

# LETHARGY IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS?

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We at Kansas State University have shrugged off our lethargy and have done some things for the first time in our public affairs program. Our educational program in “Financing State and Local Governments” was successful because we knowingly used necessary action-creating principles, methods, and leadership involvement techniques in the development of an *action-oriented public affairs program*. In the development of this program, we also had to mesh the *public affairs problem-solving process* with the principles and leadership involvement techniques taught in the *social action process*. Our experience commands us to recommend that you do the same.

The tried and proven public affairs problem-solving process includes: (1) professional perception of the problem; (2) bringing together facts and principles relating to the problem, its alternative solutions, and their consequences; (3) creating viable alternatives for solving a public problem; (4) placing each problem in a decision-making framework; (5) diffusing information among the people; and (6) encouraging and organizing interaction among individuals and groups concerned with solution of the problem.

The principles and leadership involvement techniques taught in the social action process include: (1) the elements of the actual process when ideas start on their way to becoming action programs, (2) the critical order in which these elements occur, (3) the people involvement techniques required to make things happen, and (4) the planning and organization involved in bringing the elements and the people together for program action.

All action-oriented public affairs programs must have a desired educational outcome or result. Our aim was to increase the level of understanding of public problems and issues among the people of Kansas, so that they and their leadership acquire a broader knowledge base from which to make public decisions.

A suggested comprehensive plan which combines the principles and techniques of the public affairs problem-solving process and the social action process into one blueprint for the development of an action-oriented public affairs program is as follows:

1. Know the main principles, techniques, elements, steps, and procedures in the development of an action program:

- a. Define the target audience and relevant clientele groups.
  - b. Benefit from past successful and unsuccessful public affairs program experiences—in and out of state.
  - c. Develop a consensus identification of the public affairs problem situation.
  - d. Motivate key influentials in the university and in relevant clientele groups to recognize that a problem exists and that something must be done to solve it.
  - e. Obtain commitment of key leaders in the university and in relevant clientele groups to take action to initiate the program.
  - f. Obtain formal and informal power structure *legitimization* of the program in the university as well as in relevant clientele groups.
  - g. Obtain acceptance of the program by key leaders of relevant clientele groups.
  - h. Commit sufficient and essential university time, money, and resources to action.
  - i. Develop the plan of work:
    - (1) Program goals and objectives
    - (2) Data collection and back-up information system
    - (3) Teaching method to be used
    - (4) Specific target audiences
    - (5) Channels of communication
    - (6) Appropriate techniques
    - (7) Needed publications and visuals
    - (8) Time schedules
    - (9) Facilities required
    - (10) Promotional requirements
    - (11) Evaluation
  - j. Launch the program.
2. Know the critical order of the principles, techniques, elements, steps, and procedures in a public affairs program.
  3. Become acquainted with and contact opinion leaders, key in-

fluentials, and legitimizers to get things accomplished at various stages in the development of an action-oriented public affairs program.

4. Prepare a plan for each element or step including the organization of the people involved.

#### **TARGET AUDIENCE AND PRIOR PROGRAM EXPERIENCES**

It is important to recognize that an action-oriented public affairs program involves people from both the university and relevant clientele groups *before, during, and after* the fielding of a program. Key leaders are involved in developing various steps of the program. They are also recipients of facts and information flowing from the program.

Kansas chose to conduct its program with the kingmakers, kings, and key interested citizens in all 105 counties and also at the state level. The statewide key influentials and university administration and program leaders were contacted personally to: (1) get program commitment and (2) convince the leaders that the public affairs problem-solving process would work and that we were not advocating any specific solution or espousing any cause.

Our educational philosophy, our methodological approaches, and our program planning procedures have all been molded by our belief in the land-grant university system. This system insists that we administrators, program leaders, and public affairs specialists take the leadership in program development.

Commitment to program action was achieved by the College of Agriculture administrators through a joint research-teaching-extension advisory group. Thus, we had agreement among inside and outside program initiators that a public affairs issue did exist and that something had to be done about it educationally. The program was formally legitimized by presenting the entire plan to the President of the University.

The success of a public affairs education program depends on how well it is taken from the source, carried to a point where it is approved, and finally put into operation. Sufficient time must be allowed to plan and organize each step before launching the program. All administrators, program leaders, and specialists connected with the program must try to make sure that all principles, techniques, elements, steps, and procedures of an action program are considered. They must know who should be involved in the program from the time it is conceived until it is completed and finally evaluated, and must see that the right people are contacted at the right time.