Public Relations Handbook

For NARFE Chapters and Federations
On the outside, the practice of public relations is often seen as simply being visible in the public eye. While visibility is an important element to any successful public relations campaign, it’s just one piece of a broader strategy.

The purpose of a public relations program is to use strategic, effective communication tools and techniques to gain awareness of a particular cause or issue and ultimately obtain media coverage. As your chapter’s public relations contact, you have the opportunity to further expand the reach of NARFE to other organizations, people and the media in your community.

This guide is to equip chapter/federation members with tools and resources they’ll need to conduct effective public relations. The following pages will also provide you with insight and advice on interacting with the media.

OBJECTIVES AND TACTICS
Let’s start by laying out some general objectives of what a public relations program should aim to accomplish. NARFE public relations objectives include:

- Gain public understanding/support
- Build public appreciation for active and retired Feds
- Inform local and state officials about policies and positions of importance to NARFE
- Establish relationships with media (i.e. newspapers, talk radio, community publications)

While these overall goals help frame PR programs and campaigns, specific PR tasks and tactics are steps to implement that will help accomplish the above objectives. Examples of specific PR tasks include:

- Establish a connection with local media. A simple email to a reporter letting him/her know who you are and that you’re available as a resource on the federal community is a good place to start.
- Monitor media (read the newspaper, listen to talk radio programs) coverage to discover what is being written or talked about. By doing so, you’ll get a better sense as to current issues and upcoming programming and how you and NARFE can provide information and be a resource.
- Invite elected officials and candidates for public office to speak at chapter meetings.
- Submit an Op/Ed to your local newspaper concerning a current NARFE-related issue (i.e. negative perception of public servants, state tax issue).
- Create opportunities for chapter officer(s) to address other local civic, business, religious and community organizations.
AUDIENCES
Interestingly, the “public” in public relations covers more than just the general public. NARFE members are an important constituency considered an internal audience. Since they live and work in their local communities, members are familiar with local issues. In this way, they are the voice of NARFE to local external audiences. Getting PR messages before members can be accomplished through emails, newsletter articles or chapter meetings that inform them of important developments, legislative positions and/or initiatives.

NARFE’s external public relations program is meant for the general public and seeks to increase awareness and generate favorable recognition of federal workers and retirees. Getting messages out to the general public is most often achieved through media relations or the process of interacting with the media. Reporters, editors, and journalists serve as “gatekeepers,” connecting NARFE’s message to their audience of readers. In other words, they provide NARFE with widespread access to the general public.

Getting media coverage is challenging today. Press can file reports any time of the day, news outlets have reduced staff size and social media can be flooded with inaccurate or misleading news. Successfully gaining media interest and coverage comes from strategic, planned outreach efforts centered around newsworthy, substantive information.

Whether the audience is members or media, consider what your audience needs to know before engaging them.
Public Relations

WHAT TO SHARE?
To ensure that your message is of interest to media, ask yourself the following question before reaching out to a local journalist:

- Is this just important to me or would a bigger audience also be interested?

Bombarded with news from other local organizations or individuals, journalists sift through information and select to cover topics, issues and events that appeal to them.

News/Issues:
If you’re emailing a reporter suggesting he/she should cover a specific topic (ex: legislation that would harm the federal community), include data (facts and figures), explain why the issue is important and provide a local impact (for example the number of local feds that would be affected).

Chapter event:
Realistically, a chapter meeting alone is not newsworthy, but an appearance or speech by a celebrity or public official at a chapter meeting is noteworthy and may likely draw media interest. If you’re goal is to promote a chapter event/fundraiser, provide the media with key details including:

- Name of the event
- Date of the event
- Location of the event
- Purpose of the event
- Relevance of the event, explaining why it is important to the local community.
Communicating with the Media

HOW TO SHARE YOUR NEWS WITH THE MEDIA

Press releases
A tried-and-true tool for communicating important information with the media, press releases are brief statements designed to position your chapter on an issue. A press release should contain substance and details and demonstrate relevance/impact to the local community. Not only is it important that a press release contains substantive information, it’s also important how the press release is structured and when reporters receive it.

Headline
Should be short and to the point. When possible, be creative in writing a catchy headline, something that grabs the reporter’s attention and conveys the main point.

The lead
The most important part of the press release is the first paragraph, also called the “lead.” This is where you want to hook the reporter’s interest. If a journalist is not compelled by your release after the first paragraph or two, he/she is unlikely to use the information. The following basic news elements should be addressed in the “lead” of a press release:

> who  > what  > when
> where > why > how (if applicable)

Quote
The press release should also contain a quote from your chapter, preferably the Chapter President.

Media contact
Change the Media Contact to be a specific person in your chapter that will be the liaison, someone who is articulate, informed on issues and is comfortable and experienced with interacting with media.
Communicating with the Media

Length
Preferred length for a press release is one to two pages (maximum).

Logistics
It’s often most effective to reach out to press in the early morning. This is a critical time when reporters are planning story ideas for the day. Many have traditional filing deadlines of 5 p.m., however in today’s 24-hour news cycle, journalists can also file their reports at any time. Emailing press releases is preferred.
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 2, 2019

FEHB Premium Increase for 2020 Disappointing for America’s Active and Retired Federal Employees

Alexandria, Va. – In response to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) announcing today that the average Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program premiums for America’s active and retired federal workers will increase by an average 4.0 percent in 2020 – with the share paid by federal civil servants increasing by an average of 5.6 percent – NARFE National President Patricia Thomas issued the following statement:

“With the cost of health care services rising and federal employees on track to receive only a modest pay raise in 2020, a premium increase of 4.0 percent comes as unwelcome news. In doubt why, the 5.6 percent average increase for enrollees will inevitably affect the take-home pay of active federal employees and the families they support. It’s even worse for retirees whose purchasing power and quality of life are already diminished from increases in the general cost of living.

While the modest increase for next year is disappointing, it’s important to remember that last year’s average FEHB premium increase was historically low. Additionally, FEHB enrollees have tremendous flexibility given the variety and number of health plans offered which connects them with renowned medical professionals, services and programs resulting in exceptional quality of care. NARFE encourages all participants to thoroughly review the plans to select the one that best fits their needs.

“Each year, employees of OPM’s Health Care and Insurance Division work hard to negotiate affordable benefits and rates, and I thank them for their dedication and service to the federal community.”

Background:
- Open Season, the annual period during which eligible federal employees, retirees and survivors can make changes to their health benefits coverage for the following year takes place November 11-December 9, 2019.
- Overall, the federal government’s contribution in 2020 will increase by an average of 3.4 percent and the enrollee share will increase an average of 5.6 percent.
- Annual average premium increases for previous years were 1.3 percent in 2019, 4.0 percent in 2018, 4.4 percent in 2017 and 6.4 percent in 2016.

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As the only organization solely dedicated to the general welfare of all federal workers and retirees, NARFE delivers valuable guidance, timely resources and powerful advocacy. For nearly a century, NARFE has been a trusted source of knowledge for the federal community, Capitol Hill, the executive branch and the media.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
September 11, 2019

NARFE Statement on the Confirmation of Dale Cabaniss as OPM Director

In response to the Senate’s confirmation of Dale Cabaniss as director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), NARFE National President Ken Thomas issued the following statement:

“Just as NARFE has long served as a resource to previous OPM directors, we look forward to developing the same productive relationship with Director Cabaniss to ensure that OPM effectively carries out its mission and fulfills its key responsibilities. Yet, considering the Administration’s organizational proposal calls for the elimination of the very agency Ms. Cabaniss has been committed to lead, we hope that OPM is around long enough for that relationship to grow.

We also hope Director Cabaniss honed in her commitment to ‘protect the civil service, merit principles and retirees’ as she noted in testimony before the Senate Appropriations and Governmental Affairs Committee last spring. Given our shared goals in supporting, promoting and serving the dedicated men and women who serve the American people, we are eager to establish a positive working relationship with Director Cabaniss and continue to provide assistance to the entire agency for the benefit of the federal community.”

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Sample Letter to the Editor

Writing a letter to the editor (LTE) of a news organization expressing your opinion, typically in response to an article or news story, is another way to put NARFE’s messages out for the wider public to see. LTEs are shorter in length than Op-Eds, and therefore require the writer to provide content in a short, concise delivery. LTEs ideally consist of 100-200 words. Check with the news outlet for specific submission instructions. A sample LTE is provided below.

Disregard for the Country’s System of Government and Disdain for Public Servants Make for Bad Policy, Poor Leadership in Trump Administration

Reading and listening to recent remarks by Office of Management and Budget director Mick Mulvaney reminded me of the 2011 movie Horrible Bosses. Sadly, the all-too frequent negative attacks and disdain directed at the federal workforce from the Trump administration are daily real-life scenarios playing out in the lives of millions of people, far worse than anything on the big screen.

Having served the American people for 35 years as a federal employee, I can tell you that relocating agencies and workers is not something the federal government takes lightly. Nor has relocation proved to be an across-the-board effective best-practice that benefits taxpayers. Relocating federal agencies is expensive and complicated, but perhaps Mr. Mulvaney – with his six-figure salary – never had to face the economic, emotional and environmental challenges of uprooting one’s career and family.

Agency relocations do not happen overnight, and often they involve the input and, sometimes authority, from other branches of government. According to a report from the USDA’s Office of Inspector General, the USDA relocation referenced by Mr. Mulvaney may have violated a 2018 appropriation act that requires Congress’s approval to fund the move – something the Trump administration did not obtain.

This should come as a surprise to no one. Congress’s role and a blatant disregard for facts have been hallmarks of the Trump administration. Its proposed merger of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) with the General Services Administration (GSA) has skirted Congressional oversight and shows an incredible lack of due diligence. Additionally, documented instances of the administration denying facts and undermining science and research efforts in decision-making have drawn criticism from industry, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and policymakers on both sides of the aisle.

Having managed and led hundreds of employees in my federal career, I can tell you that Mr. Mulvaney’s comments epitomize a lack of leadership rather than years of experience managing programs and people. Don’t just take my word on this: Check out Google’s Project Oxygen or Monster.com’s piece “What Makes a Great Boss” and you’ll see that negative comments and divisiveness do not make the list of attributes of remarkable leaders.

By stating that relocation efforts such as the USDA’s pending move to Kansas City would combat liberals “making sure government lives forever and that it gets bigger” proves that politics, not sound policy, is driving decisions from the executive branch. Mr. Mulvaney’s own words erode esteem and deplete morale in the federal workforce – the very people upon whom Americans depend to ensure their medication, food and flights (among many other things) are safe; social security checks are processed and civil rights are not violated. Undoubtedly, his damaging remarks will not improve the government’s
efforts to attract and retain a highly qualified, top-performing workforce.

Perhaps Mr. Mulvaney is living in an alternate universe, one in which harsh banter and ineffective policies drive people to succeed. Reality, however, is that most federal employees are hard workers who take pride in serving the American people— even those like Mr. Mulvaney, who devalue their existence and degrade their profession.

Like employees in the private and nonprofit sectors and, well, anywhere, federal employees thrive and perform exceptionally under effective leaders—republican or democrat, liberal or conservative. Instead of spewing negative commentary and being out-of-touch with federal employees, the Trump administration should reflect on its leadership, or lack thereof, to learn why federal employees are unhappy or quitting their jobs. As the old adage goes, “people don’t leave companies; they leave managers.”

[Signature]

Ken Thomas
NARFE National President
Sample Op Ed

Named after its location opposite the editorial page, “Op-Eds” express your opinion on a particular issue. Op-Eds are longer pieces (approximately 800 words). To increase the likelihood of your Op-Ed getting published, it should contain facts, data, statistics, and examples to support the opinion. Most news outlets require “exclusivity” and will not publish your submission if it’s been submitted elsewhere and already published by another news outlet. A sample Op-Ed is provided on the pages that follow.

34 Days and Counting

The partial government shutdown continues into its 34th day. More than 800,000 federal workers will miss their second paycheck today.

Like most Americans, many federal employees live paycheck to paycheck. For these workers and their families, one missed paycheck is a crisis. Two missed paychecks are devastating.

Failure to pay mortgage or rent could lead to foreclosure or eviction. With no money for copays, some are forced to ration needed medical treatment. Even after the shutdown, damaged credit could force some to lose the security clearances necessary to keep their jobs.

Missed paychecks may force late payments on bills, causing late fees, interest charges and costs associated with damaged credit, such as difficulty securing a loan for a home purchase or higher interest rates if approved.

More than 420,000 federal employees – and counting – continue to work without pay, as they perform “emergency work involving the safety of human life or the protection of property” or perform other, limited types of “excepted” work. Now, many of these 80,000 federal workers who have been furloughed are being called back in – now that this work cannot be delayed indefinitely. But missed paychecks for federal workers only represent the tip of the iceberg of this shutdown’s impact.

An untold number of federal contractors may face an even more perilous situation, as many will not receive rear pay once the shutdown ends. Small- or medium-sized firms relying on federal contract business are forced to stop paying employees, send employees home on paid leave or lay them off. Even the largest firms are being forced to repurpose employees and consider layoffs due to the shutdown.

Countless businesses that rely on normal federal operations are losing substantial sums due to the shutdown as well. Here are just a few examples: With the Federal Aviation Administration’s (FAA) training academy for air traffic controllers closed due to the shutdown, Oklahoma City businesses providing temporary housing to its students will receive no rent and no back pay. Businesses that rely on tourists to national parks – from hotels and campgrounds to restaurants, outfitters and bookstores – are losing money due to park closures. Others, like food trucks outside federal office buildings, are losing money without their federal employee and contractor consumers.

Government operations are not the only things being disrupted by the shutdown; the economy and the American public are suffering too. Here are just a few examples: Small businesses cannot get the loans needed to start or expand. Others, like small craft beer businesses, cannot get the license approvals needed to get started. Home sales requiring certain loan approvals are being delayed, with fewer or no staff working to process the approvals. Farmers cannot receive aid intended to blunt the damage from retaliatory Chinese tariffs. While Internal Revenue Service (IRS) workers are being called back from furlough to try to ensure tax
Sample Op Ed continued

refunds go out “as scheduled,” shutdown-caused delays may still delay payments. National parks and monument sites face overflowing trash and/or closures.

All of the missed payments and disruptions of business and service are snow-balling, causing the larger American economy more and more permanent damage each day. Based on federal salary data, two missed paychecks for 800,000 workers will delay nearly $5 billion in payments to federal workers. Standard & Poors analysts already estimated the economic cost of the delayed pay and disrupted services at $3.6 billion, 10 days ago. By the end of this week, the estimate will exceed the $5.7 billion cost of the border wall construction at the center of the dispute.

The costs of this shutdown – or any shutdown – are real and tangible, and only get worse as it prolongs. It is past time for the shutdown to end. At a minimum, it call on the President to support short-term funding to reopen the government and get congressional leaders to engage in good faith negotiations.

This is not about taking sides in the debate over border security. It’s about ensuring hard-working federal employees and millions of other Americans are not collateral damage in a political battle that has nothing to do with them.

While this may be the longest shutdown ever, it’s not the only one. I personally endured 17 shutdowns during my time in federal service, and there have been four since. Not one was justified. In each, whatever their length and whatever the issue at hand. Regardless of the merits of either side’s argument, who is president or which party controls which chamber of Congress, government shutdowns should not be used as leverage in political negotiations. The cost to America’s public servants, workers, businesses, citizens and entire economy is too great.

Ken Thomas
National President
NARFE
Contacting the Media

WHO TO CONTACT

Reaching the right person at the right news outlet is a critical step to expanding awareness and obtaining media coverage in your local community. The following are various types of media outlets to contact.

- Daily newspaper – staff writer, editor
- News/talk radio – producer, news director
- Television – reporter, news director
- Blogs – author

Becoming familiar with these local outlets, and more specifically the reporters, editors and producers at them, will tell you who to contact and what topics they are interested in – knowledge that is helpful when you are in the process of creating opportunities for news coverage.

Newspaper

While newspapers across the country have drastically cut their staff in the last few years, your daily or regional newspaper remains an effective medium for your NARFE message. Since they publish every day, reporters are typically on tight deadlines. Remember this when reaching out to writers or editors of local newspapers. Understanding the demands and structure of their jobs can go a long way to developing (or enhancing) media relationships.

Local TV News Stations

When considering reaching out to reporters or news directors at any given station, remember that TV is a visual-based medium. Video footage conveys best to viewers.

News/Talk Radio

Talk radio programs afford you two distinctive opportunities in which to engage with media. One way is to appear as a guest on a news program. Obviously, you’d speak on issues of concern to federal employees or about an upcoming chapter event. These interview slots are not easy to get. Establishing a relationship with the news director or producer can help to secure an interview.

Another opportunity is to participate as a caller where you can express your opinion or ask the host, guest a question.
BLOGS AND NICHE WEBSITES

If you’ve never heard of blogs before, you’re not alone. Blogs are regular features of an online publication that typically relates to a particular topic and consists of articles and/or personal commentary by one or more authors. Anybody can create a blog, and authors are not necessarily bound by professional journalism standards. Depending on how the blog functions, anyone from the general public can share their thoughts, sometimes resulting in contentious and conflicting opinions. Sometimes, the blog’s creator will screen submissions before they get posted.

Niche websites are topical websites that focus on a particular interest or geographical area. If you have done some fundraising for Alzheimer’s, for instance, there may be a regional health website that would be interested in featuring your check presentation event. Or, neighborhood sites such as NextDoor.com and Patch.com are becoming popular sites for sharing local news without having to go through a submission process.

If you would like to contact the author of a blog or niche website, look for an “about” or “contact” page on their site.

Whether it’s TV, newspaper or radio, one thing all local and regional news outlets have in common is that they are always looking for a local connection to a broader story or issue.
Interview Tips

BEING INTERVIEWED
So, you’ve shared your news with media in your area, and a reporter or writer expresses interest in interviewing you or having you as a guest on their program. The following are tips to utilize in preparation of and during a media interview – for both the seasoned pro and a novice.

• Prepare by summarizing the main points you want to convey. Cover the most important points first.

• Keep your main points near you, so that you can easily and quickly refer to them during the interview.

• Be comfortable; sound interesting. Especially when it comes to radio and TV, reading the words as though they are a script is a sure way to appear dull. Instead of coming across as a robot, speak as if you were having a conversation. Be relaxed but still know your material.

• Don’t be afraid to say “I don’t know” or suggest that you reach back out to the reporter with more information. Making up an answer on the spot on a topic of which you are not familiar can cause more damage than simply saying “I’ll get back to you.”

• Remember the reporter views this as a professional relationship. Even if you feel you have a solid rapport with the journalist, keep in mind that he/she is looking to you for information, not a personal connection.
SOCIAL MEDIA IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

Social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter are other avenues that afford you the opportunity to expand awareness of your news. You can follow reporters via social media, and you can reach out to the general public on social media.

When journalists write an article or produce a story, it doesn’t just live and die that day in the newspaper. Reporters are keen on sharing their pieces by posting them on their individual Facebook pages and tweeting about them at their respective Twitter handles (or usernames). People who follow reporters on Facebook and Twitter can individually message or tweet back to them, expressing their opinions on the articles or news pieces. LinkedIn is a great place for building a network of people who share your professional background or interest.

Chapters and Federations that have Facebook pages and Twitter handles should share their news on both. For those who don’t, it’s a good idea to create them. This being the digital age, many people, especially younger working professionals, consume news quickly on their mobile devices and through social media sites. Facebook and Twitter are highly effective real-time communication tools that can connect you with current chapter members and even new ones.

**Facebook:**

- To learn more about Facebook, check out this resource:
  Facebook: Everything you need to know!
  https://www.imore.com/facebook-faq

- To set up a Facebook business page, check out this resource:
  Facebook page setup
  https://www.facebook.com/business/learn/set-up-facebook-page
Social Media

**Twitter:**

- To learn more about Twitter, check out this resource:
  [Everything you need to know!](https://www.imore.com/twitter-everything-you-need-know)

- To set up a Twitter account, check out this resource:
  [Signing up with Twitter](https://help.twitter.com/en/create-twitter-account)