

COMMUNICATIONS

A section can raise awareness of its activities by implementing both external and internal communication programs. External publicity is the communication of information to the general public or to specific groups outside the section. Internal publicity is the communication of information to your section membership. Depending on the size of the section and the groups with which the section needs to communicate, separate committees can be formed to accomplish the section's publicity objectives.

EXTERNAL PUBLICITY

Disseminating information to audiences outside the section is a simple task if you have something newsworthy to communicate. Stories that may be of interest to external audiences include

- Section efforts to educate the public about the oil and gas industry
- Profiles of section leaders
- Section-sponsored events involving members of the local community
- Section involvement in volunteer/community service activities
- Section anniversaries or other historic milestones
- Section scholarship programs
- Listing of section meetings and speakers in a business calendar

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Communication with a certain group outside the section may be as simple as a business letter or a phone call. For example, inviting members of a local environmental club to a section meeting might require a series of letters or phone calls (initial invitation and follow-up) to the club president. These communications should highlight how the group might benefit from attending the meeting and should be made 2–3 months in advance of the meeting date.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

The best way to communicate to the general public is through the news media. To do this, you must first get to know the local media and establish a rapport with them.

Creating a Media List

Each section should be familiar with the major news outlets in your area, including daily and weekly newspapers, local business journals, and radio and television stations. In order to communicate with these outlets, you will need to maintain a media list of appropriate contacts who might cover business, energy, and the environment. Other contacts to consider would be those who

cover city news, community service activities, social functions, special features, education, and calendar listings.

Your media list should have complete contact information, including name, title, mailing address, telephone number, fax number, email address, and how each person prefers to receive information. For the media list to be effective, it should also be updated on a regular basis.

Contacting the Media

Once a media list is compiled, a letter of introduction should be mailed or emailed to each person on the list. Identify the key section contact, list publicity committee members, and give a brief overview of the section's activities. You should also provide the name of a contact person who can answer media questions, in a timely manner, about the information you send.

Each letter or email should be personalized and individually addressed. It should be roughly two to three paragraphs stating the nature of the section's business and how it might relate to the person to whom you are writing. Remember to include the names, addresses, email addresses, and phone numbers of contact people. If the contact has a specific area of responsibility, such as career guidance or scholarships, note that beside the name.

Writing/Distributing Press Releases

The best way to supply information to the press is with a press release. A press release should contain the name and telephone number of a contact person, when the story should be released, and the information itself.

Topics for press releases include section scholarship recipients, members who receive SPE awards, community service by the section, section meeting notices (especially for special speakers such as distinguished lecturers or on topics of interest to the general public), section activities for Engineers Week, section anniversaries, and special events such as golf tournaments.

Use a direct, straightforward style to write a press release. The first paragraph should contain all of the important information: who, what, where, why, when, and how. Subsequent paragraphs add supplemental information. Keep in mind that you want to communicate with the general public. Try to explain technical terms in easily understood language, and most of all, try to give some perspective on how the technology will affect daily life or the local community. Keep your press release to a single, double-spaced page. Press releases should never be handwritten.

Once a press release has been distributed, usually via email, fax, or mail, it is a good idea to follow up with the media to ensure that they have received the release and to see if they have any questions about your news.

For additional resources to support your external publicity efforts, please refer to the SPE Media Center. You will find the SPE fact sheet, executive biographies, and previous SPE press releases.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Keeping your section members informed about section activities is one of the most important tasks to be accomplished. Strong internal communications are necessary to the success of your section.

While internal communications are targeted toward a more receptive audience, it still requires dedication and assistance from all areas of section operations.

The section board should decide how to communicate with the section members. They should consider what information needs to be communicated on a regular basis and what sort of periodic updates will be generated by various operating groups within the section (continuing education, scholarship, career guidance committees, social events, etc.). Once the amount of information to be distributed has been determined, the board should decide the most efficient means of communication.

Newsletters

Many sections find a monthly newsletter to be an efficient communications medium. When planning a newsletter, consider costs, distribution, and personnel.

Newsletters do require some time to put together, but they need not be difficult. Regular board meetings, at which committee reports are made, serve as the main source of articles for newsletters. Planning reports, meeting notices, opinion polls, and personal items about members are other topic suggestions for filling the newsletter. Some section chairpersons write short columns for their newsletters. Newsletters should be factual, concise, and timely. They should be written like a good press release, with the most important information in the opening paragraphs followed by supplemental information.

Advertising is an option to help defray the costs of printing and distribution, but it must be accurately managed and carefully monitored. In general, advertising accepted for SPE section publications and websites should be pertinent to the oil and gas industry and the readers of the publication. Sections are advised to follow the SPE advertising policy found in the “Guidelines for Section Publications” because it provides a section with the option of refusing to run advertising it does not feel is appropriate to the professional reputation of SPE.

Websites

A website may be the most cost-effective method to distribute both internal and external communications. SPE has web hosting services to assist sections in establishing and maintaining a website. Contact sections@spe.org for more information about creating a section website. Please refer to the “Guidelines for Section Websites.”

Emails

Email is another cost-effective way to communicate with your members about section meetings, upcoming events, and section business. The membership chairperson can access email addresses on the section roster.

You should carefully consider the frequency of email communication so you do not annoy your members or overload their inbox. We do not recommend you rely solely on email for communication with you members as emails can easily be blocked or lost. For suggestions and tips on effective email communication, refer to the “SPE Email Guidelines for Sections and Student Chapters.”

COMMUNITY RELATIONS NIGHT

Many sections plan an annual “community relations night” that provides an opportunity for section, industry, and community leaders to become better acquainted and to exchange ideas. It also allows the section to foster a stronger community presence. Some sections coordinate the event with Engineers Week activities (a global event held each year in February). Suggested steps for a successful community relations night are as follows:

1. Set a date at least 6 months in advance of the program.
2. Appoint a committee to plan and manage the event.
3. Give careful consideration to the choice of speakers and secure the speaker early. Traditionally, SPE Distinguished Lecturers are available to speak on subjects of general interest.
4. Have an alternative speaker available in case the first speaker cannot attend.
5. Prepare a guest list of community leaders, government representatives, and local media.
6. Mail (or email) invitations 4–6 weeks before the event.
7. Contact invited guests 2–3 weeks before the event to confirm their attendance.
8. Send reminder emails or make reminder phone calls 1–2 days before the event.
9. Assign one person as a host for each invited guest to usher the guest to his/her reserved table, introduce him/her to the speaker and various section members, and answer questions.

REFERENCES

- Editorial and Advertising Policy
- Email Guidelines for Sections and Student Chapters
- Graphic Standards Guide
- Guidelines for Section Publications
- Guidelines for Section Websites
- Policy for the Use of SPE-Copyrighted Material
- Policy on the Use of the SPE Name and Logo

For more information, contact

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