

## **Every Lion Contributes to Our Public Relations Image**

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When you hear the words “public relations,” what comes to your mind? Are you familiar with this field of communications or do these words seem somewhat alien to you? Who is responsible for public relations for your club? Whether you are your club’s public relations chairperson or its newest member, and whether you know it or not, you are just as integral to the association’s image as any other Lion.

Public relations (PR) is the art of promoting a favourable relationship with the public. For Lions, this means putting forth and maintaining a positive image and sustaining a relationship with local residents and all others who come in contact with your club’s members.

All Lions have to do their part. Although each club should have a PR chairperson to take the lead in PR efforts, being successful in PR is dependent on all members of a club. As a Lion, you are constantly representing your club and the association as a whole.

“It is up to each of you as Lions to get the word out about what you and your clubs are doing to better your communities,” points out Public Relations and Production Division manager Dane La Joye at International Headquarters.

The benefits that come from raising awareness about who Lions are and what Lions do are endless. PR improves club morale and provides recognition for members, which reinforces a positive attitude and generates enthusiasm to continue serving the community. PR also garners support from your community, making serving those in the area easier and more of a joy to do. PR even supports membership. Although it will not directly generate more members, a positive image will attract more interest from prospective members and will make people more eager to accept invitations to become members.

### **Steps to Positive Publicity**

The first step in becoming PR savvy is to identify your audiences. Your first group is internal, which includes your fellow club members, district officers, International Headquarters staff, family and friends. Often internal audiences are overlooked, which is a mistake as these people are often the most important support you will have as a Lion. What most people think of when they think of PR is the external audience. The external audience consists of everyone else, such as sponsors, community leaders, prospective members, the community-at-large and, of course, the media.

Next, form your key messages. Think about how your club makes a difference in the community and about what non-Lions would find interesting about what you do. For examples of key messages, view the association’s web site ([www.lionsclubs.org](http://www.lionsclubs.org)) under News & Events and PR Tools. These messages include “Lions make a difference by serving youth, sight and community needs around the world” and “Lions Clubs International is the world’s largest service club organization – made up of 1.3 million men and women in 200 countries and geographical

locations.” Key messages should be developed and understood by all members of a club so that the ideas communicated by members are cohesive.

Once you have agreed upon your club's key messages, set some PR goals. These can include constructing a club newsletter or web site and launching the Peace Poster Contest or Strides for Diabetes Walk and promoting it in the media and community.

Use your goals to develop a PR plan consisting of what you would like to accomplish during the year. In order to stay on track and remain organized, create a PR calendar by filling in a yearly calendar with events, promotional and follow-up deadlines, and all other important dates.

### Use PR Tools

Use the multiple PR tools available to you to assist in communicating with your community and the media. Following are examples of these tools.

To provide information to your community and for exposure:

- Wear **Lions apparel**, such as vests and T-shirts, and display **Lions signage** during events and projects.
- Hand out **flyers** announcing events to schools and community groups and post **signs** throughout the area to publicize upcoming activities.
- Send out **letters of appreciation** to sponsors.
- Contact community **web sites**, such as chamber of commerce sites, and request your club contact information be included. Create club and district sites.

When working with the media:

- Send **news releases** to newspaper editors, local TV station general managers and radio program directors. Sample releases are available at [www.lionsclubs.org](http://www.lionsclubs.org).
- Provide **dates and basic event information** to calendar editors.
- Send **photos** with descriptions to newspaper reporters.
- Send **letters to the editor** (thanking a community for its support or as a call to action, such as an eyeglasses collection) to newspaper editors.
- Contact TV and radio stations to request airtime for **public service announcements (PSAs)**. PSAs are available on the Lions News Network (LNN) at [www.lionsclubs.org](http://www.lionsclubs.org) or by request from the Public Relations Department.

Examples and samples of the tools listed above can be found on the PR Tools page under NEWS & Events on the Lions Clubs International web site. The site also contains a Learning Centre with an interactive and informative PR Course.

All forms of communications should also include who, what when where and why. In this case, “why” refers to and end result; for instance, "Funds raised are for scholarships given to local high school students."

Materials sent to the media should be newsworthy. Items should be timely, relevant, original and have an impact on the community.

**Follow-Up**

After your PR program is under way, study the media by reading local publications and paying attention to radio and TV stories about your club or other groups and activities similar to yours. Take notes and keep a list of the media outlets and reporters that run these stories to contact in the future. Evaluate your results, keeping in mind what works and what doesn't work.

Don't forget that internal communication is an imperative component to a successful club. Publish event details and recognize accomplishments in club and district newsletters and web sites. Also, the PR Department at International Headquarters is always interested in Lions activities and PR successes. Send information, photos and clips to [pr@lionsclubs.org](mailto:pr@lionsclubs.org) or to Public Relations, Lions Clubs International, 300 W. 22<sup>nd</sup> St., Oak Brook, IL 60523.