

Unit Introduction



“...technicians (people who can write news releases, handle publicity, and execute internal and external communication programs) are readily available. But those who have the objectivity to analyze, strategize, develop recommendations, and ‘think up’ are the ones top management learns to prize.”

- [Chester Burger](#), Life Member, Counselors Academy, Public Relations Society of America.

All too often public affairs practitioners have argued that management/leadership has little or no faith in public affairs. Research by professional development organizations and associations reflect disconnects between practitioners and organizational leadership’s thinking. Numerous recommendations from within the public affairs profession have concluded that in order to be valued by leadership, practitioners have to think like management.

This is not unique to the private or public sector workforce. And, some of us in the military have either heard or experienced the same thing.

Communication planning is the proactive planning and implementation to convey your organization's mission, goals and objectives. It facilitates the implementation of key strategies and tactics. However, these initiatives are always in support of organization operations with inclusion of the PA perspective.

Unit Introduction (continued)

“The old ‘flying by the seat of the pants’ approach to solving public relations problems is over,” – Edward J. Robinson (p. 339)

For many years we perpetuated the myth that Public Affairs deals with intangibles and cannot be measured – this is simply not true. Public affairs has evolved to an applied science – no longer do just hunches, gut feelings and personal experience serve as an adequate basis for our public affairs programs. Communication Planning is a process designed to deal with various PA issues, as well as capitalize on opportunities. Leadership rarely accepts a PAOs recommendations or simple claim that a program is, or was, successful on faith alone. They want to see proof (p. 340).

Objectives

- Define public opinion.
- Explain how public opinion affects military operations.
- Explain public affairs goals with regard to public opinion.
- Analyze audiences.
- Identify target audiences.
- Apply/Identify elements of the public affairs problem solving process.
- Write a communications plan.

OVERVIEW

- Purpose
- Four-step Public Relations process (RPIE)
- Defining Public Relations Problems (Research)
- Planning and Programmin
- Taking Action and Communicating (Implementing)
- Evaluating the Program

Purpose



The purpose of public affairs is to communicate your command's vision, goals and initiatives to its stakeholders. Communication planning provides a framework for practitioners to construct long-term communication initiatives of your organization's vision, goals and initiatives.

Purpose and PA's Role

According to *Effective Public Relations*, page 375, the mission statement for public affairs builds upon the command's mission statement and helps an organization achieve its mission by doing the following:

1. Collect and analyze information on the changing knowledge, opinions and behaviors of key publics.
2. Serve as the central source of information about an organization and as the official channel of communication between the command and its publics.
3. Communicate significant information, opinions, and interpretations to keep an organization's publics aware of command policies and actions.
4. Coordinate activities that affect command's relationships with its publics and other groups.

These four purposes of public affairs offer the perspective from which practitioners generate communication plans.

Your role as the PAO is to explain and manage your command's vision, goal and initiatives. Remember from the Public Affairs History unit that operational planners must include public affairs in its efforts. A good communication plan will provide focus and a unity of effort across command staff elements. It will always support the operational plan.

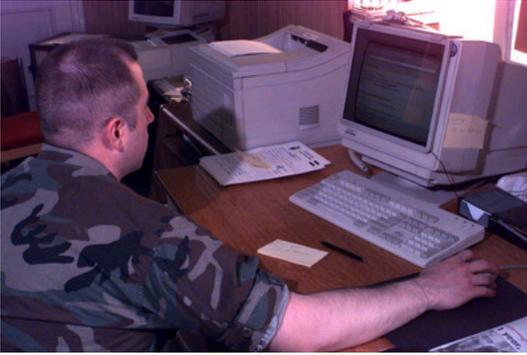
R.P.I.E. Overview

The foundation for strategic communication planning is the Research, Planning, Implementation and Evaluation (RPIE) process. These are the steps you'll use to develop a strategic communication plan, or any communications plan. Keep in mind, however, that RPIE is not a linear process, but a cyclical one. Each step in any plan you do needs to be continually evaluated for effectiveness. The research you do will need to be evaluated to ensure you've done the right research. The planning you do will need to be evaluated to ensure you've done the right planning, etc.

1. **Research** is the gathering of information and defining the problem or opportunity. This is where preliminary identification of publics and resources takes place. You also need to monitor opinions, attitudes and behaviors of those publics concerned or affected by the acts and policies of your organization in order to narrow in on your publics. This is the foundation for the other steps
2. **Planning and programming.** Information gathered in the research step is used to make decisions about what you should do or say, consider your goals, establish publics and identify what needs to be done
3. **Implementation** is putting the plan into action using detailed planned communication strategies and tactics
4. **Evaluation** is the assessment of the preparation, implementation and impact (outcome) of the program. Measuring your progress allows you to make adjustments as needed during the preparation and implementation phase, and to measure the effectiveness of your program.

Now that you've been introduced to the RPIE process, let's take a closer look at each part.

Research



Research is the basis of developing a solid plan. Thorough research will enable you to properly identify the problem or opportunity, your publics and resources, and public perceptions, attitudes, opinions and beliefs. You should be able to identify your organization's position - backward, present (around) and forward. Without adequate research, you risk having a faulty plan.

Research is the systematic gathering of information to describe and understand the situation and to check out assumptions about publics and public affairs

consequences.

Research

How do you know if you're collecting the right data? Information gathered to build your background should do three things:

- Define a problem/opportunity and reduce uncertainty
- Increase the chance of success for the program
- Lend credibility to your communication efforts

Research is the keystone to a successful communication plan.
Without research:

- you have no baseline
- you risk solving the wrong problems
- you risk letting tactics direct actions and decisions
- you risk overlooking critical information.

You must establish a **baseline**.

Research

Situation analysis is the unabridged collection of all that is known. It includes all of the background information needed to expand upon and illustrate in detail the meaning of a problem. In order to establish individualized objectives for each of your publics you must know their current opinions and behaviors. (Recall that communication focuses on the receiver).

The background starts off with the basic who, what, when, where, why and how elements - a concise description of the situation. Then you should move toward analyzing what is happening around your organization and others like it, what is happening inside, and what can be expected ahead (assumptions).

When doing your research, consider:

1. Looking backward, around, inside and ahead
2. Viewing internal vs. external factors
3. Using both formal vs. informal data collection methods

Research – Situational Analysis

Your plan's situational analysis also should include information such as positive and negative forces operating, who is involved and/or affected, how they are involved and/or affected. All of this will give you a baseline for measuring objectives.

According to Grunig's Theory of Effective Communication, the most effective communication must be a two-way symmetrical discourse. To do that, you must first have a thorough understanding of your publics. Your research must evaluate the public's understanding of your intended messages.

You need to do preliminary research to gather essential background data. Also, you need to look at internal and external factors using formal and informal research.

Research – Internal and External

Internal and external research will give you the balance you need to consider communication with your publics. Always look at an issue with a “global” perspective but take a local approach to planning for your command. Here are some things to consider looking at when doing your research:

Internal research considerations include:

- Mission statement -commander's/supervisor's vision during his/her tenure.
- Membership - in service, command, unit, organization, etc
- Historical info - about mission, units, operations, services, publics, issues, etc.
- Statistical info
- Policy - concerning issues
- Position – on issues
- Procedure – on issues and some operations
- Publics – perceptions, attitudes, beliefs.
- Media available

External research considerations include:

- News clippings
- Video coverage
- Content analysis - of stories, reports, essays, public comments, etc.
- Media lists
- Issues background
- Poll/survey results
- Schedules
- Publics
- References
- Regulations

You know the types of internal and external considerations for background and situational analyses, so let us look at formal research versus informal research.

Research – Formal versus Informal

Formal research includes scientific methods of gathering information, such as **primary** research (new surveys and studies) and **secondary** research (existing surveys, studies, research, etc). This quantitative (measurable) data is used for analysis of existing situations and benchmarking objectives in your strategic communication planning.

Examples: DoD/Service and climate surveys, Equal Opportunity Surveys, Work Life Surveys, Regulations, Reports, etc.

Informal research includes exploratory methods of gathering information, such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, opinion polls, etc, and can include primary and secondary research methods. This qualitative (subjective/feeling) data is used to measure attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, opinions, etc.

Examples: In-depth interviews, focus groups, opinion polls and surveys, questionnaires, etc.

Note: The Department of Defense (and its component services) has limited resources to conduct the kind of research similar to independent/private institutions. You will have to rely on existing means available to do the research you need. Informal/exploratory research can be done best with internal audiences, while formal/scientific research can be done using existing data from internal and external information sources.

Planning – Goals

Based on your research, establish an overall goal – or desired end state – from a PA communication perspective. After you've focused in on the particulars of your various publics, you need to start developing Objectives, Strategies and Tactics in support of your overall goal for each public.

Goals. Strategic thinking involves first predicting or establishing a desired future goal. A public affairs' goal in regards to public opinion is to communicate truthful information to the public so people can form their own, educated opinions.

The objectives that you generate for each public should support the overall goal of your plan.

Planning - Defining and Identifying Publics

Public Affairs establishes and maintains positive relationships by facilitating two-way communication between organizations and their publics. Publics are defined by how people are involved in or affected by the issue. They are a result of specific issues or situations, not shared cross-situational traits. They also can be referred to as stakeholders; however, we are going to stick with the term publics.

Planning - Defining and Identifying Publics

Identifying various publics for successful communication planning can be challenging.

Adequate resources necessitates refining publics in order to target them with specific and responsive objectives, strategies and tactics. Knowing what varying publics believe (know) about an issue, their attitude (feel) about an issue, and their behavior (do) in response to factors combined with who and where they are provides the basis for writing useful objectives for each target public. You can not reach everyone.

The key to selecting publics is to identify how people are involved and affected by a situation for which the program is being developed. Below is a list of **relevant indicators** we use to further categorize publics into sub-groups:

- **Geographics** - Natural or political boundaries
- **Demographics** - Gender, income, age, marital status, education
- **Psychographics** - Psychological and lifestyle characteristics
- **Covert power** - Behind the scene political or economic power
- **Position** - Those held by individuals, not the individual's attribute
- **Influencers** - Opinion leader – based on perception of others
- **Membership** - Can signify a person's involvement in an issue
- **Role** - Who plays what role in the decision-making process?

While these indicators are useful there are other factors which aid in targeting publics, properly. Mutual interest and situational variables tie certain individuals to specific issues.

Planning - Defining and Identifying Publics

Public Opinion is another factor to consider when attempting to identify publics. You need to focus narrowly on target publics in order to develop appropriate objectives, meaningful messages, specific action strategies and appropriate tactics to deliver messages selectively and effectively to achieve your overall goal.

Orientation. Individuals assign value to objects in their environment based on their history and on their assessment of current context. To describe and understand a public opinion you first must understand an individual's orientation: Belief (know)/ Attitude (feel)/Opinion (think)/Behavior (do)

- **Beliefs.** Deep-rooted mental acceptance of something – also called values. Product of someone's lifelong experiences. Difficult to change. (salience)
- **Attitudes.** Cross-situational predisposition or preference with respect to an object (pertinence). Predisposes individuals to respond in certain ways from one situation to another based on a lifetime of accumulating and evaluating information and experiences.
- **Opinions.** The judgment expressed (verbally) about an object in a particular situation or given a specific set of circumstances. Reflect someone's related attitudes but also takes into account the current situation.
- **Behavior.** The manifestation of beliefs, attitudes and opinions. Actually doing something, ideally based on someone's belief system and attitudes.

Co-orientation consensus. Formed when many individuals are simultaneously oriented to issues of mutual concern and interest. It is the product of both individual perceptions on an issue and their perceptions of what significant others think about the same issue.

Planning - Prioritizing Publics

Once public opinion has been assessed, then the publics must be prioritized based on who they are, what they know, feel, say, and do. Then, because of limited resources (time/money/manpower), decide what our goals are in reaching them based on the impact we want to have on them.

Initiatives should be aimed to do one of three things:

- **Conserve positive opinion.** Foster good relations – don't alienate those who support you.
- **Crystallize latent or uninformed opinion.** The majority of the general public doesn't know a lot about the military or our mission – most won't have an opinion on your command's issues because they don't have enough information. You want to generate an understanding or appreciation for our position in regard to any given issue.
- **Neutralize hostile opinion.** These aren't typically susceptible to change. Be forthright with information – refute them with the facts in an effort to neutralize.

The background information you've obtained about your publics will help you concentrate strategic communication efforts on viably measurable, obtainable objectives. The objectives will enable you to reach the overall goal of your plan.

Planning – Objectives

Objectives. Objectives represent the specific knowledge, opinion and behavioral outcome to be achieved for each well-defined target public to reach the desired program goal. It should be written in plain language, be clear and direct.

The purpose is to:

- Give focus and direction for strategies and tactics
- Provide guidance for those charged with implementing program
- Spell out outcome criteria used for monitoring and evaluating program

A well thought out objective makes the working theory of **learn > feel > do** concrete. When publics gain information (know) it shapes or changes their opinion (think), which, in turn, affects their behavior (do).

4 Elements of an Objective

There are four elements that make up an objective. Each one should contain:

- A desired effect. – “to increase, decrease, maintain...”
- A specified outcome – knowledge, opinion (predisposition) or behavior
- Magnitude of effect – use terms that provide useful and realistic and verifiable outcome criteria “measurable”
- Target date – “By when”

Examples:

To **increase awareness (know)** by **15 percent** of new service members fitness standards **within 12 months**.

To **decrease** by **10 percent perception (opinion)** of unethical conduct within our unit by **July 12, 2005**.

To **increase volunteerism (behavior)** with the local community on environmental issues **by 10 percent** from current baseline **within the next three months**.

Implementing and Communicating

Implementing and communicating is the next phase of your plan and involves communicating your strategies and tactics to inform your publics. During the planning stage you will identify which strategies and tactics to use but they will be put into effect during this phase of the plan.

First we'll discuss implementing strategies and then we'll look at tactics.

Implementing and Communicating – Strategies

In the planning phase, we addressed a wide range of information as the keystone to begin our plan. Developing objectives is the last component of the planning phase, so we now turn to developing strategies and tactics to achieve the outcomes specified by the objective.

Public affairs has evolved and matured over the years in response to advances in technology and rising public scrutiny of organizations. Practitioners are helping commanders decide not only what to say but what to do. Again, it is having a “seat at the table” that helps us provide better guidance to leadership. We need to have an overall game plan, concept, approach or general plan for the program designed to achieve a goal.

There are two kinds of strategies to consider in developing plans: **action strategies** and **communication strategies**.

Implementing and Communicating – Action Strategies

An **action strategy** communicates the mutual interests of your organization and your publics. It is the ‘**two-way symmetrical**’ communication that change is as likely within your organization as it is on the part of your publics. Also, it communicates that change results in a win-win situation, meaning both your publics and your organization benefit.

- Typically, it includes changes in organization’s policies, procedure, products, services and behavior.
- Your situational analysis conducted during the research phase allows you to know how your organization’s policies, procedures, action and other outputs contribute to public affairs problems/opportunity.
- To facilitate two-way symmetrical communication, you should establish a liaison with who is involved, for what purpose and how does this support your objective
- Common action strategies **alert** publics about:
 - Command mission
 - Command relations
 - Nature & importance of contributions
 - Facilities & services available
 - Personal & moral responsibilities
 - Equal opportunity
 - Policies
 - Program of personal & professional interest
 - Situational information

Examples of action verbs are:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| • Target ... | • Generate awareness... |
| • Illustrate... | • Develop... |
| • Market... | • Communicate... |
| • Conduct training... | • Ensure... |
| • Educate on... | • Emphasize... |
| • Promote unity... | • Encourage... |
| • Alert media... | • Instill appreciation... |

Implementing and Communicating – Communication Strategies

A **communication strategy** supports the action strategy. Think about the **command messages** unit of instruction. The content should be framed in such a way that the information answers questions, responds to audience interests and concern, and empowers members of the audience to act on their interests and concerns.

Your publics consist of people. Consider what interests your publics, what mass media they use and why, and what media impact their beliefs (knowledge), opinion (think) and behavior (do) and why.

- **Inform** publics of our action strategy (Knowledge)
- **Persuade** publics to support or accept the action (Opinion)
- **Instruct** publics in skills needed to translate intention into action (Behavior)

You should also select a **Media Strategy** when implementing your program. A media strategy is how you plan to respond to queries from the media on a specific issue. There are two types of strategies to consider:

- **Active** strategies involve a seeking out of venues and opportunities to communicate your messages.
- **Passive** strategies involve responding only when asked about a specific issue.

Implementing and Communicating - Considerations

Word choice is critical in determining the most effective message for your communication's plan. Don't let the words you choose become part of the public affairs problem. EPR breaks word choice into three categories:

- **Semantics.** Semantics is the science of what words mean. Words can excite or inflame. "The public relations specialist is expected to combine words and actions that will correct misunderstandings, educate where there is a lack of knowledge, and in general clear up confusion." (414)
- **Symbols.** Words are symbols for real objects: table, chair, freedom, and love -- these must have *shared* meaning for the sender and the receiver. "Symbols have been used since the dawn of history to compress and convey complex messages to the multitudes." (415) Examples include the Star of David and the Cross of Christ
- **Stereotypes.** They serve as a defense mechanism against having to exert the effort required to learn about and understand the uniqueness and details of each person, group, and situation. (418)

Now that we've reviewed communication strategies, next we'll turn to **tactics**.

Implementing and Communicating – Tactics

Tactics are the methods with which you intend to communicate organizational messages to your various publics. Different publics and strategies will require different tactics; however, some of them may overlap based on the type of plan you're doing.

Communication initiatives need to be focused with laser guided precision in order to hit their targets. However, different communication tactics are effective at different points and in different ways.

Implementing and Communicating – Tactics

According to pp. 377-378 of *EPR*, “It is important for a communicator to know what media and techniques to use at different stages and how to mobilize influencers effectively. The decisions or actions taken to make the strategy fit the reality and contingencies of the field of battle – the actual events, media, and methods used to implement the strategy.”

In the basic *communication process*, wise communicators see their receiver not as passive subjects but as selective users of information.

Take into consideration the following and ask yourself what effect they may have on the type of tactics you employ.

- Credibility
- Context
- Content
- Clarity
- Continuity
- Channels
- Capability

The following are examples of tactics used for planning purposes.

- Direct/verbal (face-to-face, commander’s calls, briefings, speeches, meetings)
- Print (Newspaper, magazine, flyers, fact sheets, press kits)
- TV/Radio (PSAs, announcements, advertisements, slide presentations, films)
- Displays (marquis, billboards, bulletin boards, posters, bumper sticker)
- Computers (email, Intranet, Internet, message traffic, websites, Blogs)

Evaluations



“I have begun to feel more and more like a fundamentalist minister railing against sin; the difference being that I have railed for evaluation in public relations practice. Just as everyone is against sin, so most public relations people I talk to are for evaluation. People keep on sinning ... and PR people continue not to do evaluation research.”

**James E. Grunig
Communication Professor
University of Maryland**

Public affairs success is evaluated on its effectiveness in helping to advance the organization's mission and achieve organizational goals. Evaluations provide evidence of impact and help us learn what happened and why.

We can measure changes in our publics' level of information, or predisposition and behavior changes. Having properly written objectives enables us to measure the level of our success toward reaching our goals. No evaluation is complete without addressing criteria at each level to determine if our objectives are being met. We will examine the three stages of evaluation using the [Stages and Levels for Evaluating Public Relations Programs](#) model, illustrated in EPR page 437.

In the preparation phase, research and planning must be evaluated on the adequacy of the information-gathering and intelligence steps.

Evaluation - Preparation

Once you have completed all the extensive research necessary for a thorough background to start your plan, you need to ensure that you begin evaluating this part of your plan, immediately. Evaluation is one of the important components of your plan.

Without evaluation methods, you will never know if you are meeting your goals and objectives, or if you are reaching your intended publics. It is critical to the success of your program, and must be continual throughout the entire communication initiative. Things that you would want to evaluate in the preparation phase are:

- The adequacy of background information base for designing the program
- Appropriateness of message and activity content
- Quality of messages and activity presentation

Next is implementation evaluation, a critical review of the organization and appropriateness of your program strategies and tactics.

Evaluation - Implementing

During and at the end of this phase of your plan you want to conduct another set of evaluations. What you are looking for here is whether or not you are effective in placing message and communicating with your publics. You also want to try and gauge current "standing" with your publics and make adjustments accordingly. According to EPR (437), examples of implementation evaluation criteria are:

- Number of messages sent to media and activities designed
- Number messages placed and activities implemented
- Number who receive messages and activities
- Number whose attention was gained (awareness)

Again, this is a continuous process and should remain ongoing throughout the course of your initiative in order to be effective. Cost and resources will dictate the level and extent at which you can perform evaluations, but you should also look at inventive means of performing evaluations.

The final evaluation step involves looking at the impact of your initiative.

Evaluations - Impact

Impact evaluation looks at the consequences of your program. Simply put, it records how effective you were in meeting your objectives.

Here are some examples of "before and after" baseline and evaluation measurements (437):

Pre-Communications (Baseline)

- Number who comprehend
- Number who hold specific opinions
- Number who hold specific attitudes
- Number who behave in specific ways

Post-Communications (Outcome)

- Number who comprehend
- Number who change opinion
- Number who change attitude
- Number who behave as desired
- Number who repeat behavior
- Social and cultural change

Evaluations – Methods

There are a variety of methods to be used in evaluating your communication objectives. However, government agencies face personnel and monetary resource necessary to properly evaluate communication initiatives. Public affairs practitioners are still held accountable for showing how effective we are, one way or another.

To get you started on the right path to accountability, here are some methods that government public affairs practitioners can use and how they apply to PA operations:

- **Content Analysis** – Formal qualitative data collected to measure how effective messages, themes, talking points, tone, focus, etc. of information.
- **Tracking Studies** – Formal qualitative data used to follow the development of information and message placement.
- **Secondary Analysis** – Formal studies used to gather quantitative data from existing databases.
- **Segmentation Analysis** – Studies used to breakdown key (target) audiences into various groups, such as demographic, psychographic, gender, geographic, covert power, position, influence, membership, etc.
- **Opinion Polls** – Informal qualitative data collected through either primary or secondary research methods.
- **Focus Groups** – Informal qualitative data collected through either primary or secondary information.
- **In-Depth Interviews** – Informal qualitative data used to collect either primary or secondary.
- **Surveys** – Informal and formal data used to collect information through primary and secondary information.
- **Knowledge Testing** – Formal surveys used to collect information through primary and secondary information.
- **Recall Studies** – Formal surveys used to gather qualitative information to gauge the effectiveness of key information.

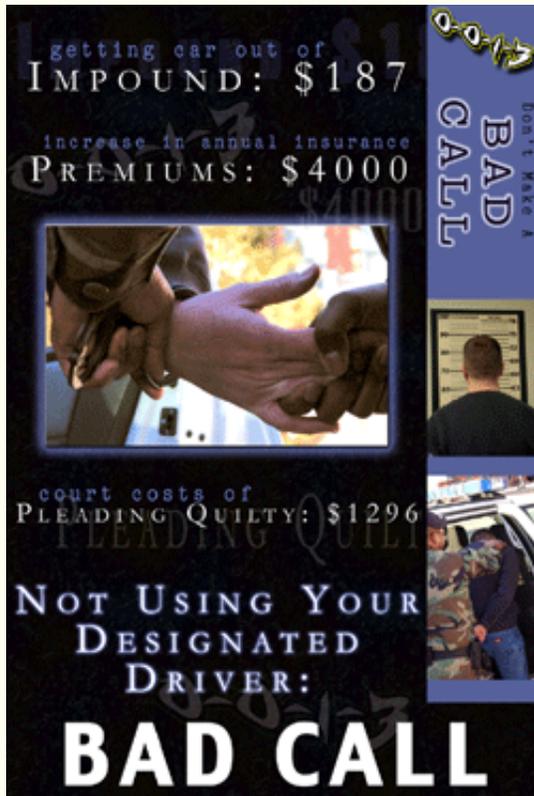


0-0-1-3 Communication Case Study

The following is a true story—a success story of how communication planning, coupled with a team effort from a variety of base agencies, helped bring one base's alcohol issues under control.

F.E. Warren AFB in Cheyenne, Wyo., had a difficult time dealing with its alcohol issues. Many approaches had been used—designated driver programs, leadership addressed the issue from the top down, strict punishment was given to anyone involved in an alcohol related incident. Despite the hard line, the issue persisted.

Communication Case Study (Cont.)



One commander, Col. Evan Hoapili, had to deal with a rash of alcohol incidents in his first month of taking command back in 2003. Frustrated and fed up, he pulled his public affairs, safety, medical, family support, and services officers, as well as the senior enlisted advisor in a room and said, “We need to fix this issue with alcohol and you’re not leaving until you have a plan.”

The goal the group established is nothing less than the result of imaginative thinking and leadership—they set out to quantify what “responsible drinking” actually was. Their goal wasn’t to tell people that they couldn’t drink—frankly, they knew it would be unrealistic to do so. Instead, they set out to create a responsible drinking culture at the base.

The base action plan and the public affairs media communication plan provide a good example of how to take a commander's vision and execute. Links to both are provided below:

- [Developing a Responsible Drinking Culture](#)
- [90th Space Wing PA Media Communication Plan](#)
- [Sample 0-0-1-3 Ads](#)