

# Public Relations as a Process

Public relations is a process—that is, a series of actions, changes, or functions that bring about a result. One popular way to describe the process, and to remember its components, is to use the RACE acronym, first articulated by John Marston in his book *The Nature of Public Relations*. Essentially, RACE means that public relations activity consists of four key elements:

- **Research.** What is the problem or situation?
- **Action (program planning).** What is going to be done about it?
- **Communication (execution).** How will the public be told?
- **Evaluation.** Was the audience reached and what was the effect?

Another acronym, ROPE, is also used to explain the public relations process. Jerry Hendrix, in his book *Public Relations Cases*, says R is research, O is objectives in terms of setting content output and impact, P is programming and execution, and E is evaluation. Yet another acronym for the public relations process is R-O-S-I-E for research, objectives, strategies, implementation, and evaluation. In all cases, the process is a never-ending cycle in which six components are links in a chain.

**1. Step 1: Research and Analysis.** This consists of inputs that determine the nature and extent of the public relations problem or opportunity. These may include feedback from the public, media reporting and editorial comment, analysis of trend data, other forms of research, personal experience, and government pressures and regulations.

**2. Step 2: Policy Formulation.** Public relations personnel, as advisors to top management, make recommendations on policy and what actions should be taken by the organization.

**3. Step 3: Programming.** Once a policy or action is agreed on, public relations staff begin to plan a communications program that will further the organization's objectives. They will set objectives, define audiences, and decide on what strategies will be used on a specific timeline. Budget and staffing are also major considerations.

**4. Step 4: Communication.** Public relations personnel execute the program through such vehicles as news releases, media advisories, newsletters, Internet and Web postings, special events, speeches, and community relations programs.

**5. Step 5: Feedback.** The effect of these efforts is measured by feedback from the same components that made up the first step. Did the media mention the key messages? Did people change their attitudes or opinions? Did sales go up? Did the organization preserve or enhance its reputation?

**6. Step 6: Assessment.** The cycle is then repeated. The success or failure of the policy or program is assessed as a way of determining whether additional efforts are needed, or whether new issues or opportunities must be addressed. Thus, it is a continuing loop process.

Note that public relations plays two distinct roles in this process, thus serving as a “middle ground” or “linking agent.” On one level, public relations interacts directly with external sources of information, including the public, media, and government, and relays these inputs to management along with recommendations. On a second level, public relations becomes the vehicle through which management reaches the public with assorted messages to accomplish organizational goals.

## PR as a process: RACE

