

Introduction to Public Relations

Various definitions of PR

Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics (Public Relations Society of America).

One early definition that gained wide acceptance was formulated by the newsletter PR News: “Public relations is the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organization with the public interest, and plans and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and patience.”

One of the first major textbooks the field, *Effective Public Relations* by Scott Cutlip and Allen Center, stated, “Public relations is the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends.” The management function was also emphasized more than 25 years ago in *Managing Public Relations* by James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt. They said, “Public relations is the management of communication between an organization and its publics.”

“Public relations is influencing behaviour to achieve objectives through the effective management of relationships and communications.” (British Institute of Public Relations, whose definition has also been adopted in a number of Commonwealth nations) .

“Public relations practice is the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organization leaders, and implementing planned programs of action which serve both the organization’s and the public’s interest.” (1978 World Assembly of Public Relations in Mexico City and endorsed by 34 national public relations organizations).

It isn't necessary, however, to memorize any particular definition of public relations. It's more important to remember the key words that are used in most definitions that frame today's modern public relations. The key words are:

■ **Deliberate.** Public relations activity is intentional. It is designed to influence, gain understanding, provide information, and obtain feedback from those affected by the activity.

■ **Planned.** Public relations activity is organized. Solutions to problems are discovered and logistics are thought out, with the activity taking place over a period of time. It is systematic, requiring research and strategic thinking.

■ **Performance.** Effective public relations is based on actual policies and performance. No amount of public relations will generate goodwill and support if the organization has poor policies and is unresponsive to public concerns.

■ **Public interest.** Public relations activity should be mutually beneficial to the organization and the public; it is the alignment of the organization's self-interests with the public's concerns and interests.

■ **Two-way communication.** Public relations is not just disseminating information but also the art of listening and engaging in a conversation with various publics.

■ **Management function.** Public relations is most effective when it is a strategic and integral part of decision making by top management. Public relations involves counseling, problem solving, and the management of competition and conflict.

To summarize, you can grasp the essential elements of effective public relations by remembering the following words and phrases: deliberate . . . planned . . . performance . . . public interest . . . two-way communication . . . strategic management function. The elements of public relations just described are part of the process that defines today's public relations.

Objectives of public relations

Some of the main goals of public relations are to create, maintain, and protect the organization's reputation, enhance its prestige, and present a favorable image. Studies have shown that consumers often base their purchase decisions on a company's reputation, so public relations can have a definite impact on sales and revenue. Public relations can be an effective part of a company's overall marketing strategy. In the case of a for-profit company, public relations and marketing should be coordinated to be sure they are working to achieve the same objectives.

Another major public relations goal is to create good will for the organization. This involves such functions as employee relations, stockholder and investor relations, media relations, and community relations. Public relations may function to educate certain audiences about many things relevant to the organization—including the business in general, new legislation, and how to use a particular product—as well as to overcome misconceptions and prejudices. For example, a nonprofit organization may attempt to educate the public regarding a certain point of view, while trade associations may undertake educational programs regarding particular industries and their products and practices.