

The term has a mixed history. According to Wes Pedersen, a former director of communications for the Public Affairs Council, the term *flack* originated in 1939 in *Variety*, the show business publication. It began using *flack* as a synonym for *press agent*, he says, “in tribute to the skills of Gene Flack in publicizing motion pictures.” Others say the word *flak* was used during World War I to describe heavy ground fire aimed at aircraft. At times, journalists consider the barrage of daily news releases they receive a form of flak that interferes with their mission of informing the public.

Within the public relations community, feeling also exists that *PR* is a slang term that carries a somewhat denigrating connotation. The late Sam Black, a public relations consultant in the United Kingdom and author of several books on public relations, said, “The use of ‘PR’ probably originated as a nickname for ‘press relations,’” the primary activity of public relations in its early years (see Chapter 2).

Although PR is now more than press relations, the nickname is commonly used in daily conversation and is widely recognized around the world. A good compromise, which this book uses, is to adopt the style of spelling out “public relations” in the body of a text or article but to use the shorter term, “PR,” if it is used in a direct quote.

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?

Part Two of this text (Chapters 5–8) discusses this key four-step process.

Another approach is to think of the process as a never-ending cycle in which six components are links in a chain. Figure 1.1 shows the process.

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.

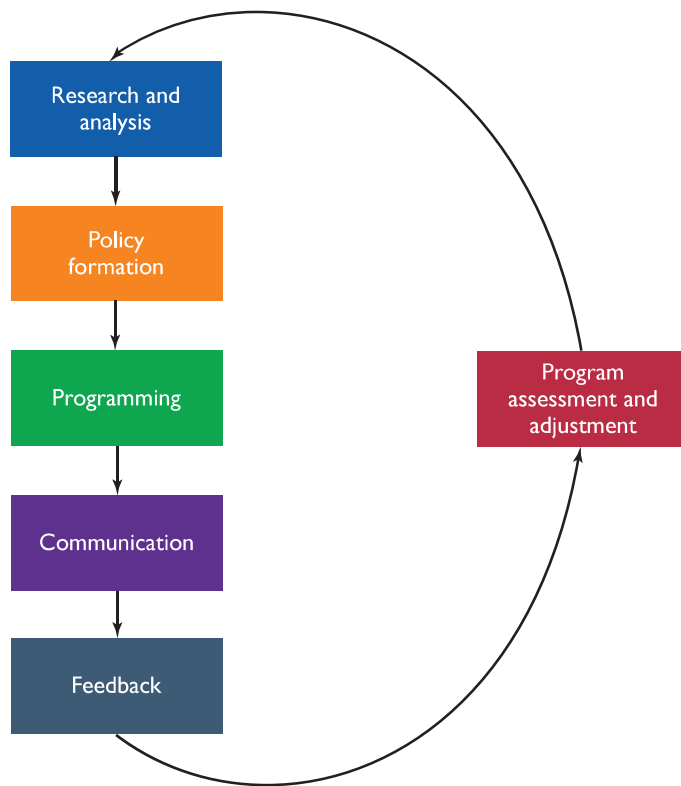


Figure 1.1 The Public Relations Process

The conceptualization of public relations as a cyclical process, feedback, or audience response leads to assessment of the program, which becomes an essential element in the development of another public relations project.

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.

We provide a voice in the marketplace of ideas, facts, and viewpoints to aid informed public debate.

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