways to Promote Scouting

- Letter to the editor. A simple, straightforward statement, written to the editor of your local newspaper.
- Op-ed page: "Opposite the editorial page." Some newspapers use this page to print reader opinions and articles by columnists.
- Target vertical media, publications that target special interests, such as magazines for parents and kids, outdoors publications, and other youth development magazines in your area.
- Send releases to local business newsletters and community bulletin boards.
- Speak formally at churches and other community and civic organizations, as well as informally with parents, friends, and co-workers on behalf of your council.
- Decorate a float for Scouts to ride on in your local parade.
- Hang banners during Scouting Anniversary Week or to promote School Night for Scouting.
- Pass out fliers promoting School Night for Scouting.
- Set up booths at trade shows or fairs. Provide information that visitors can take home with them.
- Hang posters and fliers in places where boys and young adults will see them. The school may have a bulletin board for these items.
- With more than 100 merit badges, there should be something that will interest almost anyone. Market the possibilities a youngster can be involved in through merit badges. Create a story about the Cooking merit badge for the food section. Include a recipe of an item that can be prepared for a group of hungry young men. Write an article about the Personal Management merit badge for the finance section in local publications, or the Music merit badge for the local theater's playbill. How can you create interest and generate positive publicity through the other merit badges?
- Promote your community service projects.
- Word of mouth can be the best marketing tool. It is a free and effective method to spread positive messages. So, always remember to share the positive things your unit is doing!

Publicizing Your Unit Appendix

NEWS RELEASE

Cub Scout Pack [number] Wants You!

Pack [**number**], operated by [**name of chartered organization**], invites you and your son to become a part of one of America's leading values-driven organizations. Cub Scouting is a valuable resource that can help families accomplish worthy goals while building and strengthening relationships within the family.

Cub Scouting combines fun with educational activities and lifelong values. It also helps parents help their boys strengthen character, develop good citizenship, and enhance both mental and physical fitness. In addition, the program provides boys with positive peer groups and tools to shape their future.

In Cub Scouting, boys learn ideals like honesty, bravery, and respect. These values help boys make constructive decisions throughout their lifetimes and give them the confidence they need to grow and develop. According to a recent study conducted by Louis Harris & Associates, "Character may be defined as the 'willingness to do what is right, regardless of circumstances.' Cub Scouting teaches boys what is right, in part by encouraging them to reflect on lessons learned through Cub Scouting activities."

Pack [**number**] will be hosting a roundup, where boys and their parents can find out more about Cub Scouting. We encourage every boy to bring a buddy. [**Details of event**]. Join us for more information. Cub Scouting: Fun at every turn!

###

NEWS RELEASE

Is Your Child Learning Your Values?

Do you want your son to grow up to be self-reliant, dependable, and caring? Is it important to you that he learns traditional values such as honesty, trustworthiness, and respect for others and the environment?

If you answered "yes" to either of these questions, then you should check out what Cub Scouting has to offer boys in first through fifth grades. Pack **[number]**, operated by **[name of chartered organization]**, invites you and your son to become a part of one of America's leading values-driven organizations. Cub Scouting is a valuable resource that can help families accomplish worthy goals while building and strengthening relationships within the family.

Pack **[number]** will be hosting a roundup, where boys and their parents can find out more about Cub Scouting. We encourage every boy to bring a buddy. **[Details of event]**. Join us for more information. Cub Scouting: Fun at every turn!

###

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact: [**Contact Name**], [**Phone**]

SCOUTS CELEBRATE BIRTHDAY! _____ YEARS YOUNG [**Anniversary Date**]

On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country
and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times;
to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.

-The Boy Scout Oath

([**City**], [**State**], [**Date**])-The Boy Scouts of America celebrates its [#]th anniversary this week, and [**City**] will be abuzz with Scouting activities commemorating the founding of the movement. One of the nation's largest youth development organizations, the BSA was founded on February 8, 1910.

"We're working hard to make sure the youth of tomorrow are prepared for what awaits them," proclaimed Scoutmaster [**First Name, Last Name**]. [**Unit**] will celebrate by [**Fill in Activity Details Here**]

"Within the span of just years," [**Last Name**] added, "the name 'Boy Scouts' has become a paradigm for a good turn and the ideal of community service."

The idea for the Boy Scouts of America began in 1909, when William D. Boyce, an American businessman, was lost in a London fog. A young boy found Boyce and led him to his destination. Boyce offered to tip the young man for service; the boy refused, saying he was a Scout and could not accept payment for a Good Turn.

-more-

Page 2

The businessman later asked the boy to introduce him to Lord Baden-Powell, the founder of Scouting in England and publisher of the handbook *Scouting for Boys*. The groundwork to bring Scouting to America had been laid

Boyce established the Boy Scouts of America on February 8, 1910, with the help of Baden-Powell, wildlife author and illustrator Ernest Thompson Seton, naturalist Daniel Carter Beard, and attorney James E. West.

Since the 1910 inception, the Boy Scouts of America has become one of the nation's premier youth development organizations, with more than 110 million people participating on adult and youth levels.

###

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact: [**Contact Name**], [**Phone**]

CUB SCOUTS PARTICIPATE IN END-OF-THE-SUMMER CAMPING ACTIVITIES

([**City**], [**State**], [**Date**])-More than 100 Cub Scouts from [**the metropolitan area**] gathered this weekend for two days of fun-filled camping at [**Location**] for the traditional end-of-the summer campout.

Cub Scouts, leaders, and parents pitched their tents and braved plummeting temperatures to participate in the last camping rite of summer. Activities started with a cookout dinner Friday night and ended with parents and leaders cooking breakfast on Sunday morning before everyone broke camp.

These extended campouts give Cub Scouts the opportunity to demonstrate to their parents skills ranging from knot-tying to first aid, and from tepee building to outdoor cooking." The Cub Scouts get such a thrill out of being able to show their parents all the knowledge they learn at the weekly meeting," said Cubmaster [**First Name, Last Name**]. "It's not like they can run home after a den meeting and say, 'Hey Mom, let me show you how to light a campfire.'"

Activities during the campout included an outdoor obstacle course race, timed knot-tying competitions, and a mother/son fishing derby. Awards for the top three Cub Scouts and their mothers were presented at the Sunday breakfast. "The campout's also a great way for Cub Scouts from different elementary schools to get to know one another," said [**Last Name**].

"Sitting around the campfire and roasting marshmallows with the other guys and my family was great," said Cub Scout [**First Name, Last Name**], "but the best part was winning the fishing derby with my mom ... she's the best."

###

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact: [**Contact Name**], [**Phone**]

ANNUAL SCOUTORAMA EVENT HELD AT [**Event Site**]

([**City**], [**State**], [**Date**])-Dozens of area Boy Scout troops and Cub Scout packs gathered this weekend at [**Event Site**] to present their annual Scoutorama. Open to the public, the Scoutorama allows youth from the community to demonstrate skills ranging from knot-tying to first aid, and from tepee building to outdoor cooking.

"This is just a great opportunity for our young men to showcase their talents and skills to the public and to give the boys a chance to form relationships with Scouts from other packs and troops," said Scoutmaster [**First Name, Last Name**]. "It is also a way for the youth who are not a part of Scouting to get acquainted with us and what we do."

The theme for this year's Scoutorama was "[**Event Theme**]." Highlights of the Scoutorama included an outdoor baking contest between Scouts of all ages, a timed rope bridge building contest, and an award for the three Scouts who sold the most tickets to this year's event. "I had a blast at this year's Scoutorama," said First Class Scout [**First Name, Last Name**], second-place winner of the baking contest. "My peach cobbler was good, but I didn't think it would win an award."

-More-

Page 2

[**First Name, Last Name**], Indian wrestling champion, was equally excited about winning. "I'm a small guy, but it proves that speed can be more useful than size," said [**Last Name**].

[**Unit and #**], chartered to [**Chartered Organization**], was formed in [**Year Chartered**]. With nearly 4.4 million youth members, the Boy Scouts of America is one of the nation's largest youth development organizations.

###

MEDIA ALERT FORMAT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE MEDIA ALERT

WHO: _____

WHAT: _____

WHERE: _____

WHEN: _____

Background: _____

For more information, contact _____ at _____
(Contact Name) (phone)

MEDIA CONTACT SHEET

Name of Newspaper/Magazine: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Delivery Address: _____

Contacts: Editor: _____

Reporter/Columnist: _____

Reporter/Columnist: _____

Reporter/Columnist: _____

Telephone Numbers:

News Desk: _____

Fax: _____

E-Mail: _____

Other: _____

Publication Day: _____ Deadlines: _____

Notes: _____

