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 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.
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.

**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.
Sample Press Release

NARFE PRESS RELEASE

New OPM Director Jeff Pon to Address Agency Priorities to Advance, Better Equip the Federal Workforce at NARFE’s FEDcon18

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (April 12, 2018) – Dr. Jeff Pon, director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), will recognize the important work of federal government employees and address workforce changes proposed by the Trump administration at FEDcon18, the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association’s (NARFE) premier training event for the federal community, on Monday, August 27, in a keynote address to nearly 1,000 current and retired federal employees.

An advocate for transforming government to keep pace with next-generation technology and human capital demands, Pon is committed to advancing the public’s understanding of the honorable, positive work of civil servants. In addressing OPM staff and government employee organizations, he has pledged to help make the federal workforce more successful by implementing “systems, policies and technology that ensure federal employees can perform their jobs better.” One such area of importance to Pon is the processing of retirement claims, which he believes will take less time as agencies become “more efficient and responsive.”

“As OPM plays a critical role in addressing workforce concerns and issuing guidance that directly affects current and retired federal employees, we look forward to Director Pon sharing his enthusiasm and vision for leading a more mobile workforce and improving OPM services to employees, agencies and retirees throughout the federal government,” said NARFE President Richard G. Thissen.

Nominated in September, Pon was confirmed last month to serve as the agency head.

Throughout his federal career, Pon served in leadership roles to transform federal government operations. Pon’s career in federal service began more than 25 years ago as a White House intern in the Office of Public Liaison under the George H.W. Bush administration in 1991. Returning to federal government in 2003, Pon served as deputy director for eGovernment at OPM, where he jointly led the implementation of ePayroll, USAJobs, eTraining, Enterprise Human Resource Integration, eClearance, and also the HR Line of Business - six initiatives that transformed federal human resources functions and saved taxpayers an estimated $2.6 billion.

Pon later transitioned to the Department of Energy where he served as the agency’s chief human capital officer. More recently, Pon worked in the private sector, serving as the chief human resources and strategy officer at the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM). Prior to joining SHRM in 2012, Pon was the president and COO of Futures Inc., a talent management software company working to advance its mission to help find the right jobs for returning military, veterans and their families. Pon was also a principal in the Human Capital practice at Booz Allen Hamilton, Inc.
Sample Press Release

NARFE PRESS RELEASE

Pon earned his doctorate in Industrial Organizational Psychology and master’s degree from the California School of Professional Psychology and completed his undergraduate degree in Psychology and Human Factors from the University of Southern California.

“NARFE has a long and productive history of working with past OPM directors and their staff,” continues Thissen. “We are excited to continue this strong relationship with Director Pon and are eager to work alongside OPM to showcase and advance the hard work of our nation’s federal community.”

FEDcon18 is NARFE’s premier training event for the entire federal community, consisting of educational sessions and workshops on advocacy, federal benefits, financial planning, and professional and personal development tailored specifically to the needs and interests of both current and retired federal employees. FEDcon18 takes place August 26-28 at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront in Jacksonville, Florida.

Media can attend FEDcon18 for FREE but must preregister by contacting NARFE’s Deputy Director of Public Relations Jill Talley at jtalley@narfe.org or 571-483-1291.

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The National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE) was founded in 1921 with the mission of protecting the earned rights and benefits of America’s active and retired federal workers. One of the largest federal employee/retiree organizations, NARFE represents the interests of 5 million current and future federal and postal annuitants, spouses and survivors.

Media contact:
Jill Talley
Deputy Director, Public Relations
jtalley@narfe.org
703-835-7760
Sample Press Release

NARFE PRESS RELEASE

Senate Bill Would Balance Postal Service Books on Backs of Retirees

Alexandria, Va. (March 26, 2018) – National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE) President Richard G. Thissen issued the following statement today, expressing disappointment with both the introduction of the Postal Reform Act of 2018 by Sens. Tom Carper, D-DE; Heidi Heitkamp, D-ND; Claire McCaskill, D-MO; and Jerry Moran, R-KS, and the request for the bill to bypass the committee process:

“This proposal seeks to balance the books of the United States Postal Service (USPS) on the backs of postal retirees. It would tell a 90-year-old postal retiree that he or she must pay another $1,600 or more per year in health insurance premiums to Medicare to keep his or her existing retiree health insurance plan. That’s health insurance the retiree earned in exchange for years of hard work for the Postal Service.

“This requirement aims to lower USPS health insurance costs by shifting primary responsibility for retiree health coverage from USPS to Medicare, at a cost of $10.7 billion to taxpayers. It puts a new, onerous requirement on 76,000 postal retirees to pay additional Medicare premiums to keep their current health insurance.

“Supporters of the bill will argue this step is necessary to save the USPS. I disagree. Rather, I suggest lawmakers tackle USPS financial issues head-on rather than pursuing a more complicated route. This is not the only path forward. Legislators should be asking: Why not allow USPS to raise the price of postage to a more reasonable amount, instead of continuing to heavily subsidize the business of bulk mailers? Why not allow USPS to pay its health insurance bills when they are due, and not before, by ending the burdensome prefunding requirement?

“After dedicating long careers to the USPS and living on fixed incomes, postal retirees should not be threatened with the loss of their health insurance if they do not buy additional coverage through Medicare that they have previously declined. This not only eliminates choice with regard to health insurance for postal retirees, but it also sets a dangerous precedent for all federal retirees.

“Not only is the substance of the bill troubling, but so is the fast-track process the bill’s sponsors are pursuing. They have sought to bypass the deliberative committee process completely, preventing the type of thoughtful attention, thorough review and common-sense amendments that committee consideration allows. We urge Senate leaders to reject their request to do so.”

For additional information on NARFE’s views on postal reform legislation, see our statement for the record to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, commenting on a substantially similar House bill.

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The National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE) was founded in 1921 with the mission of protecting the earned rights and benefits of America’s active and retired federal workers. One of the largest federal employee/retiree organizations, NARFE represents the interests of 5 million current and future federal and postal annuitants, spouses and survivors.
Dear Editor,

Joe Davidson’s recent article titled “CPA tried to discredit retirees after The Washington Post published their criticisms” brings to light several alarming issues, but most notably it underscores the need to protect the earned pay and benefits of federal employees and correct misperceptions about their compensation and retirement benefits.

A common misperception, and one unfortunately promoted by this Administration, is that federal employees enjoy lavish pensions at the expense of taxpayers, when in reality the average federal pension is quite modest. According to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM)’s statistical abstract for federal employee benefit programs for fiscal year 2017, the median pension for retirees under the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) was $3,171 per month. For employees hired after 1986 and in the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS), the median monthly pension was $1,121.

Still, the negative perception of federal employees is fueled by misleading reports such as a 2017 article published from the Cato Institute claiming that federal workers earned 80 percent more, on average, than private-sector workers. More recently, a 2018 Federal Salary Council (FSC) report using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) calculated that federal employees are actually paid 31.86 percent less than their private-sector counterparts.

Further, federal retirees who are covered by the Civil Service Retirement System do not pay into Social Security and accordingly do not accrue Social Security benefits for their civil service. Their modest federal pension is often their only source of retirement income.

When misinformation about federal employees is disseminated, it does more than harm the reputation and careers of specific individuals. It paints a damaging and misleading picture of the entire federal workforce. It sends a clear message to our nation’s civil servants that they should refrain from expressing diverse perspectives or concerns on policies or programs that are harmful to the greater good. In the end, it’s the American people, who benefit the most from the hard work of civil servants, who are hurt the most from misinformation and negative perceptions about federal employees.

Sincerely,

Richard G. Thissen
President,
National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association
Alexandria, Va.
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.

Why ‘You’re Fired’ Employment Is a Bad Idea for Government

In his State of the Union address, President Trump called on Congress to “empower every cabinet secretary with the authority to reward good workers and to remove federal employees who undermine the public trust or fail the American people.”

While this may sound like a reasonable, commonsense proposal, the implications and unintended consequences of making government employment subject only to the whim of cabinet secretaries would have a dangerous, corrupting influence on our government. It should concern all citizens, regardless of party affiliation or political ideology.

Let me be clear. I am not arguing that every detail of our current laws and the related regulations are perfect, or that reforms should not be considered. Federal employees who undermine the public trust or who fail the American people – whether through incompetence, corruption, or otherwise – should be fired and they are. In fact, one-third of the firings that President Trump attributed to the passage of the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act occurred prior to passage of the bill in 2017. It should be possible to streamline procedures and expedite processes to improve performance management throughout the government. But the core protections must remain to provide an enforceable requirement that firing decisions are based on merit and not political favoritism.

Making federal government employment at-will would return us to the spoils system of the 1800s, when jobs were handed out or taken away based on political contributions or affiliations rather than individual capabilities, leading to corruption and incompetence in the civil service. It would also shift substantial power from Congress to the Executive, as federal employee jobs would depend more on allegiance to the president or a political party than to the Constitution and laws enacted by Congress.

As the saying goes, those who forget history are doomed to repeat it. The merit-based system for civil service first emerged in response to a spoils system that was broadly denounced for the corruption and incompetence it produced. According to then-Civil Service Commissioner and future-President Theodore Roosevelt: “The spoils system was more fruitful of degradation in our political life than any other that could possibly have been invented. The spoils-monger, the man who peddled patronage, inevitably bred the vote-buyer, the vote-seller and the man guilty of misfeasance in office.” It not only permeated the highest positions, but also clerical positions as patronage for constituents who might not have otherwise found employment elsewhere. Most notoriously, the spoils system even led to the 1881 assassination of President Garfield, who was shot and killed by Charles J. Guiteau, a disgruntled office-seeker who believed he was entitled to, but denied, a job in exchange for work he had done for his political party.

In response, Congress passed the Pendleton Act of 1883 and later the Lloyd-LaFollette Act of 1912, which put in place merit-based hiring and firing rules, respectively. Over the course of the century, a patchwork of civil service laws and rules developed, leading to the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, which codified a more uniform set of rules and procedures. We now have a system that provides some core protections: notice of a proposed action, an opportunity to respond, and a right to be heard by a neutral arbitrator.
Despite this, President Trump’s State of the Union called for piggybacks on congressional efforts to return federal employment to an at-will proposition, in which employees can be hired or fired for any reason whatsoever. While Republicans may cheer a shift to at-will federal employment, they should consider how they would feel if we had a Democrat at the helm. Particularly for conservatives traditionally concerned with government overreach, such a policy centralizes more power—with the resulting potential for abuse—in the hands of a single elected leader and his or her party. Especially if extended to defense, intelligence and law enforcement agencies, this should worry any American citizen whether in relation to this president or the next.

We should preserve the requirement that (non-political) federal employees only be fired for just cause and protect that requirement with adequate due process procedures to guarantee it is upheld. Both ensure that federal employment, and termination, is based on merit.

Richard G. Thissen
National President
National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE)
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.
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
Twitter:

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

- To set up a Twitter account, check out this resource: 