PUBLIC RELATIONS:

What is public relations?

A lot of textbooks define public relations but probably the easiest definition to remember is that public relations is the process of increasing the knowledge, understanding, and acceptance of your organization or issue among the various groups of individuals with whom you deal.

When you think about it, you are a member of many groups. For example, you are a researcher (a group) who lives in a certain area (another group). You are male (a group) or female (a group), a certain age (a group), a certain religion (a group), and so on. Reaching the groups, you want to influence can be challenging because of the many different types of groups you have to try to reach. As you develop your “public relations” plan, you have to think about what appeals to each group.

What should I expect from this public relations job?

Expect to play a significant role in your chapter’s activities. You will have to show your value to the president (who may realize it already) and members by producing results. This means gaining exposure for AAHGS and the chapter both in your community and among prospective members. Most people do not realize the public relations officer is a communicator and not just someone who takes pictures at meetings.

How can I help my chapter and AAHGS?

By getting your chapter’s and AAHGS’s name readily known in your community. It gives the organization credibility; helps to attract new members; encourages potential historical organizations to be a part of AAHGS and helps to attract notable speakers who want to be associated with an influential group.

Just as with any other job, you have to devote some time to make it successful. However, your initiative will go a long way to making your chapter well known and credible.

What happens if I don’t do the job well?

You have an important job and your chapter will not be as good as it can be if
you don’t do it correctly or at all. Chapters that don’t have an effective and productive on-going publicity program are less likely to be readily recognized in the community; fall short on making sure members gain recognition for their expertise; and will lose opportunities to recruit new members.

**What is the nature of the news media?**

The news media—print, radio, and television—are in a fast-moving, highly competitive business. The news media’s job is to report the news. With the increasing number of radio and television channels, as well as the Internet, they need to fill a lot of space with stories.

Your planning ahead is important to news media representatives. Don’t wait until the day an event is happening to tell them you want coverage. Give them time to schedule their reporters.

**All we do is have meetings. How can I generate story ideas?**

Your chapter is full of story ideas. For starters, the news media are always looking to interview someone with an interesting story to tell, particularly someone with ties to an experiences that relate to a particular date. To take advantage of that, you must know your chapter members or their stories well. Other story possibilities may relate to your chapter’s community activities, such as awarding scholarships, speaking at a local school, helping people in need, or having a recognized guest speaker.

**Working with Your Community - What is Community Relations?**

Community relations” is nothing more than establishing and maintaining a relationship with individuals or groups in a particular community. A “community” is similar to the groups discussed at the beginning of this guide, so there are many “communities.”

**Why is it important for my chapter to be involved in community relations?**

It’s important because it lets the people in your area know that a AAHGS chapter exists there!

Effective “community relations” helps the chapter to attract new members, particularly those moving into your area. Your chapter can also accomplish positive “community relations” by being actively engaged in local events— after all, in many cases your chapter represents a large and influential constituency. Being involved in the community builds credibility. It’s also fun for your members to have that sense of unity they gain from working together on a project.

**What if my chapter doesn’t want to be involved in community relations?**

Whether they know it or not, they are already involved. Just by having a chapter and announcing the meetings, they are letting the community of citizens in your area know that they exist.

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**About the Author:**

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