

(Application & info from ICSA, 401 N. Michigan av, Chi 60611-4267; 312/321-6800, fax 312/321-6869)

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN KEY DECISIONS of gov't, industry & the service sector is growing thruout the world. An association devoted to this is growing up alongside. **International Ass'n of Public Participation Practitioners (IAP3)**, headquartered in Edmonton, Alberta, is holding its 2nd annual conference focusing on 1) public processes used in legislative & regulatory reviews; 2) indigenou people's participation & community involvement; 3) assessing the effectiveness of public participation. To be held Aug 30-Sept 1 in Kananaskis Country (near Banff), conference is for decisionmakers, prgm developers, interest groups, communicators & public participation practitioners. (Info from 9942 - 108 St, 8th Floor, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T5K 2J6; 403/427-3608, fax 403/422-9684)

DID THIS STRIKE A CHORD IN YOU, TOO? In response to prr's listing of PRSA's '93 district chairs (2/8), Carol Reuss (UNC-Chapel Hill) notes 7 of 10 are with firms where their name's on the door; 2 are with nonprofits; 1 with a bank. "Where are the big-name counseling firms & corporations? Has the economy kept their pr staffers from volunteering as PRSA officers? Are the smaller firms using PRSA service as stepping stones to business opportunities? Or, is the selection of district chairs just chance?" [Or -- have smaller firms come into their own?]

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION CAN BE SO EASY. Room service is a major complaint cause in hotels, mainly because the order arrives with wrong items, no butter, etc. Hilton Hotels now simply 1) has the ordertaker repeat the order when it's phoned in, for verification; 2) then the waiter goes over each item delivered with the customer, once the meal is laid out in the room. All the best pr in the world goes down the tube when you sit down to dinner after an exhausting day...and there's no silverwear. Which is why practitioners cannot duck involvement in details of daily operations.

NEW TERMINOLOGY: "EDITORIAL OPPORTUNITIES SPECIALIST" is what Beaupre & Co PR is advertising for. Job description says must "create rapport, educate & persuade press" in order to "influence the direction & content of editorial in national computer industry" publications.

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

RETIREES. Joe Awad, '82 PRSA pres & 1st College of Fellows chair, as vp-pr Reynolds Metals (Richmond) -- after 36 yrs, 24 as chief pr ofcr; will write & consult.

Wrenne Timberlake, only pao since its founding in '64 of US Army Information Systems Command (the old Signal Corps); previously with Atomic Energy Commission handling

nuclear testing pr; ex-chr PRSA Gov't Sect.

ELECTED. IPRA pres, Kaarina Alanko (mng dir, Tikon PR, Helsinki); pres elect, Pierre Hervy (dir, Analyses et Interaction, Paris).

ANNIVERSARY. Public Communications Inc (Chi, Tampa, Miami) celebrates its 30th.

OPINION LEADERS GIVE FOCUS, WILLING SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF

The value of effective 2-way communication with key leaders is that your organization can **earn the benefit of the doubt** with them, so when they make a decision affecting your interests, they will consider your needs. Research conducted by HRN (Philadelphia) among more than a quarter million key leaders in 39 states shows:

- **Leaders' awareness of an organization's community involvements favorably influences their evaluation** of it in a variety of dimensions, and...
- **Effective communication positively influences reputation.** Good reputation, in turn, influences willingness to do business with the organization & to support the public policy initiatives it advocates. For healthcare organizations in particular, effective communication also influences volunteerism, contributions & patient referrals.

WINNING KEY LEADER SUPPORT

2 fundamental premises must first be understood: 1) certain people influence & shape the opinions of their groups, 2) media reflect the opinion of these key leaders (pr 3/2/92). "To get a highly leveraged point in the communication process in either forming or shaping public policy, we've got to get to & understand this rarefied group of people," David Kirk, svp, told prr.

To communicate effectively with key leaders, an organization must understand their needs & priorities. Then the org'n must describe itself in terms that relate to those priorities. Leaders remember organizations & activities that are relevant to what is already of concern to them.

Key leader surveys reveal how they prioritize key issues; what their expectations are for an organization's leadership role; how they view its performance. "We learn in discrete demographic categories who misunderstands, who doesn't know so the organization can pump up its communication to them. It saves money because it can target. It shows who supports the organization, so programs can be designed that put those in favor out in front of those who aren't, creating interaction among these groups."

"Organizations wonder if what they're doing is appropriate to what key leaders are thinking about. Frequently they're doing the wrong stuff -- communicating what they think is important. Or they're doing the right stuff, but a terrible job of communicating it."



- THE METHODOLOGY** 1) A thoughtful, clean (no hidden agendas or biases), **written survey** takes 45-60 minutes to complete.
- 2) The way people are **invited into the research process** & how the organization is represented "are critical." First, a personal letter, hand-signed from the CEO, says "we've determined you're important in the community and have influence on policies affecting our business. We want to know how you think we are performing, what you think we ought to be focusing on, where we should be leading, where following, where building coalitions. If you are willing to participate in a dialogue with us, a survey will be coming. If not, return this card and we'll take you out of the data base." Typically, only 7-10% want out.
- 3) "So we've learned important info for future communications. We know who isn't willing to play." **10 days later**, a 2nd personalized letter is sent with the survey, return envelope & a card to request the findings.
- 4) All leaders receiving the survey package will know who is sponsoring the project. All communications make the point that the org'n wants to be a better communicator & a more effective community citizen & employer. Even those who don't respond learn more about the organization's commitment.

Phone interviews don't provide the same opportunities for relationship building; wouldn't get the "rich, thoughtful communication in key leaders' hands"; don't as fully "demonstrate respect for their position & time"; don't provide enough time to ask for all the info needed.

Survey results create a platform for communications, programs & management of future issues agenda. "What we're trying to do is get in at the beginning *before an issue blows up*, preparing for 5 years down the road." Contrary to when many get involved -- at the end of an issue's life cycle during legislation & litigation when "there are already champions for the other side."

✓ **BENEFIT: FOCUSED PROGRAMMING**

Washington State Hospital Ass'n
(Seattle) just finished its key

leader survey. "It made clear to us & validated what we thought we knew, and surprised us with things we should have known but hadn't thought about," Stephanie Bradfield, dpa, told prr. "It's giving us a solid base to do some major strategic planning -- mostly toward community benefit. It's extraordinarily difficult to meet community expectations if you don't know what they are."

In a previous position with a corporation, Bradfield used similar research "to carefully focus our community giving program. We had been giving a little bit of money to everybody, making everybody a little bit happy. Finally, somebody said 'wait a minute, we could really make a difference if we were to focus our funds on a few really important topics. Let's go out & talk to the community & find out where they think we ought to be focusing.' We did that and really changed our corporate giving program."

"At hospitals it's much the same. Most are not-for-profit or public institutions that have a responsibility to give back to the community. They tend to do a lot of small programs. As we start looking at the changes

coming in healthcare, one of the things we're asking is what are we doing to improve the health status of the community. We're doing little bits & pieces but not enough to really make a difference. So we're using this study to help us determine what one or two or three areas we need to focus on."

✓ ✓ ✓ **AUSTRALIA DEMANDS QUALITY ACCREDITATION FOR PR FIRMS**

Public relations firms & practitioners in Australia will have to be quality accredited to be eligible for gov't contracts. The government is "leap-frogging over the debate about registration & licensing. Ed Bernays may end up being right -- even if in a different way than he advocated," Noel Turnbull, chrm, Turnbull Fox Phillips (Sydney), told prr.

The Queensland Government has announced that a) contractors will be required to have some form of quality accreditation -- "probably the basic ISO standard"; b) consultants & other providers of service to gov't will need to have quality assurance systems in place beginning July 1 '94. "Quality Assurance Policy" booklet prepared by the federal gov't is being distributed thru PR Institute of Australia.

For firms wanting to do business in Australia, Turnbull suggests these steps to introduce quality assurance systems: 1) survey clients to provide a benchmark on service quality; 2) "systematic evaluation of all processes & policies with a view to developing ways to achieve continuous improvement"; 3) go for formal ISO accreditation (more next week). "Quality is not just a fad. It is being regarded as an essential tool by companies & governments. They expect their suppliers to co-operate, participate & qualify."

U.S. Next? At last year's Australian Quality Awards dinner in Sydney, a letter dated 11/2/92 from then-Gov Clinton extolled the virtues of quality & quality systems. "Considering the other priorities the Clinton team had around that time, quality must rank very highly -- enough to make one wonder if the Australian moves could be a harbinger of similar US moves."

ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PROFESSIONALS

✓ ✓ **12 AWARDS OPPORTUNITIES:** 1) For the best of the best **corporate volunteer programs** -- exhibiting active encouragement & support of their CEOs & demonstrating linkage between doing good in the community & doing well in business. Winning programs receive The Points of Light Foundation's "Awards for Excellence in Corporate Community Service." Submit by April 30. (Nomination forms & info from them at 736 Jackson pl, DC 20503; 202/408-5162) 2) International **Customer Service Assn's** 11th annual Award of Excellence in manufacturing & non-manufacturing categories. Two awards are given to 2 org'ns best displaying consistent customer service excellence thruout all levels of their organizations. "Preparing the application provides the opportunity to evaluate your organization's approach to customer service," says 1990 recipient Jerry Crowe, customer service dir, CSX Transportation (Jacksonville, Fla). Deadline is June 25.