



city of san luis obispo

Press Policy & Public Information Manual

March 2003

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
PURPOSE	1
Administrative Review Required.....	2
Department Review Only	2
CAO Review	2
GENERAL PRESS INFORMATION	3
Informing the Public	3
Understanding the Media.....	3
The Importance of Incident Information.....	3
Determining Media Interest.....	4
DO'S AND DON'TS OF WORKING WITH THE MEDIA.....	5
PLANNING INFORMATION STRATEGY	7
WHAT TO DO WHEN A REPORTER CALLS.....	8
Don't Panic	8
"Three C's" of Effective Communication	8
If You Are Asked For an Interview	8
BEING INTERVIEWED.....	9
In General	9
Three Universal Mistakes	9
Preparing For a Radio Interview.....	10
Your Rights as a Television Interviewee.....	10
Before the Interview	11
Your Appearance and Demeanor.....	11
Answering Media Interview Questions	12
Type of Interview Questions With Recommended Ways to Respond	13
If You Make a Mistake	14
CONDUCTING A NEWS CONFERENCE.....	15
Primary Considerations.....	15
What to Say.....	17
Presentation Ideas	17
PRESS RELEASES	18
Press Release Definitions.....	18
Special Tips for Press Releases	19
Common Press Release Errors.....	19
ONGOING DEPARTMENTAL PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAMS	20
MEDIA CONTACT LIST	
SAMPLE PRESS RELEASES	

INTRODUCTION

This manual is proposed to assist all of us to do a better job of telling the City's story. We are doing important things and quality work in the City of San Luis Obispo. It's important that our citizens be informed about what's happening in this City. The document begins by setting out some overall policy guidelines to help recognize and capitalize on opportunities to promote good community relations. In addition, you will find guidelines for handling the types of contacts with the press you might encounter during your employment with the City of San Luis Obispo.

The approach of the manual is both:

- Incident-based; starting with the basic scenario that something has happened and the press calls you to find out about it.
- Announcement-based; meaning that you want to convey some information to the public through the media.

This handbook does NOT cover guidelines for major emergencies. Those guidelines can be found in the City of San Luis Obispo's Disaster Plans located in each department.

PURPOSE

The public has a right to balanced information about our City's operations and activities. Often we disseminate this information through the media, and the way this is done can help or hinder how we get our message across. The purpose of this policy is to assist departments in recognizing opportunities to promote and maintain good community relations through positive media communications.

While there are a number of instances when the press will seek out information regarding a particular program, event, incident, etc., there are numerous times when a department wants to get the word out on important community information or something great they're working on. Often, just writing a brief press release will do the trick. This is a relatively quick and very effective way in which to communicate with the public in a positive and proactive way.

Remember, if you ignore the press, you will miss important opportunities to get your message to the public in the form and context that best communicates its substance; if you take the initiative to plan ahead, you will have better control of the flow of information. With careful thought ahead of time to how you will deal with the media, you'll spend less time on damage control and more time serving the public's need to know, thus fostering the most positive relationships between the City and our citizens.

Administrative Review Required:

- All news conferences.
- Anything dealing with subject matter that has been or may be acted upon by the City Council.
- Politically volatile issues (if you're not sure, check). These probably will almost always fall under the preceding category.
- Major public relations campaign for a new program or project (i.e., water conservation, recycling, Chorro Street traffic calming, etc.)
- Items that "hit people where they live", such as major street closing/repairs, parking regulations and information, utility maintenance/changes, etc.

Department Review Only:

- Routine communications done in the course of daily business, such a meeting/event announcements, legal notices, display ads, etc.
- Factual updates and reports regarding incidents such as fire, accidents, robberies, temporary street closures, etc.
- Election notices and general information.

CAO Review:

It's important to be certain that Council and staff are informed of major press announcements or media campaigns, and that we remain sensitive to political issues. For this reason, some press releases and *all major public relations campaigns* should be forwarded to the CAO to review and approve. If in doubt, err on the side of giving a "heads-up" to the CAO.

If you have any doubts about which category your plan falls under, please be sure to check. Even routine press releases should be reviewed by your Department Head before being sent out.

GENERAL PRESS INFORMATION

Informing the Public

The public has a right to balanced information about your operations. Exceptions would be specific wages, personnel, and medical records. (Note: If you have questions as to whether information can be made public, contact the City Attorney).

Often you will disseminate this information through the media, which in a cooperative spirit, can help you to get your message out.

Understanding the Media

It is the reporter's job to dig behind the scenes - they are usually chasing small bits of information. Journalism is not responsible for "the larger truth", so you will have to provide the context for your statements to the press.

In general, the press's freedom to cover what it wants to is broad and inclusive. Even during emergencies, California State Peace Officers may **not** close off dangerous areas to media representatives (*California Penal Code* Section 409.5 [d]). The only times the press may be excluded from a disaster scene are:

- When it is believed that a crime has caused the calamity (thus making the area a crime scene).
- When press access will interfere with emergency operations. This should only be used in very specific instances, not as a blanket excuse to keep the press out of sensitive areas.

You must know when you may lawfully keep things from the press and when full cooperation is desired or mandatory (which is almost always).

The Importance of Incident Information

If information about an incident is not readily available from an official source, the media will find something to report. Too often, that report will be based on incomplete or inaccurate information. It's better to take the initiative and put forth the correct information on any situation before the wrong information is reported.

Determining Media Interest

Factors affecting media interest include:

- Timeliness.
- Proximity.
- Significance - how does it make a difference?
- Prominence (new, first).
- Oddity.
- Human interest (touching/sentimental/tragic/heroic).
- Progress (innovations to improve life).
- Humor.
- Struggle.
- Unfolding drama.
- Money issues.
- Cover-ups - lies vs. truth.
- Potential conflict with the public, with other agencies/departments, or between groups of people.
- The City's ongoing media relations programs, as well as those of other agencies/departments.
- Prominent people affected by the incident.
- Famous landmarks.

The media is also interested in:

- Accessibility for news crews (air, ground).
- Number of media organizations in the area.
- How many media are already at the scene or on the telephone (they all want the "scoop").
- Past media interest in same or similar events.

DO'S AND DON'TS OF WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

DO:

- Take the initiative in all cases, good or bad. Remember that detaining or excluding the media is counterproductive unless they are interfering with an emergency response or endangering someone's life.
- Assume that each news media person is a professional trying to do his/her best to convey accurate and timely news to the public.
- Respect reporters' needs and priorities. News people operate under strict deadline pressure - they have to be aggressive to get the job done. Try to meet their deadlines.
- Be there for the media - return calls.
- Give equal consideration to all local newspapers, radio, and television stations.
- Know what is important to local versus regional versus national media. Local media will want to provide specific information to residents (evacuations, etc.), while regional media will be interested in local issues but will focus on things like the involvement of state or regional agencies. National and international media will care about major noteworthy events.
- Understand that conflict and tragedy are inherently newsworthy. Help the media keep these in perspective by providing facts, showing the larger picture, and noting positive agency actions.
- Tell the truth. Evasions, "half-truths", denials and perceived cover-ups keep the story in the news longer, give the reporters more "copy" material (a new angle on the story), create an atmosphere of distrust, and can ruin credibility. If you make a mistake, admit it, say you're sorry, and then go to work to correct the information.

DO'S AND DON'TS OF WORKING WITH THE MEDIA, cont'd

DON'T:

- Overreact to negative coverage.
- Try to fool the press.
- Fake it.
- Argue with the press.
- Attack the media.
- Tell one news agency what another is doing.
- Attempt to talk "off the record".
- Try to say everything at once.
- Lie.
- Stonewall. If you can't disclose information, say so and explain why.
- Fill the "pregnant pause".
- Be a "slow bleed".
- Break the connection until the interview is over.
- Be overly verbose - keep the message simple.

NEVER ask to clear a story as a requirement of its use.

NEVER get in a position of having to kill a story once submitted.

NEVER complain if a story does not run as you wanted it.

It is appropriate to follow up after a story has run and positively critique how you think it might have been better.

PLANNING INFORMATION STRATEGY

- Adopt a media philosophy that leads to constructive behavior. The first step is to acknowledge the public's legitimate interest in government affairs, their right to know, and your responsibility to keep them informed.
- Make yourself accessible to the press. The media will cover the story with or without you. It is much better to be able to tell the story your way.
- If you want to win positive press coverage, don't wait for the phone to ring. Be proactive and offer the press information and ideas for stories about your program and services. Make it interesting, visual, and something the public wants/needs to know.
- The microphone is always on. Choose your words carefully and assume that any written document (letter, memo, etc.) prepared by you or your staff may appear on the front page of the paper or be the lead story on the 6:00 o'clock news. You never know when someone will be offended by your words and decide to air your differences in the media - that goes for employees, citizen groups, and volunteers, too.
- Get your side of the story out quickly and accurately.
- Think about the public/media's reaction to any policy, program, activity, or statement before you officially release the information. Decide early in the process how you will respond when questioned by the media about your actions or activities. If you can't think of a truthful, reasonable response, reevaluate your activity - you may need to change your plans.
- Develop a media calendar. At least once a year, sit down with key staff to discuss events, themes, and special programs or activities that will generate media coverage over the year. Develop a strategy for getting your message out in a timely manner and discuss how you plan to respond to media inquiries about controversial issues. Be sure to review this calendar regularly and monitor your progress.
- Remember: It takes four positive articles to negate one negative one. It's up to you to generate good, positive press. Be proactive about it and don't expect the press to come begging for stories about the good things your department is doing - you've got to make the effort or it won't happen.
- Don't expect to bat 1,000 with the media. Everyone strikes out now and then.

WHAT TO DO WHEN A REPORTER CALLS

In general, department heads should take the responsibility for fielding questions from the news media. S/He may delegate those responsibilities to others, but even then it is important for department heads to be aware of media interest and to be prepared to assist. Depending upon the issue, it might also be appropriate to provide a “heads-up” to the CAO.

Don't Panic

If you need a few minutes to get your thoughts together, ask the reporter what information s/he is seeking, then say you'll call back shortly. The same is true if a reporter/camera crew shows up at your office. They may press you for an immediate answer, but it's important for you to have enough time to collect your thoughts so you can give an accurate, coherent, concise answer. Tell them to come back when you're ready.

"Three C's" of Effective Communication

- 1) Clear: State your purpose clearly, organize your ideas carefully, and leave out everything else.
- 2) Concise: Only say what you need to.
- 3) Correct: Make sure your information is accurate. If you aren't sure, tell the reporter you will verify the facts and call him/her back.

If You Are Asked For an Interview

- Ask the reporter what s/he wants to talk about.
- Schedule it so you'll have time to prepare.
- Draft a brief outline, review your materials, and clarify in your mind the main points you want to get across.
- Develop a good, 30-second explanation of your work or subject matter.
- Provide the reporter with written material whenever possible. That will give him/her something to refer to back at the office.
- Give you Department Head or CAO a “heads-up” if the issue is significant or controversial.

BEING INTERVIEWED

In General

Interviews are the basic tool of news gathering. They give depth, background, perspective and personality to the news of the day. The reporter sees you as the source of information to tell the story. Reporters ask questions they think interested members of the public would ask as well as questions to draw out information they think the public has the right to know.

Even if you give a lot of interviews, one every week for a year, you may talk to reporters who take fifty interviews a week, so the reporter will probably have the experience advantage. Your edge is your knowledge of the subject.

The principles of giving good interviews are the same for all media whether it be on the phone, face to face with the reporter, or recorded for radio or television. The better prepared you are for an interview, the better the result. What you do before you meet the media is as important as what you do when you meet them.

To prepare for talk shows and interview programs, listen to or watch the show (or tapes of it) before your interview. It helps to watch several different episodes of the show, if possible.

Look for:

1. What the show's format and theme are.
2. Who the host is and his/her approach, style, mood and philosophy.
3. How long the interview segment is.
4. How long the entire program is.
5. If the program is pre-recorded, live, or live with audience and/or phone-in questions.

***AND** – Think about the listeners and/or viewers are most interested in.*

Three Universal Mistakes when being Interviewed:

Inexperienced interviewees often err by:

1. Treating the interview as an ordinary conversation. Interviews are not conversations. They are content-driven exchanges of information in which you make statements that are used in a story for the benefit of an audience that does not come into personal contact with you. The interviewer represents the public; you are using the news media as a channel of communication to reach that public through the interview process.

2. "Overloading the system". If you use jargon and technical terms, too many acronyms, or talk too much, you'll overload the system. Select words with care because you are trying to reach a general audience. Don't make listeners/viewers guess what's important in what you say. Match your pace with the ability of the reporter to absorb the information.
3. Merely answering questions. Don't wait for the interviewer to get around to the right questions. Take the initiative and tell your story. Bring up the things you think are important.

Preparing For a Radio Interview

Before the interview, ask:

- Is this the first report made to this station, or is it an update?
- Will the interview be live or taped?
- Will I give a straight report or respond to questions?
- How much time will I have for my report?
- Will I be introducing myself?
- Will I sign off at the end of the interview?

See "Answering Media Interview Questions" below.

Your Rights as a Television Interviewee

In interviews of a spontaneous nature you have the right:

- To know who is interviewing you and whom s/he represents.
- To have total agreement by both parties of the ground rules, no matter how hastily arranged.
- To be treated courteously. The questions can be tough, but the reporter's demeanor should not be abusive.
- Not to be physically threatened or impaired by such things as television lights too close or microphones shoved in your face.
- To break off the interview after a reasonable amount of time, but only after important questions have been answered.

In pre-arranged, office or TV studio interviews you have the right:

- To all of the rights noted above for short-notice interviews.
- To know the general content, subject or thrust of the interview so you have time to research the appropriate information.
- To know approximately how long the interview will last.
- To know if there will be other guests appearing with you on a talk or panel show and what the nature of their role will be.

- To have a public relations or other agency representative present.
- To make your own audio or videotape of the interview, or to be able to obtain a complete tape from the TV station.
- To make sure that no material is recorded on audio or videotape unless you are told you are being recorded. The "pre-interview" discussions, talks between commercials or after-show chitchat cannot be used on the air unless you approve.
- To physical comfort during the filming or taping of the interview (i.e., appropriate setting, chair, makeup, etc., as well as the cooperation of the director and the floor manager).
- To be allowed to answer without the constant harassment of interruptions, assuming your answers are brief and to the point.
- To ignore "editorial comments" or pejorative asides by reporters or panelists.
- To have an accurate on-air introduction that will put the interview in the proper perspective.
- In the film or tape editing, to have the basic intent and flavor of your answers come through.
- To have the time to get some of YOUR points across in the interview and not be expected only to answer questions obediently and obsequiously.

Before the Interview

- Know who is interviewing you and which station they represent.
- Reach agreement on the subject and length of interview.
- Prepare your agenda for the interview. Make a list of no more than 3 critical points to be made over and over. Polish them until they are sharp, forceful, and commanding.
- Prepare any visuals you will need.
- Write out questions you would like to be asked and provide them to the host.
- In a friendly but firm way, ask about the reporter's background and experience in dealing with the issues at hand. Find out how much s/he understands about the topic, and be helpful and courteous in doing so.
- Be there early, even if it is a taped program. Studios are heavily booked.
- Bring an audio or video cassette and ask the station engineer to tape the interview for you.
- Get your self-enthusiasm level up before you go on the air.

Your Appearance and Demeanor

- Find a good location with an appropriate background, if you have any choice in the matter. Avoid distractions.
- Your attire should be appropriate for the setting. When in doubt, dress equal to your host.

- Watch what you wear: No black, no white, no fine patterns that crawl. No clothes, jewelry or hair styles that draw extra attention. Don't wear sunglasses on camera.
- If your agency requires a uniform, wear it.
- Look at the interviewer, not the camera. Maintain eye contact and don't stare off into space. Limit head, eye and arm movement. If you are seated, keep both feet on the floor and sit up straight.
- Speak slowly and clearly. Sit up straight and speak from the diaphragm. Use good voice inflection; incorporate pitch and rate changes for variety.
- Avoid speech mannerisms like "er", "ah" and "um".
- Don't try to be funny, clever, or overly dramatic.
- Don't make offhand or flippant remarks in front of reporters.

Answering Media Interview Questions

DO:

- Be relaxed, confident and honest.
- Maintain a neutral attitude.
- Fight the urge to fill "dead air" with unnecessary (and possibly damaging) talk. Stop when you've said what you need to say.
- Present your main point or conclusion first, followed by supporting points. An umbrella statement helps a reporter follow your logic and supporting comments, especially on complicated topics.
- Be concise - it is easy to bore an audience. Get all your key points across in the first half of the interview.
- Be concrete - short sentences, active verbs, simple and colloquial.
- Be colorful - use language that makes an audience sit up and listen.
- Discuss only those activities and policies within your area of responsibility.
- Stay on the subject.
- If interrupted in the middle of a thought, proceed with your original answer before changing the subject.
- Build in a "cut-off" with your answer if you wish to drop the subject.
- If you don't know the answer, say so. Don't bluff. If you promise to provide more information, deliver.
- Tell the truth. Reporters keep track of who "burns" them and remember it for many years.
- Use visuals to help clarify your message.

DON'T

- Don't use jargon, acronyms or technical terms.
- Don't be curt, even with the dumbest question.
- Answer one question at a time. If presented with a laundry list of questions, identify the one you will answer. It's not your responsibility to keep track of the parts of a multiple-part question.
- Don't restate the question.
- Don't begin with trite phrases such as "I'm glad you asked that".
- Don't give a "no commitment" response. If you're unsure of the answer or can't discuss it, say so.
- Don't get into a verbal fencing match if it's proprietary information; just say so and move on.
- Don't volunteer information unless it supports a positive point you want to make.
- Don't be defensive - make all of your responses positive.
- Don't ever assume anything is "off the record"; there is no such thing unless you're certain the reporter will honor the agreement. This applies before, during, and after the interview.
- Don't let anyone put words in your mouth; only agree if the facts and figures are the truth. Carefully listen to any request for you to endorse a paraphrase of your remarks.
- Avoid one-word, "yes/no" answers.

Type of Interview Questions With Recommended Ways to Respond

Puffballs - the Easy Ones:

- Acknowledge question.
- Take the opportunity to communicate a positive point.
- Don't let the chance pass by without talking about one of your key points.

Factual Questions:

- Affirm and bridge to a positive point if the information is correct, or disagree tactfully and give the real facts.
- End with a positive point.

Hypothetical Questions:

- No one can see into the future.
- Don't answer "what if" type questions.
- Discount the hypothetical statement.
- Bridge into a key positive point.

False Facts or False Assumptions Questions or Comments:

- Don't repeat the false information.
- Discount the false facts or assumptions by bridging into a positive point.
- If the interviewer returns to the false information, use the same technique again.

Leading or Loaded Questions:

- Don't repeat the information.
- Set the record straight, but don't dwell on the interviewer's leading or loaded question.
- Bridge into a key positive point.

Questions that Put Words in Your Mouth:

- Don't let it happen!
- Never repeat what the interviewer has said if it's not true or you don't agree.
- Be sure not to repeat key negative words the interviewer used.
- Give a positive answer by using a key point.

Forced Choice Questions:

- Do not agree if both choices are incorrect.
- Tell the "real story".
- Make the information as positive as possible.

If You Make a Mistake

- During a live interview: Correct yourself immediately.
- During a taped interview: Stop and ask to start over again, or pick up where you left off. Glitches can be edited out.

CONDUCTING A NEWS CONFERENCE

News conferences should only be held in situations when you need to get major news to all reporters at the same time, in a very visual, dramatic way. All such conferences should be pre-approved by the CAO, and Council Members should be advised in advance, if at all possible. Avoid scheduling press conferences if you can just as effectively get your message across in a news release. Reporters say that news conferences tend to leave them all with the same story - they would rather have a chance to ask their own questions without an audience.

Primary Considerations

Timing:

- Timing is CRITICAL.
- Consider media deadlines when scheduling the news conference. They all have different deadlines, so schedule it at the time most convenient for the largest number of reporters.
- Which day of the week is it? Slow news day or a big news day?
- If don't have prominent speakers, need "big draw" or controversy to generate interest.

Location:

- A site that makes good "story sense" - if your story is about the ground breaking for a new park, have the conference at the new site.
- Convenience for audience/participants.
- Adequate parking.
- Enough room for the number of press expected.

Publicity:

- Make sure the CAO/Council are aware - No Surprises!
- Call it "News Conference".
- Prepare a news release about news conference with:
 - The purpose of the conference.
 - Names and titles of dignitaries.
 - Presenter(s).
 - Contacts.

Prepare a press packet for reporters who attend the news conference and arrange to get these materials to media representatives not in attendance as soon as possible after the event. A press packet may include:

- The news release.
- Fact sheet (or question and answer sheet).
- Special facts that can be used as a "side bar" or extra story.
- Speaker's comments or speech.
- Photographs.
- Supporting documents.

Focus on quality of material, not quantity.

Whom to invite: EVERYONE

- Media: See media contact lists.
- Council Members - Consult with CAO
- Coordinate with other agencies, cities and counties.

Who will speak:

- Ideal = President Bush or Governor Davis, but not practical.
- Person with most expertise, authority and credibility in subject area. (Consult with CAO)
- A single agency representative, or a group?

Room arrangement:

- Adequate space and lighting.
- Seating vs. camera space.
- Ground floor location is best.
- Entrance/exit door for news conference speakers.

Technical aspects:

- Sound system or distribution amplifier.
- Lighting - avoid backlighting from windows.
- Acoustics.

Logistics:

- Sign-in sheets for media contacts.
- Press packets.
- Visuals.
- Entrance/exit of speakers.
- Availability of speakers after conference for interviews.

Strategy:

- Get ahead of the story and disarm media tactics.
- Save the punch line. Don't release the content of the news conference to reporters before the event. Tell them why they should come, explain the purpose, identify speakers, but don't give them "the punch line". They won't come to your news conference if you've already told them the story.

What to Say:

- Be prepared - do your homework and bring complete information.
- Have at least three key points you want to make.
- Keep it short and simple (KISS).
- Use visuals when possible.
- Speak in short "sound bites".
- Entertain questions. Be ready for dumb, trick and tough questions.
- See section on being interviewed.

Presentation Ideas:

- Get a successful victim to talk - with pictures.
- Have city/county representative speak.
- Set up a display and/or have brochures available.
- Open the presentation with a video.
- If you have something to announce that can be demonstrated, like a new rescue technique, demonstrate it.
- Videotape the news conference for future evaluation.

PRESS RELEASES

Press Releases shall go out on letterhead (City or department). If you're sending out some other type of advertising message, the City's official logo must appear as well, in addition to any other department or program logo you may use in connection with the event or activity.

When a press release is issued for any grant funded activity, programs, or CIP, mention of the grant as the source of funding must be made. The current City Fiscal Plan does not fund any new programs or capital projects. It needs to be made clear to the public that grant funded activities are not being funded out of the General Fund.

Press Release Definitions

News Releases are written for "news" events. They are prepared statements of fact that are written or presented orally; they answer the four basic questions of who, what, when, and where. They shall be impartially distributed at the same time to all legitimate representatives of the news media.

Releases should be sent to assignment editors, editors of specific departments (business, features, city, county, entertainment), or reporters.

Public Service Announcements are for non-news events like fund raisers, health care messages, etc. PSA's should be sent to public service directors or community calendars.

Feature Stories are in-depth stories that give the reader a clear picture about a person, place, event, or program. They can be human interest, educational, or historical pieces.

News/Story Idea is a news or feature story idea that you want to suggest to an assignment editor for print or broadcast media. You can prepare a brief news or story idea memo and fax or E-mail it to the appropriate editor. Frequently, if the story is presented in a way that makes it interesting and newsworthy, it will be investigated by a reporter. Remember to think about why anyone would be interested in the story.

Event Release is a memo sent via fax or E-mail to an assignment editor that reminds them that you have an important event happening that deserves news coverage. Always include why it's a good visual story (photos/TV news). You should have previously sent a news release about the event - this a follow-up nudge to cover the activity.

News Memos are another good way to remind the press that you have something newsworthy happening. Example: You have previously sent announcements to the media about a series of public workshops and this information has been printed or aired a week before the event. Send a news memo asking the radio and TV stations to broadcast the time, date and location of the workshops during their newscasts the day before and the day of the event. This gives you another chance to reach the public with your

message.

Special Tips for Press Releases

When sending out press releases of any kind a few points should be noted:

- Timeliness is key...for upcoming events (ribbon cuttings, ground breakings, dedications...) press releases should be sent out two weeks in advance. Once sent out, follow up calls should be made a few days before the event. Many media outlets have a central fax and do not receive all faxed press releases, or so many are received that some may get lost or not stand out. Follow up calls are an effective means of ensuring some media may attend an event.
- Invite all media outlets, including the smaller media such as the Journal, and the radio stations. The idea is to get the word out, so inviting only the Tribune, KSBY and New Times will only be effective if they attend;
- If Council or dignitaries will be at an event, it is significant to say so in the press release, as often media will respond more so when a dignitary is involved;
- Remember, any kind of media coverage will depend greatly on whether it is a slow news day/time. Therefore, simply sending out a press release does not require media to attend;
- Establish some contacts at different media. The more contacts one has, the better the response;
- When trying to “sell” a story to the media, remember that you are “selling” it and talk about how it will effect the community, how it relates to current events, if appropriate, and let them know why this is something that should be covered.
- **Don’t Forget:** Press Releases shall be sent out on letterhead, department or city.

Common Press Release Errors

- Too wordy.
- Too long.
- No focus.
- No contact name or phone number.
- Outdated/old news/not newsworthy.
- Language too technical.
- Not written with the public's interest in mind - what is it that the public wants or needs to know?

The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual is an excellent guide to news writing style.

ON-GOING DEPARTMENTAL

PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAMS

Public Relations Team

On-Going City Departments' Public Relations Programs

Administration

Natural Resource Management

The Natural Resource Manager oversees two important community natural resource programs:

- 1) Stewardship Program - This program empowers individuals or groups who want to undertake natural resource projects in the community, such as building trails or removing native vegetation. This program has been in effect for approximately five years and is ongoing.
- 2) Educational Program - This is an outreach program in conjunction with staff from the Parks & Recreation Department to develop a pool of City staff and docents who can provide nature education to the general public, interested civic groups, and school groups. City staff and docents receive training in order to have at least a basic level of knowledge about the natural history of the San Luis Obispo area so that presentations, walks, or talks could be given to various groups. This program has been in effect for approximately three years.

Economic Development

- 1) The Economic Development Manager provides information about the City of San Luis Obispo to existing and prospective businesses as well as real estate professionals seeking to locate businesses to the City. This information is provided through:
 - 2) The Economic Development pages of the City's website.
 - 3) Printed materials marketing the City as a place to do business including an overview piece, demographic information piece and listing of available properties.
 - 4) Direct marketing pieces summarizing the Economic Development Program and mailed to licensed businesses in the City.
 - 5) Speaking engagements to various business and service oriented community groups wherein the Economic Development Manager provides an overview of the program to meeting attendees.

The City Clerk

The City Clerk manages the operations of the City's Government Access Channel, SLOView Channel 20. City residents who subscribe to cable TV can get important information via the "City Calendar", an electronic bulletin board which runs continuously seven days a week, 24 hours per day between government meeting replays. This is an excellent way to market City programs, events, activities and public meetings. Using Microsoft PowerPoint and a simple protocol for creating and submitting content for Channel 20, employees have an alternative and very effective tool for getting out important information quickly. Contact the City Clerk for more details.

Human Resources

- 1) The Personnel Department provides information regarding job openings to the public through:
- 2) A Job Hotline that provides information about positions that are currently open in the City. The hotline is open to the public 24 hours per day, and is updated frequently.
- 3) Current listings of job opportunities in the area.
- 4) Job announcements are also sent out to the local colleges, county and state-wide.

Community Development

- 1) The Community Development Department maintains an ongoing number of public service-related programs, some of which are:
- 2) Representation for the Planning, Building, and Code Enforcement Divisions on the Neighborhood Services Team – meeting regularly with neighborhood groups to discuss current issues, trends, prevention and develop new policies and regulations for City planning and neighborhood preservation.
- 3) An extensive microfilm library, available to the public, of complete development plans for projects that have been built within the last 50 years – primarily commercial buildings, subdivisions and multi-family buildings. In 1990, this operation was expanded to include all residential projects, new houses, remodels and additions.
- 4) A new housing website which will be available online as of November 1, 2002. This will include affordable housing standards and provide access to many housing programs and opportunities, administered by the department.
- 5) The Historic Preservation library, available for research to both the public and other departments, advisory bodies and agencies.
- 6) The Building & Safety Division issues a monthly report of activity that is available to the public and is distributed to interested, outside agencies.

- 7) Over-the-counter approval for many types of Planning and Building projects is available and encouraged, including some pre-approved plans and details.
- 8) Community Development Block Grant program – a new program is initiated each Fall providing funding for housing, social services and many other endeavors.
- 9) A new brochure containing our Sign Regulations guidelines for the business community is being handed out with any Notices-to-Correct for infractions of the City's sign ordinance.
- 10) An extensive update of the City's Conservation Element of the General Plan, incorporating the results years of public input, new policies and future open space annexations.
- 11) Outreach Program for new neighborhoods that are being annexed and developed for a smooth transition through forums and mutual decision making.

Utilities

The Utilities Department maintains an ongoing public information program using a variety of communications media. The Department utilizes advertising via print, radio and television to promote and maintain public participation in the programs of the Utilities Conservation Office; water conservation and solid waste reduction and recycling.

The Department also uses direct mailing of a quarterly newsletter, the Resource, which provides additional information on conservation programs, and information on other programs, projects and services of the Department. In addition to the Resource, the Department provides information on key projects through direct mailing of information postcards to either all residents or targeted neighborhoods, depending on the project being communicated. Advertising programs may also developed for special projects of the Department, such as the Water Reuse project, where the Department wishes to increase the intensity and focus of community information regarding the project.

Like most other departments of the City, the Utilities Department maintains a web site with information about the Department's facilities and programs, as well as a kid page aimed at providing water education materials to children. The Department has also developed a school education program for grades 3,4 and 7, again to provide water education materials to children and incorporate water education into the curricula of local public schools. The Department has used a variety of consultants in the development and implementation of these programs, as well as in-house resources.

Public Works

The Public Works Department provides ongoing public information regarding current projects and various programs through the use of: the City's web site, appropriate and timely television coverage, radio and print press releases along with print media story ideas. An informational booth is set up at Thursday Farmer's Market throughout the year as needed to promote different projects or programs such as National Public Works Week, Summer Construction Projects and Winter Weather information. During the winter season, a *Winter Weather* telephone hotline is activated to inform citizens of locations for services and information regarding flood prevention and protection.

The department participates in the SLO High School Rotary Career day with an informational display booth regarding public works activities and opportunities. In addition, Public Works employees actively participate in a variety of citizen advisory bodies by providing informational updates and recommendations.

Police Department

The Police Department provides the following community programs:

- 1) D.A.R.E. - This is an outreach, drug resistance and self-esteem program for elementary and middle school students. The City provides one police officer that visits schools to talk with students on a regular basis in their classrooms and on campus.
- 2) S.N.A.P. – The Student Neighborhood Assistance Program is a peer policing and outreach program that employs students who are trained to respond to initial complaints regarding excessive noise or parties in the community. S.N.A.P. staff give warnings to first time offenders in an attempt to improve community relations and cut down on noise and party violations, enforce neighborhood parking districts and issue notices to correct for neighborhood enhancement ordinance violations.
- 3) Speakers Bureau Program - This program is provided to deal with talks on various crime prevention issues for groups, neighborhoods, and businesses.
- 4) Neighborhood Enhancement Ordinance - An information brochure and slide presentation has been produced for SLO Days, WOW Week, neighborhood groups, service clubs, etc., explaining what the law is and how to comply. A service delivery system has been established to implement the ordinance, which includes extending the VIOLTRAC computer program to the City Attorney's Office, coordinating and training Police Department SNAP personnel to respond to complaints.
- 5) Working to Improve Neighborhoods (WIN) - The WIN Program is a joint venture between Water Conservation (Utilities), Building and Safety (Community Development) and the Office of Neighborhood Services (PD). Utilizing a combination of radio and print advertising, the program's focus is front yard

maintenance and the advantages of drought-tolerant landscaping. The intent of the campaign is to improve the image of neighborhoods by stressing water conservation, enhanced property values, pride of ownership or belonging in a neighborhood, and reduces calls for service to the Community Development Department's Yard Maintenance Program. The program also addresses sub-standard housing, illegal dwellings and blight reduction.

- 6) Neighborhood Communications Program (HRC) - Work with the Human Relations Commission to produce a set of materials designed to increase communication and problem solving within individual neighborhoods. Centered around the popular "Neighborhood Event" concept, this program is used to: introduce neighbors to each other, foster working relationships within certain geographic areas, identify persons interested in the Neighborhood Action Team concept, promote neighborhood self-reliance, and communicate successful problem solving strategies.
- 7) Neighborhood Services Team - This type of problem solving approach is actually made up of three different levels of participation, each having their own significant role. The first level is a group of persons within City Government who have key roles in the direct delivery of services to neighborhoods, and would meet on an "as needed" basis to discuss how their individual group is providing the services, sharing ideas with the team. Most departments would designate one person to serve on the team. The second level is a separate set of representatives from various neighborhood groups who would meet, discuss issues of mutual concern and then meet on a quarterly basis with City staff assigned to the Neighborhood Services Team. The third level is the minutes of the items presented by staff are formatted as "Neighborhood News" and circulated to interested neighborhood groups.
- 8) Four Point Crime Prevention Program – Using a combination of television commercials, newspaper advertising, radio commercials ("Prevention Minute") and website (SLOPD.org) the community receives vital tips on preventing various crimes, reducing risks and getting involved in safety programs (Neighborhood Watch *Interactive*).

Fire Department

The Fire Department develops and maintains a number of on-going public education programs on fire prevention, fire safety, and accidents which go out to the general public.

The goal of public education is to reduce the tragedy of fire and other emergencies within the community. The programs provided by the Fire Department are designed to assist the citizens of the community by providing reasonable, safe living conditions in the home and in other locations they may occupy during the day and night. Each season brings special programs aimed at educating the public on the dangers they may encounter. Some programs include:

- 1) Spring - Weed Abatement, General Spring Cleaning and Smoke Detector Programs

- 2) Summer - BBQ, Fireworks, and Wildland Fire Safety
- 3) Fall- Back to School, School Fire Prevention and Smoke Detector Programs
- 4) Winter - Home Heater, Electrical and Holiday Safety
- 5) Certified Community Emergency Response Teams – Training citizens on how to care for themselves and others in major emergencies

Fire Prevention services are also provided to the business community, including: Fire extinguisher training, fire prevention inspections, fire protection planning, and other programs aimed at providing safe work environments for customers and employees.

The Fire Department provides quick, courteous, and professional service to the community and places an emphasis on these values.

Parks & Recreation Department

The Parks and Recreation Department provides on-going promotions through a number of different outlets including line-staff out in the field each day. These staff are the nuts and bolts of all programs and serve as a constant source of promotions with their consistent Parks and Recreation shirt/uniform and excellent customer service.

On-going promotions include:

- 1) Annual publication, “The KEY to San Luis Obispo Parks and Recreation,” which is published each December for the following year. This publication serves as a reference guide to all Parks and Recreation programs each year. It is distributed through The Tribune to every household in San Luis Obispo;
- 2) Weekly Public Service Announcements sent to media announcing events, classes and programs;
- 3) Monthly flyer distributed to 4,000 children and families through San Luis Obispo Unified School District highlighting events, classes and programs;
- 4) Brochures for different special events and programs. Since the “Key” provides brief description of all Parks and Recreation programs, brochures and flyers are created to give details of different programs in a timely manner;
- 5) Regular spots on KSBY’s Daybreak program promoting community based programs and issues;
- 6) Weekly updates on website.

Parks and Recreation has also taken a new twist on promotions with an innovative strategy: the new “Wellness Program.” This program simply promotes the wellness aspect of all programs through marketing with “wellness language” and working collaboratively with other agencies to show Parks and Recreation’s commitment to enriching the mind, body, spirit and community through wellness.

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASES