

The why and how of PR for Senior Leaders and Prospective Parliamentary Candidates

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Page 1. Why does PR matter?

- How is your organisation perceived?

Every day as a senior leader you will be required to communicate with others. You will talk to volunteers, other professionals and those who need your services. You are well aware of what you do, how you operate, what services you offer to others and how you can help them. What you are doing adds value to the community of people you work with.

It's time now to stop and think about those who work external to your organisation. Try to imagine what they know about your group or charity and what perceptions they have of your work. Are they aware of what you do and what services you have to offer?

As a leader one of your roles is to ensure that opinion formers within your community and at a national level know of your work. The first task you have to set yourself is to find out what they know already and how you can build on that knowledge to sustain and develop your work in the future.

You can do that in a number of ways. You can go out and talk to others in your local community outside of your normal circle of influence, or you can commission professional research that will allow someone else to talk to your stakeholders and others on your behalf.

Action: Make sure you set aside time in your diary to talk to those external to your organisation. Remember what they say about you. Think about setting up an external focus group to advise you.

- Raising your profile

Once you have assessed what others know about you and how you are perceived externally you can start to raise your profile. Often research companies who conduct opinion former research will help you devise a communication strategy.

However, initially your task will probably be to fight for a budget that will allow you to do this. Developing a fully fledged communication strategy will take some time. Step by step you should work towards it. Persistence pays off.

Get to know your local media. Find out what papers, daily and weekly serve your region. Do the same for radio both independent and BBC and for Television. Research which journalists are likely to be interested in your work and why. Start deciding what proactive steps you need to take to raise your profile. Ask to visit the news editors, of what you think, are the most important media locally. Tell them you want to raise your profile and ask for suggestions of how you could work with them to do this.

Don't forget local papers, radio stations and television outlets often run fundraising campaigns at Christmas for the young, the elderly or those with a disability. Could you become part of that? If not try and think up other ideas or stunts that would appeal to them.

In seeking to influence an external audience you should also host events and ensure you build up a comprehensive and reliable mailing list that you build on over time. Keep it up to date.

Action: Make sure that you go and see at least one news editor locally or a journalist who covers your specialist interest.

- Day to day concerns

Initially you may not be able to appoint one person to take care of marketing and communication but have to allocate the roles to various people in your organisation.

Even if you have to do this take care not to diminish the role of communications and its importance to you. Ask your volunteers and staff who are they talking to externally, what they are saying and how people are reacting to your work.

Raise the issue of communications regularly with your staff and volunteers, talk to them about what others are saying about you. It is a good idea to write down what your six key messages are and to update these regularly. As the senior leader writing down the key messages will help you to focus on what is and what isn't important at any one time. It is a good companion to ensuring that the policies you have devised become a reality.

Ensure that your staff are aware of what lines you have devised for them to take and that they have the facts and figures necessary to communicate these at their fingertips.

Action: Write out your six key messages and involve others.

- Launching a campaign

Decide what issues you want to campaign on. You may want more money, you may want to ensure services are improved or you may just want to communicate the fact that the people you help are in need and to say what the full extent of the problem is.

A campaign needs to be thoroughly thought through. What is the issue you want to campaign on? Who else is likely to befriend you? Who is likely to oppose what you are doing? Who else will be affected by your actions? What positive messages do you want to put across?

Answer the Who? What? Why? Where? When? How? Who is your target audience? What do you want to achieve? Why are you launching your campaign now? Where are you going to place your story? When are you going to launch your campaign? How are you going to finance it?

Don't forget the national press and the trade press maybe interested too. How new is this type of work? Who else is doing it? Why is what you are offering distinctive or different from the rest?

Look for a topical and appropriate time of year to launch your campaign. Education stories hit the headlines in July and August. Fitness campaigns are topical in January. Stories about government policies are often debated during the conference season in September or October.

Charity news and surveys are often put out in January and August when news dairies are notoriously thin. The so called "silly season" maybe an ideal time to get your messages out. But it may also be the case that there is a local event or news item that will make your story more topical. Try and find out what is going on locally and nationally.

You can subscribe to an external events diary if you wish, but initially this service may not be within your budgetary restrictions. You may ask others you know if they do have access to such a service and find out what else is going on around the time you have planned your launch. You may want to wait until there is a national themed week on your specialist area. Again others can help to tell you what is planned when in the years calendar of events.

Action: Find out what other events are planned for the time of your launch. Will it clash with anything else?

- Start sooner not later

Don't underestimate just how much time planning a PR campaign will take. You may know what you want to do and when, but think about who else you need to consult and who you want to get to "buy into" your ideas. Arranging meetings takes time, and to access busy people you need to think months ahead. People maybe away or their dairies maybe full. Don't forget that once you have met them they then have to talk to their staff and get someone to team up with you.

That liaison is time consuming internally and externally, particularly if you have to get others to approve what you are doing. Avoid that eureka moment, it will only confuse others. Build on your ideas and be methodical about them.

The web is an important tool of communication for many and it maybe that you need to think about different logos, special pages, and an interactive campaign where people contact you through the web as well as by post or phone calls. Your web adviser will want to know about this well in advance.

Action: Plan your lead-in times for your campaign and list who else you need to involve.

- Supporters and Fundraising

Securing the long term future of your organisation is the most important role a leader has. Your volunteers will need you to support them to ensure that your organisation is known to others. The more others know about your work the more likely they are to give donations to you. It takes a relatively long time to drip-feed messages out to the media and you need to be consistent in what you say to build on what is already known about your organisation.

Communicate a few things, consistently over a year to 18 months to ensure that there is reliable public awareness of your work. One big splash is not enough. People will quickly forget what has been said, so you need to ensure your publicity is sustained over a longer period of time.

The media is an important tool for you to use to support and encourage your staff and volunteers.

Those who work for you will be encouraged to do more if they hear you on local radio or television or read what you have said in local or national papers. Encouraging activists to do more is very important. They need a slap on the back too and publicity can help to ensure those volunteers you have stay with you.

Action: Make those who work for you feel good – tell others about what you are doing.

Page 2. Who is your audience?

- The public as a stakeholder

To communicate externally you need to focus on your target audience. Professional marketing and opinion former research companies can help you to devise strategies to find out who they are and what needs to be said to them.

If you provide a service to a community you should think beyond those you immediately help to engage a wide cross section of the public in your work. During different life stages we all take interest and have need of different sources of help and information.

You should view the wider general public as a stakeholder but as a target audience the term is too general. Break down who you are trying to reach by age, sex, social class, interests and lifestyles and focus on the most important groups.

Remember even individuals who are not directly involved in your work can help others to form opinions of what you do. Grandparents often tell their children of events or information they have obtained that can be beneficial to their grandchildren. A busy parent may not have the time to glean this information for themselves or to read or listen to the media enough to pick up on it. Similarly if you are ill, it is often friends, relatives and colleagues who expand your knowledge.

You may be cautious about raising demand or public expectations of your work but you ignore the public at your peril. It is your job as leaders to take the time to give them accurate information if not they may well pick up on misinformation.

Reaching a targeted general public will help you to reach those you need.

Action: Think what information you can give to the general public that will genuinely help to enable your service users. Do not take for granted that they will know it already.

- Your members/clients/users

You exist to benefit your service users. Their needs are paramount in planning what services you will offer to who and when. To talk to people who are in need, who may be ill, or may be angry with how they have been treated by others requires tact and sensitivity. When talking to your members, clients and service users take care to use the right language.

A good way of doing this is to imagine that you are sitting where they are. What could someone say that would reassure you and give you confidence that the service offered to you will improve? What words would make you angry and what words would comfort you?

Think of what you can do now for people, what information you can send them. Tell them what can be done in the future rather than telling them “there isn’t enough provision”, “we’ll put you on the waiting list”, or “you are not a priority”.

Your members, clients and service users maybe young, elderly or people with a disability. They may speak another language, need sign language or braille to communicate, or have needs that are different from others. Take care to think of who they are and to talk to them in a way that they will understand.

Think of what they read and what they are likely to be listening to. Weekly papers are sometimes the only source of information people have and they do get put through the door of all those who live locally.

Action: Be inclusive think through what need others have and devise a strategy as to how you are going to communicate with them in a way they will understand.

- The media – print, radio, TV national and local

As leaders it is important that you get to know and are on first name terms with trusted local journalists in print, radio and TV both independent and the BBC.

To form good contacts you need to be available to answer calls when the journalist phones you. Come out of your meeting to deal with them. Inform those around you that you want to take these calls and that you want to encourage a positive policy towards the local media.

Not all journalists are reliable or trustworthy but be guided by your own instincts on this. Be careful not to let your guard slip and don't answer questions on the hoof, ensure that you give journalists reliable accurate information. Phone them back if you don't know the answer immediately. Carry through your actions and do what you said you would do.

If you are available for "reactive" press calls journalists are more likely to help you with your "proactive" messages. They may help you come up with ideas for a feature article or slot. Their "leading questions" will help you to shape and form your campaigns. Don't say "yes" if you don't agree with them, but "are you going to?" is often a question the journalist uses to help you decide on what is the next course of action.

The media will help you to tell others about your work. Use it to good effect. When you ring a journalist "proactively" ask if this is a convenient time to speak and when you can ring back.

Action: Read your local papers, paid for and free sheets. Listen to local radio, watch local TV, get a feel for the media around you and what type of information it puts across to its audience when.

- Opinion formers, other politicians.

As a leader you need to win approval for your ideas with others to ensure that you have the support of key people in your local community for your work.

You already know who your internal opinion formers are, but you also need to engage the external community. Ensure that you know who all the local regional MPs and PPCs are, what party they represent and what constituency. Do the same for your European MEPs they may well be interested in your work too, form alliances.

Members of the Lords are often active on behalf of voluntary groups and charities. Research who in the Lords is interested in your field of work and decide if it is an appropriate request to involve them. They may represent a particular political party and viewpoint but a number of them are "cross bench" so have no set party line to take.

Action: Get to know your local party MPs, find out what events they are likely to be going to and try to meet them.

- Local government/health service/other public agencies

Who are the leaders of your local authorities? Who runs the health service? What about the county council and district councils? They may not be directly involved in your work but setting up an email group and informing them of what you do two or three times a year will improve others perception of you.

Even if they don't read it, when challenged you can always say that you told them of recent developments. If you want to take more time and have more resources you might want to produce a newsletter or leaflet for them. It helps to write things down and you will be surprised of what achievements you can flag up to others.

Think carefully about how others may interpret what you are saying. These relationships may need careful handling but it is still the best policy to be open and transparent as an organisation. If there

are differences of opinion people will respect you for saying what these are.

Action: Local partnerships are vital to your work, send an email, write a newsletter to tell others what you are doing.

- Other supporters and fundraising

Charities and voluntary organisations rely on a number of different supporter relationships. Different supporters may have different expectations of you as an organisation. If you achieve positive publicity this is beneficial to them and helps them to raise their profile too.

Find out how you can work together with others to achieve this. When you are writing a press release or speaking on a public platform or talking on local radio remember to say that this work wouldn't have been possible without the backing of your supporters and then name them if you get time.

Good publicity will help you to secure long term sustainable support from them. Don't forget that trade journals often have news about trusts and foundations, government agencies, and the work of charities and the voluntary sector. Make these part of your communication network so that your supporters achieve recognition for their work too.

As leaders you can teach this value to others too. Ensure supporters and funders are acknowledged on your web site.

Action: Ensure that internally and externally you acknowledge the work of your supporters. Good media headlines will impress them. Find out how you can work with them to achieve this. What are their expectations of you?

Page 3. Where does PR fit in the organisation?

- The departmental structure?

As leaders you will have to draw up a management structure to decide your lines of command and control. It is commonplace for leaders to fit the communication function alongside marketing and events and/or the policy directorate.

While this approach is pragmatic it often ignores the specialist qualities that a good communication professional will need.

Someone well versed in policy may not appreciate or be prepared to negotiate on how those policies will present externally. While those in the organisation and some opinion formers might approve of your policies you also need to ask how they will present externally and how this will influence how others view your work.

Similarly good marketing professionals may not come with first hand experience of dealing with the media on a day to day or week to week basis. They may need to learn media skills as they go.

Wherever you situate the communications function you need to impress on staff the importance of this work and the need for it to be prioritised. Discuss with them your strategy for your key messages and how you are going to communicate these internally and externally.

Action: Give your PR department a target. Tell them you expect to see so many print articles a

month, or that you expect to do so many radio interviews too. Impress on them the importance of attempting local TV coverage such as the “and finally” on regional TV news bulletins.

- Access to the leaders

Wherever you situate the PR department remember that you need to be personally involved in this work. Quotes for press releases and media publicity material must come from the most senior person in the organisation and that is you. Talk to your department regularly, plan communication seminars and forums with staff on a monthly basis.

Take the trouble to get the ideas of others so that you utilise their media awareness too. You will be surprised what people read or listen to when they are at home or as they drive to work. Tap into this knowledge and ask them for ideas.

It is important to give digestible quotes and sound bites for media interviews so be prepared to listen to and take the advice of your communication professionals. Don't let a quote compromise what you believe but do ensure that it will be reported by making it topical and newsworthy. Ask others to be honest and say whether what you have said will be reported. Journalists will look to your quote for a headline for their story so take advice and change it if necessary.

Action: Ensure you plan regular meetings with your PR staff and talk to them on a weekly basis. Pencil in a monthly communication seminar with your staff.

- You may be “the department”

PR may be one of the departments that initially you have to run yourself. It's important that however pressing your other priorities you do find the time to tell others what you have done.

Begin by writing a press release. Show someone else what you have written and said and see what they think of it. Send it out to your local papers and wait for them to phone you. When the journalist rings take their calls, phone them back and adopt a friendly persona.

Educate them as to what you are doing but be on your guard. You might want to seek the advice of some of your funders who may employ PR professionals or you can ask journalists that you know. County council's and district councils have PR departments, they may be willing to help you or share their mailing lists with you.

You may also benefit by trying to get a business to help you that is promoting its corporate social responsibility but ask others for advice on this as some groups have got their fingers burnt.

Action: Use your local strategic partnerships to get some good advice on PR. Find out what you should say to who and which local journalists are good to deal with.

- Internal communication

As your organisation grows it will need to consider more carefully how it communicates with its staff. You may well have small offices situated in different parts of the country and a number of volunteers and staff who work for you on a revolving basis. As leaders it is important that you are visible to all.

You can begin by writing a modest newsletter telling people what you have been doing, what has been achieved and what your vision of the future is. Your volunteers can send in their pictures and stories too, and you can feature profiles of your staff, who they are and what they do. Include a picture of yourself.

It is important that people know how to contact you and who is in charge of what in which office. Some “did you know” go down well when you are communicating internally. Don’t assume knowledge that others don’t have, make your internal communications clear not clever.

Action: Start making a diary of your week, list what you do, and plan how you are going to tell others of the real achievements and difficulties that are being encountered. Display relevant information on notice boards.

- External communication

As leaders you need to impress on others the importance of external communication. Let the most senior and the most junior staff know that you want to help journalists and to whom they should be referring calls.

To some extent the journalist is your envoy to others. The first impression they have of you and your organisation will influence what they write and say about you. Even if you are unfortunate enough to take a hostile call, being helpful and polite counts.

Ensure that staff and volunteers say they will get someone to phone the journalist back as a matter of priority. Get them to pass notes into meetings to ensure that you know a journalist wants to talk to you and by when. External communications must be prioritised within your organisation and it is up to you to lead others with this value.

Action: Circulate an A4 sheet to all staff and volunteers in all offices telling them press calls should be referred to you or the PR team and give some helpful hints of how they should deal with journalists. Ask them for their ideas for good stories and keep a list of these for all to see.

- Knowledge is power

As organisations evolve they can develop a secretive culture towards who knows what. In some people’s hands information becomes power and people may not want to share what they know with others.

If your organisation is going to be truly accountable it needs to break down these barriers and encourage people to share what they know with others. To communicate effectively externally you need to have facts and figures at your fingertips.

Journalists will ask you: “what’s going on?”, “why?”, “what’s going to happen next?” To answer these questions you will need to be fully informed. They will want to draw on the facts you have: “how many people you help?”, “what is the demand?”, “how much more money do you need to continue your work?”, “who supports you?”

It is not easy to answer these questions without the co-operation of your staff. Make sure that this kind of information is produced regularly.

Action: Devise a strategy for the retrieval of information in your organisation. Make someone responsible for giving it to you on a regular basis.

Page 4. Why leaders matter

- Providing leadership

As leaders you are a figurehead for your organisation both internally and externally. What you say and do is important to others. If you value good communications others will do too. It is not conceited to appear regularly in your local media, it sets a value for others and helps to communicate the brand values of your organisation.

Don't worry about what others think of you, or that your quotes are not exactly what you wanted to be seen to say. The important thing is that you are starting a process that will over time drip feed messages out to an external audience about what your organisation does. In the long term this will be highly beneficial to you and as you get more used to dealing with the media your skills will improve. You will temper your expectations and become more realistic about how the media works.

There may be certain times when it is more important to communicate what you are doing than at others, for instance, during fundraising campaigns or when you need to recruit more volunteers or need to expand into new premises. However, you should ensure that your press releases and appearances are made on a regular basis, for instance every couple of months.

Action: Consider how you come across to others. How do others perceive you? How do you dress, what do you look like, do you have real authority? Remember doing too much can make it appear that you are not in control.

- Your media skills count

Dealing with the media requires a professional approach to this work. You will improve as you increase your knowledge of what journalists respond to and want from you. However, you should have some form of media training.

You are the most important person in the organisation for media interviews. Knowing how to put your messages across requires a professional approach, particularly when "proactive" stories can often be turned into "reactive" and negative publicity.

You should always adopt a natural persona with the media, but at the same time you need to be on your guard. This can feel like scratching your head and tickling your tummy at the same time. Asking others to mentor you, or signing up to a course is the best way to ensure you approach acquiring media skills in a professional manner.

Action: Find out what media courses your local strategic partnerships are signing up to. Compare the cost of one with the other. Go on personal recommendation from others.

- Providing appropriate resources

When planning your budget for the year set aside some resources for media training. As a first priority you should go on these courses, but in the long term ensure other senior staff are trained too.

By researching who is providing what you will be able to save yourself money. Don't accept the first quote that you get, compare it with others. Ensure that those training you have first hand experience of broadcast as well as print journalism.

One off courses are useful but are not the answer. You need to build on what you have learnt and accept advice and criticism on a regular basis. We all have good days and bad days, so don't be put off by one negative headline or one less than perfect appearance. Refresh your skills and ensure new staff receive training too.

Action: Set aside resources to ensure that you receive professional media training in the year

ahead. Accept the advice you are given.

- Give it time

Remember that it takes time to learn a new skill and that the more you practice it the better you will become. To learn to deal with the media professionally you need to find the time to put into practice what you have learnt.

When a journalist rings for an interview, offer to go into the local studio to do the slot rather than talking to them on the phone. That way they get a quality interview that sounds better and you get a chance to familiarise yourself with the studio setting. At first this can be off-putting, but you soon get used to presenters who are juggling 101 things to do and ask you a question then turn away to put a record on while you are replying!

Similarly down-the-line television interviews are the most difficult of all to conduct. Sitting in an outside TV studio talking to a presenter through an ear-piece without being able to see them is remarkably difficult. The more you do it the less nerve racking it will seem.

Be kind to yourself. You won't get it right first time, but practice will make perfect.

Action: Offer yourself up to local radio programme for a mid-morning or mid-afternoon interviews. You can do it, take that first stride into the radio studio but ensure you know what you want to say and on what terms the interview is being conducted. Ask questions – it's your right.

- Planning for the long term

As your organisation grows you will need to put in place a strategy for dealing with external and internal communications. You can write that strategy yourself or call on the help of professional agencies.

The media today is very sophisticated and it takes time to get messages across to others. A media strategy should cover both the long term ie the years ahead, and short term needs ie the months ahead, of your organisation. It will draw heavily on the policies you have devised, and the resources you have for marketing your organisation.

The events you plan can "create" news and can be a source of press releases. Similarly, any new policy you devise will need communicating as to how it affects others. A new brand strategy requires resources to convey these messages to others external to your organisation.

This may be a good time to take stock and commission some research on how others perceive you before you write your strategy. Knowing your starting point is important. Alternatively you can ask your own focus group.

Action: Think through your communication policies. At what stage will you need to write a communication strategy and why?

Page 5. How to conduct your own PR audit

- Who does what?

As leaders you maybe new to the organisation you run. You may not have helped devise the current PR strategy or the structure of communications in your organisation.

As a first step find out who deals with the media, what type of press coverage you receive and from whom. Who is responsible for monitoring your coverage, and how does the organisation come across?

Look at how well the present structure is working and decide whether or not your communication policies are effective. Training may be a good way to improve your organisational communication skills or alternatively it may be that you need to place greater importance on this function.

If the communication function is shared between policy and marketing find out how much time is being given to external communications. Look at the marketing material, the display material, the past press releases, the annual report, the web site. Ask yourself is it good enough?

Action: Talk to those who deal with communication find out what their frustrations and difficulties are before moving forward. Do their skills need to be improved? Are their mailing lists kept up to date, who monitors press coverage?

- How can I improve our PR?

Be realistic. You won't be able to improve your coverage overnight. Plan what you are going to say when to whom and what your most pressing messages are. The fact that you get staff to focus on external communications is important.

Involve others in what you are doing. Of course you will need to assess whether you are getting enough coverage and the right type, but there can be genuine reasons why the press are not picking up on what your organisation says.

You may need to create some "proactive" communication tools. You may need to commission a survey, build upon your story bank and get more real life case studies, or ask other opinion leaders or celebrities or MPs and ministers to support your campaigns and what you are saying.

Enthuse others with your ideas but don't demoralise them. You'll find they have ideas too and once they are given time to pursue them your coverage will improve. PR is labour intensive and hard work. Don't underestimate this. Encourage others, tell them they have done a good job and suggest ways to improve their working practices.

Begin by writing a PR plan – this will help you even if you are the only person focusing on external communications. Write down "why you exist?", "who you need to influence?" and your "key objectives" both short term and long term

Action: Talk to your staff. Find out what difficulties they have convincing others that your stories are newsworthy. Be creative and build up your story bank of real life case studies. Write your PR plan.

- Involving the whole organisation

Although the role of PR is often allocated to one person or a department you need to highten awareness among all your volunteers and staff about how good media coverage will help your organisation to grow.

It is often the stories told round the coffee machine or in the pub that are the real newsworthy items. Messages travel orally, they don't begin with press releases. Find out what remarkable stories your volunteers are talking about that involve firsts and lasts, courage and adversity, fear and hope.

Walk round the office and talk to people. Your volunteers and staff are your story gatherers, they know what is going on, make sure you do too.

Action: Get someone to research some of those human interest stories your volunteers and staff are talking about. Should you publicise them, will those affected give their permission, and how can you protect them from unwanted intrusion? Make this part of your PR plan.

- Why seniority counts

Journalists want to interview the most senior person in the organisation and that is you. The messages count more if they come from someone at the top because they are more authoritative.

Journalists also like to hold organisations to account, and ultimately the buck stops with you. If there is a "reactive" saga developing it will be you not your staff the media wants to meet and talk to. If you have a "proactive" message and a new strategy to unveil it is also the leaders or chair who should be seen to be leading the organisation on this.

You are the most important public face of the organisation alongside your chair, patrons and celebrities. Remember how important your role is and how important it is to your organisation that your name and face get to be known.

Action: List how often you have spoken to the media this year. Set yourself a realistic target for interviews and invite some journalists in to meet you.

- Moving forward

Once you have put in place a media strategy you will need to convince others of its worth. Getting the agreement of your board members is your first step and then you must allow staff and volunteers to buy into it.

Your board members may well have media experience themselves and some charities and voluntary organisations invite journalists onto their boards. Have you thought of doing this? Local and national journalists can certainly be good figureheads for your organisation and they can sign agreements to ensure they keep information confidential.

Think of how your board will react to your calls for more resources to be given to PR and make sure you can list the benefits of doing this. Explain why your current practices no longer fit the bill and why you need to move forward. Don't worry if you meet with resistance, try, try and try again and eventually you will persuade others.

Action: Make a list of all the positive benefits of good PR and how it can help your organisation to grow. Find out what others think and involve your board members and use their experiences.

Page 6. How to promote your cause

- Proactive PR

It is important that you begin to understand some of the rudimentary footwork of PR. So called “proactive” publicity refers to situations where you go out and seek publicity on behalf of your organisation. You are instigating the press attention by talking to journalists, speaking at a public meeting, or writing a press release to distribute to others.

You will have to think carefully about what you want to say and what you shouldn't be seen to be saying. For instance, if you require more backing and resources it may not be wise to criticise others. Even in “proactive” situations you need to choose your words carefully.

Your external literature or annual report is the most important external communication you will undertake. It will allow you to get across some “proactive” messages and to release these to the press. Ensure it is written professionally with good pictures to illustrate the human interest stories.

Your key messages should be reflected in your annual report and all the literature you produce. Even if you go for the big launch of publicity you will still need to keep the pot on the boil by regularly drip feeding your messages out. Be flexible and adapt your messages over time.

Action: Write a “proactive” press release – get to know how you go about this and what comments will stand out and make good headlines. Make sure it contains: “Why? What? Who? Where? When? and How?”. It should have a direct quote from you, be one side of A4, and have a contact number. Once you written it you will be able to judge more effectively how well others are performing this role.

- Reactive PR

“Reactive” publicity occurs when the media comes to you because something has happened. It may be that something is seen to be wrong in your organisation or that you are being asked to comment on something that is happening nationally or locally that your organisation has an interest in.

It is important that the leader is available to deal with these calls when he or she is asked for by name. Act as the educator of the journalist. Often their facts are not quite right, say you will investigate it, give reassurance that you will ring them back and ensure you do that in time to meet their deadlines.

You can issue a statement or put out a press release. “No comment” leads to cover ups and sagas and will prolong the negative publicity. Deal with the issue now, involve others in your organisation, and be accessible to journalists. Carry through your actions, do what you promised you would do.

Remember that people can and often do pick up on what you are saying when you are speaking at a public meeting. Ensure that you don't invent policy on the hoof or don't give away the new brand strategy before you launch it. Inform your press department or PR member of what you are going to say and talk through with them how it will influence the media's perception of you.

Action: Talk to your press team about their “reactive” PR strategy. Keep your mobile phone on, tell them you are willing to come out of meetings to talk to journalists. Ensure that you know in draft form the “lines” you are all going to take on this.

- What works?

Even in a “reactive” situation you can get “proactive” messages out. In fact, this can be an excellent time to ensure that four of five of your key messages about your organisations real achievements are put across.

Every day on radio and TV you hear politicians and others doing this as they “rebut” the negative questions of others. Listen to these interviews and learn some of the techniques. The media is all around you listen and learn from it. Tune into local and national breakfast and drive time shows.

Also listen to mid-day programmes. Prime Ministers loved to appear on the Radio 2 mid-morning show. What local day-time programmes could you appear on?

Some leaders of large organisations can be heard to say that “all publicity is good publicity”. This may not always be true but it can certainly help you to be noticed. There’s a great deal of production effort involved in attracting “proactive” publicity so when the media comes to your door for a comment grasp that opportunity and make the most of it. Be sensitive to any legal or confidentiality issues and take legal advice when necessary.

Action: Listen to some local radio and TV programmes. Which do you think are the best, what type of audience do they appeal to? Be aware of what the media is saying around you.

- Who should I talk to?

Remember that different media cater for different audiences. BBC local radio has an ageing audience, while commercial radio often appeals to the young. The media knows who its listeners and readers are, it profiles them by age, sex and social class. It knows what their interests and lifestyles are.

This profiling allows you to target your messages too. If you are launching a campaign it may be that you want to reach a younger audience, or an older one. Or maybe you want to engage the free sheets because they get put through all doors regardless of age and income.

Don’t forget women’s magazines which are often on the look out for strong human interest stories, but remember they work to longer deadlines months in advance of their publication. Take the trouble to read some and find out which ones fit your target audience.

It is important that you ensure staff have thought about who you need to target your messages at and how you can reach them. Again the trade press is very important as not only will other opinion formers in your sphere read about what you are doing but journalists themselves use these as a primary information source. The media can help you represent your communities interests.

Action: Media Guardian on a Monday publishes circulation figures for the nationals regularly. Look up how many people read the nationals and how well the tabloids do in comparison with the broadsheets. Which is the best performing broadsheet, which is the worst performing tabloid?

- Starting in time

You can’t suddenly expect people to change their opinion. Wise up to how long it takes to conduct a good media campaign, what resources need to be devoted to it, and have realistic expectations of what can be achieved.

Let others internally and externally know what you are doing when. Good “proactive” publicity takes a lot of production effort. Reliable press lists need to be drawn up, key messages need to be devised, case studies need to be researched and permissions granted. Sometimes MPs or

ministers might be invited to speak at your launch but their diaries get very full so you need to begin by finding out when they or your patrons or celebrities are free.

Plan months in advance not weeks and get letters out quickly to those you need to help you campaign. Have you remembered to find out what events your launch may “clash” with? Think about how topical your launch is likely to be at that particular time. Imagine yourself in the shoes of the local or national journalist, ask yourself if you would cover the event.

Page 7. The importance of creativity

- Don't be boring

As leaders your quotes are the most important information in the press release. What you say will be picked up on and reflected in the headline. There is no point in going over the top and being sensational but there is a responsibility on you to inform and educate others.

You need to draw attention to the views of your organisation. Cut out all the organisational jargon that you use and speak in plain clear English. This is important, jargon does not impress people.

It is good to explain in your quote what you are going to do and what you want to happen next. For instance you might be writing to the government, holding a public meeting, or inviting others to come in and see what you do with an open day.

Actions are important they help to explain your story in a concrete way and they lead to follow-ups, for instance "what did the minister say to you?", "how many people attended the public meeting?", "who attended your open day?".

Action: Write a quote for yourself and ask yourself "what kind of headline would it make?". Try writing it again but making it more topical. The headline should reflect the words in your quote

- Why bother?

You might well ask yourself: "why should I bother with PR at all". "Surely what we do speaks for itself and there is no need for spin." This view is dated. If you don't talk about what you have done and achieved and get credit for it others will.

It is also important for volunteers and staff to see that the work they do is praised and well regarded by others. It may even in some cases be controversial but there is a broad range of media to place your stories in and your press list should reflect those who are friendly to your cause.

Good PR will help your voluntary group or charity to become sustainable in the long term. It will ensure that you can enlist new volunteers, get clients, and attract new funding partnerships. Hiding your head in the sand will lead to decline.

It is true that what you do has to be done professionally and properly but there are plenty of organisations locally and nationally that can help you. Ask others for advice on where to go.

Action: Log into the Web and go to another charity or voluntary groups site. Look at how they write press releases and portray case study material generally. Can you learn from what they are doing?

- Messages take time to spread

In the world of an increasingly fast moving media where all the messages that used to be sent in a year by email a decade ago are now sent in one day you need to ensure that your messages stand out. Young people particularly can be targeted by using text messages, email and the internet.

What you say is getting more and more condensed or put into a shorter and shorter sound bite.

Page 8. Enlisting the support of others.

- The trade press

You will be surprised at how much material there is around already that can help you. The trade press is an excellent source of information for your sector. National government, local government, charities, the third sector are all represented in the trade press.

Find out which two journals are most suited to your area of work and subscribe to them. Take time to read them each week or month. This is an important role for a leader to perform. To communicate externally you do need to be aware of what is going on. The trade press will give you a taste of that. It is up to you to follow up the stories and find out more information yourself.

Trade press journalists build up an area of expertise and will need the information you have. Take time to develop relationships with them and to get to know who you can trust. This relationship is to your mutual advantage.

Action: Name one journal that you should be reading? Ask others what they read and pick out the name of a journalist whose work you like. Don't forget you can reply to what others say and write a letter to the editor if you agree or disagree.

- National journalists

There are specialist journalists on all the nationals both tabloid and broadsheet with specialist areas of expertise such as local government, health, education, business, politics, public policy and sometimes charities.

There are a number of PR tools that you can subscribe to that will help you identify who they are. You can get phone numbers, fax numbers and email addresses from these. Alternatively if you know you want to talk to a certain journalist on a certain paper you can phone up and ask for the contact number and email address yourself. You may have to start in this way.

Don't waste journalists time they don't have much of it to give. However many now publish their email addresses at the end of articles they write. You can tell them if you agree or disagree with what they have written. But be creative think of what they should be writing about and suggest to them what the next or follow up article should be.

Action: Identify a national journalist who works in your field of expertise. Read their articles regularly and email to tell them if you agree or disagree and why. Build up your confidence with the media generally. Be prepared for what you say to be quoted.

- Local journalists

Local journalists are more likely to be accessible to you but may be busy so ask if this is a convenient time to ring and when to ring back. They have very little time to get out of the office and come and visit you. Why not go and see them, tell them why your group, your issues, or your campaign is important. Don't forget to include your local press agency in these relations, they are important so find out who covers your area.

Ask for advice of how you can get more publicity. What's wrong with the press releases you are writing? You can talk to the subject specialists where they exist, or contact the editor or news editor. Again local papers often print email addresses and ask for "come ons" – they may want to hear what you have to say.

You might think about asking one of your local TV presenters or radio presenters or newspaper reporters to come and open your events. Personal relationships count and this is a good way to meet journalists face to face. They will probably have plenty of advice they can give you and they may be willing to become a patron.

Action: Plan an event that you can invite a local journalist to speak at or launch. Why not instigate your own local question time on your issue with three or four known personalities including journalists.

- Government departments and local authorities

As leaders you know full well that you do not operate in a vacuum. You rely on the help and support of others. Although you may have set up your organisation or run an organisation because there is no proper state provision you will probably look to government or local government for funding at various times.

Take time to know what's going on in government, in local authorities and who is responsible for what. You can often list the support of others who think similarly to help you.

Equally local county and district councillors can come to your rescue. They will be aware of why your services are needed and if they are not you should take time to tell them. Council websites tell you who they are and who chairs the relevant local committees. Before you make your phone call or request a meeting find out what they have said in the past about your issues. You may want to suggest that they are also quoted in your press material so get their email address.

Action: Research who is likely to want to join with you in launching your new campaign. Who is going to support what you say and who will oppose it? What evidence do you have to support your views?

- Considering other partners

National government, local authorities, charities and the voluntary sector, now actively encourage policies that empower local communities. There may well be a number of helper organisations that have been set up at grass root level to bring together groups like yours. You need to ensure you know who the members of your local strategic partnerships are.

These might be organised on a regional basis but it is well worth going to see them or attending one of their meetings. In time you may want to become a member yourself and help to contribute to the work of others.

Going to meetings and meeting with others is an important source of external communications. As leaders you need to get out and be a figurehead for your organisation. Asking a direct question at a relevant meeting can be very influential as is being asked to become one of the guest speakers yourself.

Action: Find out how you contact the partnerships that matter to you and who convenes the meetings.

Page 9. How agencies can help

- Where to go for help?

Both nationally and locally there are PR, marketing and brand agencies that can help you devise your messages.

National agencies often have specialists who work with voluntary organisations and charities. Some even do work pro-bono. You might want to ask others who they have used, what their experiences are, what they cost and who they would recommend? But spending too much money might lead to criticisms of you.

The normal procedure is to write a brief for the work you want done and to ask others to “pitch” for it. Before you do this you might ask them in to brainstorm some ideas with you. It’s a good idea to ask them to bring examples of their work. Go to their website to research their full client list and to see what testimonials others have given them.

It is certainly true that local PR agencies will know the local media well. They may be able to devise a “meet the editors” campaign for you and take you to meet editors themselves rather than relying on your letter or cold call. Equally a local marketing company may have a very young and creative team who can help develop your ideas further.

Action: Look at the website and marketing material of other local organisations. Which design appeals to you, who do you think is communicating effectively? Find out who they have used and invite them in to meet you.

- How much should I pay?

Let the agency know how much you have got to spend. They will sometimes revise their thinking and will try to work within your budgets however meagre. Initially it might be beneficial for them to team up with you even if you don’t have thousands of pounds.

In the long term you will need to devise a more sustainable strategy towards agency help and to finance it properly. PR agencies will quote you a price on an hourly or daily basis but plenty of journalists also work freelance for less.

The advantage of using an established local PR agency is that you get access to their known contacts and mailing lists. If you want to distribute news regionally this may be the best way to proceed. Equally just getting a few helpful hints can help.

You can work with them in a number of different ways. They can help you write and distribute the release or you may just want them to distribute it for you.

Action: Your local business or charity networks should be able to help you find a good reliable local PR agency. Find out who their clients are and how they have helped others.

- What support is best?

In the short term you may have to do the PR yourself or delegate it to someone else. At some stage you will have to decide if you want the PR function to be internal or external to your organisation. There are advantages and disadvantages of both approaches.

You can get more experienced professionals working for PR agencies. The salary you can offer to employ a marketing and PR professional often means that you will employ someone younger who

does not have a great deal of experience.

Some organisations get round this by doing both. They will have somebody in-house who deals with PR but they will also use an agency to help guide them, particularly during times of crisis management.

These agencies can mentor and support your staff through difficult times and add value to the work they are doing by passing on their skills and knowledge to them. If you do decide to employ an external agency remember that you will still need to have someone internally that they deal with.

Action: Find out what approach suits your organisation best. Is there somebody you can ask onto your Board who has PR experience they can share with you? Are there any retired journalists or PR executives locally who could advise you?

- Mentoring your team

Not everybody likes dealing with the media. Taking calls from journalists involves a lot of responsibility and it often requires individuals to think quickly on their feet. They may feel they have said the wrong thing and not know what to do about it.

Encourage an open and honest approach towards media calls. If someone thinks they have blundered encourage them to tell you. It is best to know before the situation gets out of hand.

Agencies often handle media calls for you and your staff, that's why they are there. They will have a better idea of what to say when and how to devise some good robust lines to take on your behalf. They can be a very good go-between in both the crisis "reactive" situation and with your "proactive" launch event.

They work by developing relationships with your staff and getting to know them. Respect the advice they give you and learn from them.

Action: Who can you turn to for help with the media? Are other professionals willing to share their experiences with you? Your media trainer can often help you both in and out of the training situation.

- Who does what?

When an agency comes to visit you find out how many people they employ, who their clients are, and who will be dealing with your account. It is important that you feel comfortable with those who are handling the media for you as they will need to develop a close working relationship with you.

Who is handling your media calls out of hours? Have your staff put a message on the answer machine to say how you or others can be contacted? A quick response to a "reactive" situation can often lessen the potential damage. Agencies often handle out of hours calls for you to lighten your load but they charge extra for this.

Also find out who is covering for who during the holiday period. This can be a difficult time for an organisation but ensuring there is a media rota with out of hours phone numbers will make your organisation appear professional.

Action: Find out who can cover for media calls when and produce a list of out of hours phone numbers for these staff. Be prepared to get an agency to help you if you are expecting a lot of calls.

Page 10. When should I begin?

- Why not now?

You could start writing your press release now or contacting journalists but have you stopped to think who your target audience are and what key messages you need to convey.

Find out what others think of what you are going to say and how people are likely to react to it. Many leaders nationally have lived to regret their slips of the tongue. Of course your approach can evolve and become more strategic as time goes but even when you first set out you do need to de-construct what you have written and said to make sure it does not backfire on you.

You should certainly start planning your PR campaign now and for the months ahead but think through how the story will develop and what your next move will be. Journalists love to ask leading questions “are you going to?”, “when will you?” – think through the journalistic footsteps and make sure you can keep up with them. They often think into the future for you, so ensure you have done that too and you won’t be caught out.

At any one time you should be able to call on two well trained spokespeople who can promote your work.

Action: Think where your organisation will be in one years time, what will you have achieved and what will you want to happen next? Write down the messages that you want to convey now to get you to that point.

- Recruiting your PR team

In the short term the PR team maybe you and one other. As your organisation grows you will want to take on specific people for specific roles. When recruiting ask to see the work of those you interview not just the press releases they have written but also the coverage that they have achieved. Ask them to name some journalists they know and ask them where they would place your stories?

At a junior level it is good to set a test to get your interviewees to write a press release. Have they been on a Plain English course, are they writing in Plain English? If you are interviewing journalists for this role make sure they realise that they are not always in a position to call the shoots anymore. How will they react to someone being rude and demanding to them? How will they encourage others in the organisation to give them information?

It is important to recruit someone who has a good telephone manner. Social skills are very important in this role and you need to recruit someone who is outgoing and sociable not shy and retiring. If you are promoting someone from within ask if they want to go on a Plain English course or if they need more training?

Action: Think about the personality of the person you want to appoint and the skills they will need to do the job effectively. Write these competencies down in a list.

- Using your contacts

As leaders you will already be in touch with networks of people both at a local and national level. These people might be able to invite you onto a public platform to speak to convey your external messages or they might pass on the name of an agency, individual or journalist who is a specialist in your field of work.

These are important introductions so as soon as a contact name has been given write it down on the back of a business card. Take care to build up a data base of such contacts as they can be extremely helpful.

If you have a problem with the media share it with your contacts and ask for their advice. It is reassuring to know that others have also encountered similar situations and they will be able to give you good advice on how to proceed. The media is remarkably predictable and you don't have to deal with it alone.

Action: Think of one of your network of contacts who has been through a rough ride with the media. Ask if you can meet them to pass on some tips to you in how to handle your media calls

- Devising your messages

This is the most important part of your media strategy. You may have already commissioned research so you know what you want to say, but you may also be starting from scratch.

It is difficult to get across jargon or technical or funding issues unless you simplify those messages. Take your messages down a few generations and see how others react to them in this simplified version. Are they still accurate, how will others interpret them and will your target audience understand them?

In any one interview situation you can realistically only get across two or three of your messages. Prepare five or six bullet points but if in the paper or the broadcast you have managed to convey two of these you will have done well.

Being realistic is important if you want to get accurate messages out over a period of time. Once you have done this, you can build on what you have said to impart more information and understanding in the months to come.

Action: Write down six bullet point messages that you want to convey. Practice talking out loud and saying these to others.

- Are you all on message?

So you know the messages but do others? Put your key messages on your internal intranet, publish them in your newsletter or staff magazine, post them on the noticeboard and keep them updated regularly.

Questions and answers are a remarkably good and effective PR tool both internally and externally. Devise your own Q and As as if you were both the journalist and interviewee. Get agreement to them and distribute to others.

Journalists are increasingly using Q and As as if they had carried out the interview themselves. They may take what is written and put it in quotes as if it came from the leaders directly. Q and As can also help to motivate volunteers and staff internally and act as policy guidelines.

Action: Write down ten questions that a journalist may ask you and then ten questions your own staff and volunteers may ask you. Answer the questions and use them to tell others what you think and what they should say.

- Remember

What your communication objectives are both short term and long term?
Who your audience is?

What your messages are?
What communication tools you are going to use to achieve this?
What resources you have at your disposal short term and long term?
How to evaluate the effectiveness of what you are doing?
How to adapt to changing circumstances?

Action: See if your PR plan answers the above questions – it may only be two sides of A4 but it will help.

. Useful Web addresses and leaders 55 point action list

www.mediauk.com - directory of television stations, radio and newspapers throughout the UK

www.ofcom.org.uk - directory of all television stations throughout the UK

www.radio-now.co.uk - link to all websites of radio stations in the UK

www.bbc.co.uk - takes you to all BBC local radio stations in the UK

www.societyofeditors.co.uk comprehensive list of most newspapers in the UK

www.mediatrust.co.uk - free online guides will advice you how to handle the media and the Trust provides training for you and your staff at a reasonable rate

www.epolitix.com - lists all MPs and Lords with news updates. You can subscribe to micro sites on it

www.parliament.uk - Parliaments own website that lists all MPs, Lords, Westminster committees, all party parliamentary groups, government publications and Bills before Parliament. It also takes you to individual websites of MPs and Lords.

www.ecsskillnet.co.uk - on line media training, print, radio TV and how to link with MPs.

- Subscription services

www.pims.co.uk - PR organiser on subscription rate basis

www.DodonLine.co.uk - subscription service for list of MPs and others

Don't forget to look at the individual websites of other organisations. Search engines should help you find them.

County and district councils, health authorities, helper agencies and government departments also exist online. You can find out what services they offer and who's who from an online trawl.

Celebrities have their own websites too with agent contact details.

Senior leaders action list:

1. Action: Make sure you set aside time in your diary to talk to those external to your organisation. Remember what they say about you. Think about setting up an external focus group to advise you.
2. Action: Make sure that you go and see at least one news editor locally or a journalist who covers your specialist interest.
3. Action: Write out your six key messages and involve others.
4. Action: Find out what other events are planned for the time of your launch. Will it clash with anything else?
5. Action: Plan your lead-in times for your campaign and list who else you need to involve.
6. Action: Make those who work for you feel good – tell others about what you are doing.
7. Action: Think what information you can give to the general public that will genuinely help to enable your service users. Do not take for granted that they will know it already.
8. Action: Be inclusive think through what need others have and devise a strategy as to how you are going to communicate with them in a way they will understand.
9. Action: Read your local papers, paid for and free sheets. Listen to local radio, watch local TV, get a feel for the media around you and what type of information it puts across to its audience when.
10. Action: Get to know your local regional support networks, find out what events others are likely to be going to and try to meet them.
11. Action: Local partnerships are vital to your work, send an email, write a newsletter to tell others what you are doing.
12. Action: Ensure that internally and externally you acknowledge the work of your supporters. Good media headlines will impress them. Find out how you can work with them to achieve this. What are their expectations of you?
13. Action: Give your PR department a target. Tell them you expect to see so many print articles a month, or that you expect to do so many radio interviews too. Impress on them the importance of attempting local TV coverage such as the “and finally” on regional TV news bulletins.
14. Action: Ensure you plan regular meetings with your PR staff and talk to them on a weekly basis. Pencil in a monthly communication seminar with your staff.
15. Action: Use your local strategic partnerships to get some good advice on PR. Find out what you should say to who and which local journalists are good to deal with.
16. Action: Start making a diary of your week, list what you do, and plan how you are going to tell others of the real achievements and difficulties that are being encountered. Display relevant information on notice boards

17. Action: Circulate an A4 sheet to all staff and volunteers in all offices telling them press calls should be referred to you or the PR team and give some helpful hints of how they should deal with journalists. Ask them for their ideas for good stories and keep a list of these for all to see.

18. Action: Devise a strategy for the retrieval of information in your organisation. Make someone responsible for giving it to you on a regular basis.

19. Action: Consider how you come across to others. How do others perceive you? How do you dress, what do you look like, do you have real authority? Remember doing too much can make it appear that you are not in control.

20. Action: Find out what media courses your local strategic partnerships are signing up to. Compare the cost of one with the other. Go on personal recommendation from others.

21. Action: Set aside resources to ensure that you receive professional media training in the year ahead. Accept the advice you are given.

22. Action: Offer yourself up to local radio programme for a mid-morning or mid-afternoon interviews. You can do it, take that first stride into the radio studio but ensure you know what you want to say and on what terms the interview is being conducted. Ask questions – it's your right.

23. Action: Think through your communication policies. At what stage will you need to write a communication strategy and why?

24. Action: Talk to those who deal with communication find out what their frustrations and difficulties are before moving forward. Do their skills need to be improved? Are their mailing lists kept up to date, who monitors press coverage?

25. Action: Talk to your staff. Find out what difficulties they have convincing others that your stories are newsworthy. Be creative and build up your story bank of real life case studies. Write your PR plan.

26. Action: Get someone to research some of those human interest stories your volunteers and staff are talking about. Should you publicise them, will those affected give their permission, and how can you protect them from unwanted intrusion? Make this part of your PR plan.

27. Action: List how often you have spoken to the media this year. Set yourself a realistic target for interviews and invite some journalists in to meet you.

28. Action: Make a list of all the positive benefits of good PR and how it can help your organisation to grow. Find out what others think and involve your board members and use their experiences.

29. Action: Write a "proactive" press release – get to know how you go about this and what comments will stand out and make good headlines. Make sure it contains: "Why? What? Who? Where? When? and How?". It should have a direct quote from you, be one side of A4, and have a contact number. Once you written it you will be able to judge more effectively how well others are performing this role.

30. Action: Talk to your press team about their "reactive" PR strategy. Keep your mobile phone on, tell them you are willing to come out of meetings to talk to journalists. Ensure that you know in draft form the "lines" you are all going to take on this.

31. Action: Listen to some local radio and TV programmes. Which do you think are the best, what type of audience do they appeal to? Be aware of what the media is saying around you.

32. Action: Media Guardian on a Monday publishes circulation figures for the nationals regularly. Look up how many people read the nationals and how well the tabloids do in comparison with the broadsheets. Which is the best performing broadsheet, which is the worst performing tabloid?
33. Action: To create a good story you need a number of different ingredients. The most important of which is not always fame or celebrity but strong emotional human interest and topicality. A government minister won't ensure the success of your story but a story that we can all identify with told by someone affected by it will – find one!
34. Action: Write a quote for yourself and ask yourself “what kind of headline would it make?”. Try writing it again but making it more topical. The headline should reflect the words in your quote.
35. Action: Log into the Web and go to another like minded relevant site. Look at how they write press releases and portray case study material generally. Can you learn from what they are doing?
36. Action: Listen to your local radio breakfast show and find out how long each guest is interviewed for. Listen to the 9 am bulletin, time how long each “clip” from each interviewee is. Impress on yourself the importance of being able to articulate an argument to these restraints. It is no good complaining after the interview is over, you need to get to know how it works before you begin.
37. Action: Think of how research can help you. What is it you need to be able to tell others about what you are doing? How much demand goes unmet? Find out what research has been done in your field and build on this.
38. Action: Shut your eyes and think of how your organisation can communicate visually. What is it that stands out in your visual imagination? Be creative work at creating good pictures that will make your messages stand out.
39. Action: Find out the name of a celebrity that lives near your HQ and go to their website to find out how you contact them.
40. Action: Name one journal that you should be reading? Ask others what they read and pick out the name of a journalist whose work you like. Don't forget you can reply to what others say and write a letter to the editor if you agree or disagree.
41. Action: Identify a national journalist who works in your field of expertise. Read their articles regularly and email to tell them if you agree or disagree and why. Build up your confidence with the media generally. Be prepared for what you say to be quoted.
42. Action: Plan an event that you can invite a local journalist to speak at or launch. Why not instigate your own local question time on your issue with three or four known personalities including journalists.
43. Action: Research who is likely to want to join with you in launching your new campaign. Who is going to support what you say and who will oppose it? What evidence do you have to support your views?
44. Action: Find out how you contact the partnerships that matter to you and who convenes the meetings.
45. Action: Look at the website and marketing material of other local organisations. Which design appeals to you, who do you think is communicating effectively? Find out who they have used and invite them in to meet you.

46. Action: Your local business or charity networks should be able to help you find a good reliable local PR agency. Find out who their clients are and how they have helped others.
47. Action: Find out what approach suits your organisation best. Is there somebody you can ask onto your Board who has PR experience they can share with you? Are there any retired journalists or PR executives locally who could advise you?
48. Action: Who can you turn to for help with the media? Are other professionals willing to share their experiences with you? Your media trainer can often help you both in and out of the training situation.
49. Action: Find out who can cover for media calls when and produce a list of out of hours phone numbers for these staff. Be prepared to get an agency to help you if you are expecting a lot of calls.
50. Action: Think where your organisation will be in one year's time, what will you have achieved and what will you want to happen next? Write down the messages that you want to convey now to get you to that point.
51. Action: Think about the personality of the person you want to appoint and the skills they will need to do the job effectively. Write these competencies down in a list.
52. Action: Think of one of your network of contacts who has been through a rough ride with the media. Ask if you can meet them to pass on some tips to you in how to handle your media calls.
53. Action: Write down the six bullet point messages that you want to convey. Practice talking out loud and saying these to others.
54. Action: Write down ten questions that a journalist may ask you and then ten questions your own staff and volunteers may ask you. Answer the questions and use them to tell others what you think and what they should say.
55. Action: See if your PR plan answers the basic of what you are doing, why and when – it may only be two sides of A4 but it will help.

End.