

# A PLAN FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS CHAIRMAN

Public relations involves all forms of communication – written, verbal and non-verbal. It includes writing news releases and distributing promotional flyers. Equally important are actions often taken for granted, such as wearing a Lions lapel pin and marching in a parade.

Good public relations – informing the community that your club built the park, conducted the vision screening or collected the eyeglasses – will help foster community support. Public relations can even support your club's membership efforts. People want to belong to a successful and reliable organization. By actively promoting your club and its worthwhile activities, you'll be projecting a positive image in the community – and showing that your club is worth joining.

## Public Relations Tools and Information

Please use the following tools and information to spread the word about your club – and tell people about the good work you're doing in your community.

## What Are the Public Relations Chairperson's Responsibilities?

Though PR is every Lion's responsibility, the PR chairperson is in charge of the following:

- Communicating information about your club to the community, including the media.
- Keeping your club aware of PR efforts and results.
- Providing information to International Headquarters about outstanding Lions programs and activities by using the Submit A Story feature.

To get started:

- **Set Goals:** Review your club's previous efforts. Evaluate what worked, what didn't and why.
- **Determine the PR Budget for the Year:** Effective public relations programs can be done on a limited budget. Be sure to budget for both ongoing public relations efforts and special events.
- **Plan Ahead:** Planning and timely execution are vital for your public relations efforts.
- **Create a Timeline:** Determine how and when you will promote your club and when you will start publicity for your club's special events. But be flexible-newsworthy activities may come up during the year.
- **Discuss Your Plan:** Meet with your club president and the chairpersons of your club's various events and projects.
- **Be Persistent:** Keeping your club visible in the community isn't something that will happen overnight; it takes time.
- **Keep a Record:** Note to whom and when you sent news releases and who used them. Save articles about your club. Include the publication's name and issue date on the clipping. Record broadcasts of interviews and other radio and television, and share it with your club.

- **Inform Your Club:** Report regularly on your publicity efforts and results at club meetings. Write articles about public relations activities and results for your club newsletter. Explain how your club benefits from good public relations.

## How Do I Determine What is Newsworthy?

News offers information about activities or events that are of interest to, affect or involve the public, such as the dedication of a new Lions park. Some projects, although worthwhile, may not be “newsworthy.” To determine what is newsworthy, ask yourself, “Would a non-Lion find this interesting or useful?” Public service gives information about a specific topic to help or assist the public, such as describing the warning signs of diabetes or encouraging volunteerism.

Decide which activities are unique and may be of interest to the media. To be considered newsworthy, they should be about timely events or activities that:

- Enhance your local community (parks, school programs).
- Involve the general public or other community groups (fundraisers, eyeglass collections).
- Perform a public service (vision/health screenings, drug abuse education).

Read local newspapers, watch television news programs and listen to a variety of local radio stations to get a feel for what is likely to be covered by your news media.

Get involved early in the planning of Lions projects to determine their PR potential. The following are examples of club activities with possible news value:

- Service projects aiding community groups such as the visually impaired, disabled and elderly.
- Eyeglasses recycling/Recycle For Sight.
- Programs for youth/Lions International Peace Poster Contest/Scholarships.
- Special fundraising events/club anniversary events and major donations.
- Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF) grants/disaster aid.
- Club elections/volunteer recognition/Melvin Jones recognition.
- Holiday projects.

## How Do I Contact the Media?

Create a media list by compiling the names of newspapers, radio and television stations in your area, along with mailing and e-mail addresses and telephone numbers. Call each media outlet to determine the editors or reporters to whom you should send information about Lions activities. Verify the spelling of names and ask about deadlines. Also ask how they want to receive information, such as by e-mail, mail or fax. In general, information should be sent to the following:

- General assignment editor at small daily or weekly newspapers
- Community events reporter at large daily newspapers
- News and/or public service director at radio and television stations

Every Lions news story will not be published or broadcast. Local newspaper editors and the news director of a radio or television station decide which stories will be printed or broadcast each day.

Be persistent. Continue to look for good stories and angles that make Lions stories newsworthy.

## How Do I Share Lions Messages with the Public?

Use a combination of the following PR tools and resources to share your message with the media and community members.

### Club Fact Sheet

A club fact sheet will provide background information about your club to reporters. Include a fact sheet with all news releases. You can also use fact sheets as handouts during community events.

### News Release

News releases answer six key questions in the first two paragraphs: Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? Subsequent paragraphs should provide additional information in descending order of importance. Simply written and fact-filled releases are more likely to be published. To increase the chances that your release will be used:

- Be sure that it is about a newsworthy event.
- Keep paragraphs and sentences short, limiting them to a single idea.
- Use quotes to enhance basic information. When attributing quotes, be sure to identify the person's name and title.
- Include the name of the appropriate contact person at the top of the page along with a daytime telephone number and e-mail address.
- Follow a standard press release format (see the example release at the end of this guide for the format of news releases, and visit the Sample News Releases page to download pre-formatted fill-in-the-blank press releases).
- At least two weeks before your event, distribute news releases to editors, reporters and news directors on your media list who cover your particular type of story.
- If you have a major story, follow up with each media outlet one week before the event. Offer to answer questions and outline photo opportunities. Be positive and enthusiastic in explaining why their audience would be interested in your story.

Call your local media outlets to suggest a feature story to a reporter or editor in a situation when a news release might not tell the story well. Interest the reporter in covering a story, such as the importance of volunteers in your community rather than covering a specific event or activity.

### Interviews and Public Speaking

An appropriate club spokesperson should be prepared to provide accurate information with enthusiasm and confidence. Following are tips for successful interviews:

- Know Your Facts. Be ready to expand upon the who, what, when, where, why and how stated

in media material.

- Prepare Key Message Points. Rather than answer a question with a simple "yes" or "no," use the interviewer's question as a bridge to your key messages. Practice answering likely questions prior to the interview. Review the association's key messages on the LCI Web site, and adapt them to fit your club's messages.
- Give Short, Clear Responses. Mention your main points early in the interview in a few, brief, clear sentences. If you do not know the answer to a question, offer to find out the answer and follow up immediately.
- Mention Your Club's Name Often. Avoid saying only "I" or "we."
- Watch What You Say. Never give "off the record" comments.
- Dress Appropriately. Always wear your Lions pin. For television, avoid pinstripes, white shirts, loud prints and too much jewelry.
- Smile. Be conversational. Let the reporter see that you enjoy being a Lion.

## Post-Event Publicity

Report the results of your programs and fundraisers to the community through the following:

- News Release. Prepare a brief, one page news release highlighting the project's results. Include photos.
- Letter to the Editor. Write a thank you note to the community.
- Display Advertisement. Consider placing a small advertisement thanking the community for its support. Many publications offer not-for-profit discounts. Some will even donate unsold space free of charge.

## Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

PSAs are brief (10, 15 or 30 second) messages aired at no charge on radio and television stations as a community service. They must benefit the community, not just your club.

Lions Clubs International has a collection of PSAs covering a variety of topics that are available at no cost to clubs, including broadcast quality PSAs in MPEG format for television stations to download.

When writing a PSA, brevity and clarity are of utmost importance since at most you have 10 to 30 seconds to communicate your message. Messages about preventing blindness, serving youth, fundraising events that benefit the community and public events sponsored by your club are appropriate subjects. PSAs need to:

- Get the listeners' attention.
- Show how listeners will benefit from doing what you suggest.
- Tell listeners where to go, what to do, when to do it and where to call for more information.

As a general guideline, a 10-second spot will have approximately 20 words and a 30-second spot will have approximately 65.

Contact the news or public service director at your local television or radio station to learn the station's scheduling and format requirements and if they can assist you with production. Often stations have a reduced production rate for not-for-profit organizations.

## Public Access Television

Public access stations air PSAs, run videos of club activities, post club events on community bulletin

boards and have club members participate in community talk shows. Contact the public service director at your local cable station regarding program opportunities.

## Video Programs

Show a video such as LQ-Lions Quarterly Video Magazine or PSAs at community events and when you meet with other community groups. View and order videos from the Lions News Network (LNN). You can also view videos on YouTube and download LQ on iTunes.

## Web Sites and Social Networks

Web sites and social networking sites are excellent ways to let people know about your club. Use e-Clubhouse to create a club Web site with easy-to-use templates and free hosting from LionNET. Once created it is important to keep your Web site updated and to include the site in your publicity materials. Social networking sites such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn and Flickr are excellent for promoting Lions clubs. Ask a club member comfortable with social networking to create and regularly manage the club's pages on these sites. Include contact information, photos from recent projects, a statement of purpose and a list of upcoming events.

## Printed Promotional Materials

Printed materials for promoting your event should:

- Answer: Who, what, when, where and why.
- Use clear concise language and include only necessary information.
- Be eye-catching and printed with a laser printer or professionally printed.
- Use a bold, easy-to-read font or typeface.
- Feature prominently your club's name, contact information and the Lions logo.

You may be able to negotiate with printers or photocopy services to produce your flyers and posters at a reduced not-for-profit rate.

Have club members post flyers and posters throughout your area-at public bulletin boards, libraries, store windows, bus stops, train stations, etc. Ask local businesses and government offices to have them available for customers.

## Photographs

Photos can enhance your club bulletins and promotional materials and should be sent to newspapers along with a news release. Display photos of your club's activities and people you've helped at a community event. When taking photos, remember:

- Use a digital camera when possible. Digital photos are easy to send, save and store. Submit digital photos as attached files. Do not cut and paste them into an e-mail.
- Use only clearly focused photographs.
- Shoot candid rather than posed photos. While posed and group shots may be used in club bulletins, candid shots are much more interesting. Many publications will not use posed photos.
- If you must pose people, make the photos look as natural as possible by having them do

something. Carefully frame the photos so some people aren't cut off.

- Get as close to the action as possible.
- Limit the number of people and don't include too much background.
- Shoot a lot of photos and select the best shots.
- Call your local newspapers to see if and how they accept electronic photos.
- Submit your photos to International Headquarters using the Submit a Photo form.

## LION Magazine

Receive national recognition for your club's service activity by submitting articles and photos to LION Magazine. While not all submissions can be published, here are some guidelines when submitting your story:

- Submit detailed information – who, what, when, where, why and how – of your club's completed service project or fundraising activity.
- Do not send images formatted for use on the internet. Web images are too small and do not have the high resolution required for use in LION Magazine.
- Include clear, candid, action photographs of Lions participating in the project. Be sure everyone in the picture is identified.
- Do not send "grip-and-grin" photos (i.e. people shaking hands, check presentation, etc.).
- Include the name, address, daytime phone number and/or e-mail address of a contact person who is familiar with the project.

Submit stories and photographs that meet these guidelines to LION Magazine, 300 W 22nd Street, Oak Brook, IL 60523 USA or e-mail. It often takes up to a year for chosen articles to appear in print.

## What Are Some Other Publicity Ideas?

There are many ways to tell your community about your Lions club and activities. If your club is sponsoring a community event:

- Ask to have information posted on your community Web site or message board.
- Pass out flyers or brochures about your club and its activities. If the event is a fundraiser, hand out information telling how the money will be used.
- Display the Lions logo and club name prominently on all materials and at all activities and events.

Even when your club doesn't have a special event planned, you can:

- Wear your Lions pin and apparel.
- List your club in local phone books and community directories, along with a contact person and phone number. Keep this information up-to-date.
- Put information about your club in "Welcome to the Community" packets offered by local agencies or chambers of commerce.
- Invite community organizations to present information about their activities at club meetings and offer to present information at their meetings.
- Display local Peace Posters at a library or community center.
- Ask government and school district newsletters to include information about your club, especially if you are involved in a community or school project such as the Peace Poster Contest, a vision

- or diabetes screening, building a recreational center, etc.
- Place a highway sign or marker outside your community. Keep it in good condition. You can purchase a highway sign from Club Supplies Sales Department.
- Donate a subscription of LION Magazine to your local library. Contact LION Magazine Department for ordering information.

## What Resources Are Available from International Headquarters?

A variety of materials are available to help you develop your club's public relations program for the year.

- **Sample News Releases:** A variety of sample fill-in-the-blank news releases are available to download.
- **Key Messages and Questions:** When talking to the media and others in your community about your Lions club and LCI, it is helpful to know what messages you want to get across. Key Messages help you prepare before interviews and activities where the media might be present. They are also useful in presentations to groups, schools and other organizations. Practice answering these questions with your Lions members and always remember to accentuate the positive.
- **Fact Sheet and History Sheet:** These publications contain up-to-date information about the association and its history and can be downloaded in all languages or a copy can be ordered from the Public Relations Department. (Fact Sheet PR-799, History PR-800)
- **Logos:** LCI and LCIF logos and program logos are available in various formats (TIF, GIF, JPG, EPS, AI) to download.
- **Lions News Network:** Lions News Network (LNN) contains all available videos and public service announcements (PSAs) from LCI and LCIF.
- **LQ – Lions Quarterly Video Magazine:** Is produced four times a year (January, April, July and October) and located on LNN. LQ features inspiring stories from Lions clubs around the world dedicated to making a difference in their communities and the lives of individuals. Running approximately 14 minutes, this is an excellent presentation for Lions and non-Lions groups and can be used on cable access stations.
- **Tools to Submit Stories and Photos:** Use the Submit A Story and Submit a Photo to provide information to International Headquarters.
- **Newsire:** This monthly online newsletter, covers the latest news, information and programs from International Headquarters. The information is appropriate for inclusion in club, district and multiple district publications.
- **Activity Guides:** International Headquarters provides activity guides and brochures outlining how to plan and promote a wide variety of projects, including Lions World Sight Day and Recycle For Sight. Visit the Planning Projects section for more information.
- **Lions International Peace Poster Contest:** The Lions International Peace Poster Contest is a turn-key program, which promotes peace, encourages youth and fosters good public relations. Visit the Peace Poster section to learn more, and find out how to Purchase a Peace Poster Contest Kit (PPK-1).
- **How To "Get In" LION Magazine:** This publication (PR-708) provides tips on preparing articles for LION Magazine and offers advice on taking effective photographs.

## For More Information

For further information, e-mail the Public Relations Department or call (630) 203-3812. For story submissions, e-mail LION Magazine Department or call (630) 468-6909.