

Unit Introduction

We have already discussed the importance of internal information for your command and how strategic communication planning helps strengthen your command's position. Now, we are going to talk about the importance of community relations.

Fostering good relations with communities at home and abroad is in the best interest of the Department of Defense. DOD and the military services are public institutions that belong to the American people and exist to serve them. American communities are the source of most DOD personnel recruitment and material procurement. Well-planned community relations programs help earn public support and understanding of operations, mission, and requirements of the military services.

In addition, having a good community relations plan at overseas installations helps promote the military's image and enhance its position with host nations.



Objectives:

Given a community relations scenario, develop and recommend public affairs courses of action in accordance with Department of Defense and service public affairs policies and regulations. Upon completion of this unit of instruction, the student will be able to:

- Define community relations
- Identify formal/ informal components of the community power structure
- Identify components of a community relations program
- Explain how Armed Forces personnel behavior affects public opinion
- Explain how military programs affect public opinion
- Explain DOD support criteria to community relations activities
- Identify methods for maintaining relationships with local, state, federal and international organizations
- Apply DOD support criteria

Unit Overview

In order for you to reach this objective, this unit will cover:

- The Purpose of Community Relations
 - Definition of Community Relations
- Goals of Community Relations
- Objectives
 - Support Criteria
 - Support Restrictions
 - Review PAO's role in Community Relations
- Publics
- Communication Tactics
- Practical Exercise

Definition

We defined [Community Relations](#), in the Public Affairs "Roles and Responsibilities" unit of instruction. ComRel programs are usually associated with the interaction between U.S. military installations and their surrounding or nearby civilian communities.

Remember, interaction with overseas non-news media civilians in a wartime or contingency operation is handled by civil-military operations (CMO). However, public affairs supports CMO as required.



Next to your internal audiences, gaining community support is important to gaining mission and operational support.

"A government can be no better than the public opinion that sustains it."

--President

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Goal

Ultimately, the goal of good community relations is to increase understanding of the mission of the DOD and the U.S. defense posture and capabilities by increasing public exposure to, and understanding of, military personnel, facilities, equipment, and programs.

Community relations is a continued force multiplier. It supports your service's or command's operations. As we saw with General George Washington's example during the Revolutionary War, you must gain the support of the community and public in order for the military to successfully complete its missions.



Objectives

There are several ways that effective community relations can support your command's goals. When your command is confronted with an issue, or proactively communicating a change, there are a few things to consider when you start thinking about your objectives. According to the DOD Instruction 5410.18, ComRel activities should support the following objectives:

- Foster and sustain good relations on mutually acceptable terms
- Support equal opportunity goals of DOD with emphasis on individual dignity and worth
- Maintenance of reputation as a good neighbor and respected public organization
- Increase public awareness and understanding of the DoD, its missions, activities, policies, and requirements
- Support recruiting and retention programs
- Inspire patriotism through observance of the traditions of the military and individual examples of each service member



However, there are challenges associated with meeting these objectives. There are lists of "dos" and "don'ts" that accompany any planning efforts.

Support Criteria

Not every activity is appropriate for generating community support. DOD assets are scattered all over the world. There is a great variety of local conditions and requirements that make centralized planning possible. Your commands will have latitude to plan their own ComRel activities. DOD has outlined a number of basic criteria to support the wide variety of DOD community relations activities and resources.



- Interest of DOD and community as a whole are supported
- Association of the DOD is within the best interest of the DOD
- Support does not interfere with performance of official duties, nor impair operational, training or other readiness requirements
- Adequate resources available and willingness to support all similar requests
- Support may be funded by your own budget under appropriate guidelines.

Support Restrictions

In addition to the criteria, there are some restrictions, or considerations, to take into account when planning ComRel events. Below is a list of the restrictions, but for more in-depth information about each restriction, refer back to [DODD 5410.18, Sections 4.2.1 et.al., and 4.3.](#)

- Funding of ComRel activities shall not involve any additional cost to the Government.
- Loaning (DOD) resources to non-fund-raising events may be provided when approved by the Head of the DOD Component command or organization in accordance with DOD 5500.7-R, reference (c).
- Volunteer efforts by members of the DOD Components in their off-duty or personal capacities for charities of their choice are not prohibited.
- DOD shall not endorse, or appear to endorse, any non-Federal entity event, product, service, or enterprise, including membership drives or fund-raising activities.
- Public Confrontation planned or likely to occur at any event or program, where the apparent purpose is to stage controversy, is not authorized.
- Restricted admission/membership/access for any event based on race, creed, color, national origin, or gender is not authorized. Authorization also will not be granted for events sponsored by organizations whose constitution, bylaws, membership, qualifications, or rituals are withheld from the general public.
- Events or programs shall not employ military personnel in uniform in such capacities as ushers, bag handlers, guards, escorts, messengers, or any demeaning or menial task
- Competition with private enterprise support must not generally be provided to non-Federal entities when the support could reasonably be provided by resources and services commercially available.
- Compensation of DoD personnel and organizations from non-Federal entities for community relations activities shall not be accepted.
- Aerial demonstrations must consider safety, additional costs, qualifying air shows, and other detailed criteria outlined in DOD 5410.18.

ComRel Strategic Communication Planning



By understanding the overall goals and objectives of community relations programs, we can better serve our affected publics and select appropriate strategies and tactics to effectively communicate our messages to them. Ultimately this increases understanding of our mission, posture and capabilities. Let us talk about where you come in.

PAO's Role – Review

You have already heard several times throughout this course that public affairs supports operations. The public affairs' mission statement builds upon the command's mission statement and helps an organization achieve its goals by doing the following:

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

Each of these things are components of issues management and will help your command with unity of effort. Strategic Communication Planning is a valuable tool, among many, to help you coordinate these efforts.

PAO's Role – Review

Community relations is a command responsibility. Your commander has the authority and responsibility to conduct community relations programs at the local level. That task, in turn, is delegated to the PAO and his/her staff. You will be implementing the *commander's* community relations program. The PAO is considered to be the expert on the local community. Know the local issues and concerns through formal & informal research. The PAO is expected to know:

- The state of the community/military relationship
- The formal/informal components of the community power structure
- What groups make up the key publics
- What issues affect/interest/impact your community

So, now that you have a good understanding of what your responsibilities are as a PAO, let us talk about who your publics are and how to identify them.

Knowing Your Publics

Understanding your publics' needs, interests and concerns is paramount. Balancing the needs of your publics with your own goals requires particular attention. Success or failure in accomplishing your mission depends on it.

There are four basic types of publics: internal vs. external, and primary vs. secondary.

External publics are those that do not have a direct relation to your organization and include those not listed as an internal public. Examples of external publics could include:

- General public
- Business
- Academia
- Veteran and service organizations
- Military-related associations
- Other non-news media entities



Knowing Your Publics

Internal publics are those who are members of your organization or are closely associated with it. Examples include:

- Active duty
- Reserve and National Guard
- Civilian employees
- Families
- Retired personnel
- Cadets
- Local nationals in a foreign country
- Base contractors

For ComRel planning, internal publics should be considered a priority if they are a “force multiplier” in getting a positive message out. Only consider them a priority public for that purpose.



Knowing Your Publics



motorcycle riders.

Primary audiences are those you specifically want to target with a message. For example, your installation is experiencing an unusually high number of motorcycle accidents resulting in injuries and death. To help reduce this trend, you implement a safe riding campaign, with your primary audience being motorcycle riders. Your message to this group is tips for operating your motorcycle safely.

Secondary audiences are those who may have an indirect role or be affected by this issue. Your secondary audience is all other vehicle operators. Your message to this group is be courteous to

Communication Tactics

We have already talked about [communication tactics](#) during the “Internal Information” unit of instruction. The same tactics can be used to communicate with external audiences. The important thing to keep in mind with this is concentrating on how to use the tactics with external audiences.

What is Your Strategy?

Knowing who all your publics are is one thing, but for any one issue we do not have the resources (time/money/manpower) to effectively affect society at large. Using Strategic Planning to identify, prioritize and target appropriate publics increases our chances for success.

What is Your Strategy?

When developing your strategic communication plan one of the critical elements is the development of a sound strategy. Here are some of the issues you need to consider during the planning stage:

- What is your objective? (What is it that you want to accomplish or achieve?)
- Who are your primary and secondary publics?
- What is your communication strategy? Is it to inform (increase knowledge), persuade (encourage support), or instruct (change behavior)?
- What is your command message(s)?
- What tactic(s) will you use, e.g. direct/verbal, print, radio/television, displays? Banners, billboards, Web pages?
- How will you evaluate your results? Will you use statistical tracking from a known baseline, surveys, focus groups, etc.?
- What is your media strategy? Is it active or passive? (Note: An active media strategy is one in which you take a proactive approach to getting your message out to your targeted audience(s). A passive strategy is one in which you develop a strategic communication plan, but do not implement it until you are queried or the issue demands that it be implemented.

Unit Summary

From a communications perspective, community relations is another force multiplier in mission accomplishment. Reaching out to the people and businesses in your area and having open and direct lines of communication with effective feedback systems can help create an organizational environment where the public will support your mission. It is up to you, the PAO, to be sensitive to the information needs of the community and use the strategies and tactics outlined in this lesson to get that information to them.