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**The Canadian Public Relations Society, Inc.**

# **ACCREDITATION HANDBOOK**

National Council on Accreditation

**The Canadian Public Relations Society, Inc.**

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **YOUR PROFESSION – YOUR SOCIETY**

#### **HISTORY**

Tracing the origins of public relations is an exercise open to endless debate. While some people firmly believe that public relations began in earnest with the leaders of the Roman Empire, others cite historical events ranging from the Reformation to the Boston Tea Party. No matter when the practice began or how it progressed, the basis of public relations remains the same... a desire to influence opinion or initiate action through the effective planning, management and execution of communication.

Public relations gained maturity and popularity during the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and emerged as a distinct vocation in North America by the early 1920s. Thanks to the efforts of such American pioneers as Ivy Lee, Pendleton Dudley and Edward Bernays, and their Canadian colleagues Herbert Lash, Charles Vining and Rielle Thompson, public relations blossomed as a growing – and evolving – occupation.

Early practitioners often worked as press agents. Many were moonlighting news reporters who were employed by clients wanting to get their names into newspaper columns...or to keep them out.

The Second World War brought about a major shift in the focus of public relations as governments and business tried to rally support for the war effort. The practice came of age during the conflict and was gradually recognized as an essential component of business operations. During the post-war years, hundreds of people were hired to provide communications expertise to federal, provincial and municipal government agencies, industrial and service-based corporations, professional and trade associations, social welfare and charitable groups, and advertising agencies.

The changing face of public relations was quickly evident as wartime veterans working in public relations were joined by young practitioners entering the field from the traditional media and also from new disciplines like business management, law and social sciences. This mix of experience, skills and ideals led to a new respect for public relations – one marked by a keen sense of social responsibility, professionalism and, most important, recognition as a management function.

## ATTRIBUTES OF THE PROFESSION

Advocating that public relations is a true profession is still somewhat of a challenge. Many people recognize only the traditional professions of medicine, law, holy orders and the military. Others expand this definition to include dentistry, engineering and architecture as more recent, but established, professions. Supporters and insiders often identify accounting, nursing, journalism and public relations as emerging professions.

What exactly is a profession? The basis of a recognized or confirmed professional status is found in five major characteristics:

- systematic theory in which all the knowledge and skills necessary to practice the profession have been recognized and from which practitioners can rationalize their activities;
  - formal education and / or a period of internship before being allowed to practice in accordance with the rules and regulations of the profession's governing body (doctors and lawyers are licensed, military officers are commissioned and clergy are ordained);
  - sanction of the community – giving credibility, status and recognition which, in turn, confers upon it certain powers, privileges and responsibilities; among the most important being a profession's control over its own educational programs and admission to membership and accreditation;
  - other privileges such as confidentiality between professionals and their clients or employers;
- and
- an over-riding responsibility of its practitioners to conduct all affairs in the public interest.

Achieving professional status – and the recognition and authority that comes with it – makes a significant impact. Most notably, it sends a message that users of such services should employ recognized members of that profession – people who are recognized as professional. Currently, there is no legislation defining either the practice of public relations or the qualifications of its practitioners. As a result, anyone may retain the services of a non-professional public relations person, even though the outcome may be less than ideal.

A recognized code of ethics, adopted and adhered to by a profession, protects the public by requiring its members to perform their duties to the best of their abilities and within the dictates of a prescribed conduct. A code may be formal or informal and is designed to protect both the public and the profession by prohibiting acts which may jeopardize the credibility of the profession and the interests of the public.

A culture consisting of unique values, norms and symbols is integral to each profession. First among the values is belief in the essential worth of the services it provides. Among the norms are standards of behaviour covering every relationship with clients and colleagues, as well as group-approved methods for challenging theory and introducing new techniques. A number of professions

have their own symbols – the collar of the clergy, the uniform of the military or the iron ring of the engineer. Virtually every profession is steeped in the concept of an identity retained for life.

As an emerging profession, public relations is slowly establishing itself as having a recognized body of knowledge, although it has no unique powers, privileges or responsibilities conferred upon its practice. The Canadian Public Relations Society and similar societies throughout the world are helping advance the practice through a framework of professional cultures and regulative codes of ethics, but because people who practice public relations are not bound through legislation, true recognition as a profession is difficult to achieve.

## **BEGINNINGS OF CPRS**

During the mid-1940s, a group of Montreal public relations people explored the need for a greater exchange of knowledge. On March 23, 1948, 16 professionals formally established the Canadian Public Relations Society, with membership limited to practitioners working in corporations.

Later that year, a group of 57 public relations people in Toronto formed the Public Relations Association of Ontario, designed to focus on their particular needs and open to government employees and consultants as well as corporate practitioners.

Five years later, the two organizations amalgamated to form the Canadian Public Relations Society, Inc. (CPRS) and held its first national meeting and conference May 14, 1953. Today, there are 16 Member Societies representing every region of Canada.

Through the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, a reciprocity initiative was forged to develop formal links with public relations societies worldwide and explore opportunities for international co-operation. As of September, 2004, CPRS and the following public relations organizations: Public Relations Society of America, Public Relations Institute of Australia; Institute of Public Relations, Ghana; Public Relations Institute of Ireland; Public Relations Institute of New Zealand; Puerto Rico Association of Public Relations Professionals; Institute of Public Relations of Singapore; Public Relations Society of Slovenia; Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa; and Chartered Institute of Public Relations, United Kingdom have agreed to recognize each other's professional accreditation on a reciprocal basis in accordance with signed reciprocity agreements.

## **CANADIAN PUBLIC RELATIONS SOCIETY**

The Canadian Public Relations Society is a non -profit organization whose members are engaged in the practice, management or teaching of public relations. The Society's mission is to work toward maintaining high standards in public relations and to advance the professional knowledge, skills and status of those in the field.

The National Society is a federation of member societies, governed by a Board of Directors.

The Board of Directors is comprised of 12 Directors elected by the membership at the Annual General Meeting. One member must be from each of six designated geographic areas. Each Director's term is for a period of three years.

## **MISSION**

The Canadian Public Relations Society, as a distinct Canadian association, seeks to:

- group all public relations practitioners in Canada and to foster their professional interests;
- advance the professional stature of public relations, in cooperation with its regional Member Societies and with like-minded organizations in other countries; and
- regulate its practice for the benefit and protection of the public interest.

## **DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES**

The National Society, in setting forth its Declaration of Principles and Ethics of Professional Conduct, strives to:

- affirm that the obligations of a public trust are inherent in the practice of public relations;
- promote and maintain high standards of professional practice and conduct among the membership, so as to ensure that public relations shall be esteemed as an honourable profession;
- safeguard good taste and truthfulness in all material prepared for public dissemination and in all aspects of the public relations practitioner's operations;
- ensure that membership represents surety of ethical conduct, skill, knowledge and competence in the practice of public relations;
- foster increased attention to public relations as a course of study in universities, colleges, institutes and other similar educational organizations in order to further the proficiency, knowledge and training of anyone engaged in or interested in entering public relations;
- ratified the Universal Ethics Protocol of the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communications Management ; and
- subscribe to the principles of Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms

## CODE OF PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Members of the Canadian Public Relations Society pledge to uphold the letter and spirit of this Code of Professional Standards.

Society members strive to improve their individual professional proficiency and advance their knowledge and competency through continuing research and professional development. Paramount in this respect is the achievement of professional accreditation.

**1. *A member shall practice public relations according to the highest professional standards.***

Members shall conduct their professional lives in a manner that does not conflict with the public interest and the dignity of the individual, with respect for the rights of the public as contained in the Constitution of Canada and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

**2. *A Member shall deal fairly and honestly with the communications media and the public.***

Members shall neither propose nor act to improperly influence the communications media, government bodies or the legislative process. Improper influence may include conferring gifts, privileges or benefits to influence decisions.

**3. *A member shall practice the highest standards of honesty, accuracy, integrity and truth, and shall not knowingly disseminate false or misleading information.***

Members shall not make extravagant claims or unfair comparisons, nor assume credit for ideas and words not their own.

Members shall not engage in professional or personal conduct that will bring discredit to themselves, the Society or the practice of public relations.

**4. *A member shall deal fairly with past or present employers / clients, fellow practitioners and members of other professions.***

Members shall not intentionally damage another practitioner's practice or professional reputations. Members shall understand, respect and abide by the ethical codes of other professions with whose members they may work from time to time.

5. ***Members shall be prepared to disclose the names of their employers or clients for whom public communications are made and refrain from associating themselves with anyone who would not respect such policy.***

Members shall be prepared to disclose publicly the names of their employers or clients on whose behalf public communications is made. Members shall not associate themselves with anyone claiming to represent one interest, or professing to be independent or unbiased, but who actually serves another or an undisclosed interest.

6. ***A member shall protect the confidences of present, former and prospective employers / clients.***

Members shall not use or disclose confidential information obtained from past or present employers / clients without the expressed permission of the employers / clients or an order of a court of law.

7. ***A member shall not represent conflicting or competing interest without the expressed consent of those concerned, given after a full disclosure of the facts.***

Members shall not permit personal or other professional interests to conflict with those of an employer / client without fully disclosing such interests to everyone involved.

8. ***A member shall not guarantee specified results beyond the member's capacity to achieve.***

9. ***Members shall personally accept no fees, commissions, gifts or any other considerations for professional services from anyone except employers or clients for whom the services were specifically performed.***

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE CPRS ACCREDITATION PROCESS**

#### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the CPRS accreditation process is to assess a member's depth of experience and competence in the professional practice of public relations and to recognize this achievement through the designation of accreditation. Once accredited, members must remain current in the profession. As a candidate for accreditation, you must pass a three-part accreditation exam process with an overall average score of 65 per cent and subscribe to the CPRS Code of Professional Standards (see Code of Standards, Chapter One). Upon successful completion of the three-part process, you will be recognized as an Accredited Public Relations practitioner (APR) and authorized to use the APR designation. Each year thereafter, and upon payment of national membership dues, you are authorized to use the APR designation.

#### **ACCREDITATION MAINTENANCE**

Accredited members are also encouraged to take part in the voluntary accreditation maintenance program. This program was designed to strengthen the value of the APR designation for the benefit of practitioners, their employers or clients and the public at-large. The program demonstrates the accredited member's continuing training and professional development as well as leadership in public relations, ensuring the APR designation retains its relevancy and value.

To participate, accredited members must record or keep track of qualifying activities from three broad categories (training, professional activities & community service). These activities carry a unit value that is described in the accreditation maintenance program package. Once a candidate has 15 units, they note them on the maintenance registration form and submit it to the National Office. A minimum of 15 units is required every five years.

The application is reviewed and the National Council on Accreditation will recognize the accredited member's maintenance of the APR designation. Maintained members receive a certificate and recognition in the membership directory and on the CPRS National website.

Participation by non-practicing, retired APRs is waived.

The maintenance program and forms are available online at [http://www.cprs.ca/accreditation/e\\_maintenance.asp](http://www.cprs.ca/accreditation/e_maintenance.asp).

#### **APPLICATION AND PREQUALIFICATION PROCESS**

The accreditation process is a measure of the extent of your practical experience and competence in the field as judged by peers. You may pursue this designation once you have satisfied the following eligibility requirements:

- 1) you have been employed full-time in a public relations position or have owned your own public relations business for at least five years; \*

- 2) you spend at least half of your professional time involved with specific public relations activities; and
- 3) you are a member in good standing of the Canadian Public Relations Society.

\* Equivalent work credit (up to six months) may be awarded for a public relations practicum or co-operative education experience successfully completed while attending a recognized college or university.

Applications, along with the application fee must be received by the CPRS National Office by **December 1**. Your application must include the names, addresses, phone numbers and emails of three people familiar with your work who are willing and able to attest to your eligibility and professional conduct. Your references may not include members of the CPRS National Council on Accreditation, the CPRS National Board of Directors, or your immediate supervisor or subordinates. **Two of the three references must be accredited members of the Society.**

*Candidates who have applied to enter the accreditation process, but whose eligibility was not recommended by the Deputy Presiding Officer (Eligibility), may appeal to the Deputy Presiding Officer (Appeals). (see Appeals Section)*

Your application must be accompanied by:

- 1) a current resume outlining in detail your experience in the field;
- 2) a work sample overview, explaining the nature and scope of the proposed work sample and the extent of your role (ownership) in the program or project;
- 3) the \$400.00 application fee

### **PREPARING YOUR WORK SAMPLE OVERVIEW**

This overview outlines the project you intend to submit as the work sample component of your accreditation process.

Your one-page description, which may be in point form, must outline the scope of the project and your role in it, and contain at least the following information:

#### **Scope:**

- an overview of the project;
- the organizational and PR goals the project was intended to serve, and how these relate to the evaluation of your project;
- the approximate date of project completion.

**Your role:**

- your involvement in the decision to launch the project, or the point at which you became the lead PR practitioner for the project;
- a discussion of your role in the research, analysis, communication and evaluation related to the project;
- whether you worked alone, as team leader, or as a member of a team; and
- what staff or consultant support was available for the project

Soon after the closing date for application, the Deputy Presiding Officer (Eligibility) of the National Council on Accreditation carefully reviews all applications and related materials, and notifies the National Office which candidates are eligible to proceed with the accreditation process.

By January 31, the CPRS National Office informs all candidates of their status. Those who are eligible to proceed are advised of the scheduling of accreditation components. Those candidates whose eligibility was not recommended will receive a full explanation from the Presiding Officer. A candidate who wishes to appeal this eligibility ruling should write to the Deputy Presiding Officer (Appeals), care of the National Office (see Appeal Section).

Your work sample overview will be reviewed as part of the application process and, if necessary, you will be advised as to steps you might take to increase your potential for success in this component of accreditation. Candidates who are deemed to have inadequate ownership of the proposed work sample will be asked to postpone their accreditation until an acceptable project is available to them.

### **FORM OF ACCREDITATION EXAMINATION**

The accreditation examination consists of three components:

- 1) a work sample which must be submitted to the CPRS National Office no later than **April 1**;
- 2) a written examination, with a maximum completing time of 3.5 hours, held in October;
- 3) an oral examination lasting from 45 to 60 minutes, held in October.

These are valued as follows:

- work sample – 20 per cent
- written examination – 45 per cent
- oral examination – 35 per cent

Given that CPRS accreditation is recognition of experience and competence in the practice of public relations, you must attain an overall average of at least 65 per cent on all three examination components, with no individual component mark below 60 per cent.

As well as measuring experience and competence levels, the examination process probes your understanding of the CPRS Code of Professional Standards and your personal awareness and practical understanding of the theories, practices, techniques and tools used by practitioners to meet their obligations to employers or clients.

The Society has established a team of examiners and graders in every region of the country to evaluate the three components of the accreditation process. The individuals are all accredited members of the Society. Regional Examiners, in consultation with the Chief Examiner and CPRS National Office, coordinate the evaluation of work samples by graders in their respective regions. In order to ensure impartiality, your work sample is evaluated by a grader outside your region.

Regional Examiners conduct the written and oral exams, and usually call upon the assistance of the local Accreditation Chair or another accredited member of the local Society. The oral exam should include three grading examiners under the authority of the Regional Examiner (i.e. three graders analyze and come to a consensus). A grader outside your region evaluates your written exam. Given that examinations are identified only by a code number, your identity remains unknown.

### **THE PREPARATION PROCESS**

Preparation for the accreditation process requires even very seasoned practitioners to review their accumulated theoretical and practical public relations knowledge and experience. You should begin preparing for the accreditation process soon after your eligibility is confirmed. We encourage you to look for advice and guidance from fellow CPRS members, particularly those involved with the accreditation committee of your member society. The experience and insights of accredited colleagues will assist you in all phases of the examination, especially the work sample, which must be prepared over the winter and submitted by **April 1**.

While this advice and experience provides valuable insights into the process, remember that accreditation is a measure of your experience and competence as a public relations professional. The onus is on your shoulders – only you can prepare your work sample and sit for the written and oral examinations. Candidates should also review previous successful work samples and written exam answers which are available on-line at [www.cprs.ca/Accreditation/e\\_accreditation.htm](http://www.cprs.ca/Accreditation/e_accreditation.htm). Your local accreditation chair or accredited colleagues can help you select the subject, content and format of your work sample. Candidates should note that acceptable work samples must be initiated, completed and evaluated within the two years prior to your application for eligibility. Candidates should also study a number of books and abstracts devoted to the many aspects of public relations.

A reference list is included in the Body of Knowledge which is available online at [www.cprs.ca/MbrArea/Accreditation/BodyKnowledge.pdf](http://www.cprs.ca/MbrArea/Accreditation/BodyKnowledge.pdf). It identifies many of the leading books and periodicals devoted to public relations. Case histories also provide excellent study materials by illustrating how theories, principles, tools, skills and evaluation techniques have been applied successfully by other practitioners. The CPRS national Society has an educational resource centre located at Mount Royal College in Calgary. (*See page 40 for contact information*).

Your studies should concentrate on the principles of public relations and how communications can contribute to organizational solutions, as well as the practical application of public relations theories and techniques to current Canadian issues.

## THE PROCESS SCHEDULE

The accreditation process follows a calendar which makes it easier for you to schedule work and study time.

### **October, November**

A few months before the December application deadline, you should carefully evaluate your commitments for the following year. Will you have the time, resources and motivation required to complete the accreditation examination? Once you have decided to proceed:

- consult a member of your Member Society's accreditation committee for guidance and assistance;
- identify possible subjects for your work sample and select the most appropriate;
- collect relevant reference materials;
- discuss your work sample topics and possible forms of presentation with your local accreditation chair;
- identify three colleagues, **two of whom are accredited members of CPRS**, who are willing to attest to your skills as a practitioner – these references are required as part of your formal application; and
- complete the Application for Accreditation available on-line or from the CPRS National Office and make sure it is returned before the **December 1** deadline.

### **January**

Verification of eligibility. Candidates start work sample.

### **February**

Now is the time to work on the report relating to your selected work sample (see Chapter Three). Map out the content and flow of the report and prepare a rough abstract outlining the theme and purpose of the work. Discuss your draft work sample with your local accreditation chair.

If you were unsuccessful in completing a previous exam or, if by not submitting a work sample, you did not complete the accreditation process, you may try again. Your accreditation file can be re-activated during either of the next two accreditation periods. In each case, you must submit a letter confirming your intent to National Office.

### **March**

Once you have completed your formal work sample, prepare three (3) copies and submit them to the CPRS National Office before the **April 1** deadline.

### **April**

The CPRS National Office issues a letter of confirmation that your work sample has been received and forwards the material to the Regional Examiners and graders. If you do not receive this confirmation by April 10, contact the CPRS National Office to request clarification.

### **May, June**

The graders and Regional Examiners evaluate the work samples and report the results to the Chief Examiner, care of National Office. By the end of June, the Chief Examiner advises you whether you have received a passing grade on the work sample and are eligible to proceed.

### **June to September**

Time waits for no one. Your work sample is just one portion of your accreditation process – once it is submitted, you should begin research and reading in preparation for the examinations. Prepare comprehensive notes related to the practice of public relations and the code of conduct upheld by the National Society. This puts you in good stead for the formal examinations in October. Exact dates for the examinations are available on the accreditation schedule on the CPRS National website at [www.cprs.ca/accreditation/e\\_accredguid.asp](http://www.cprs.ca/accreditation/e_accredguid.asp).

### **October**

Examinations are generally scheduled for the third week of October in your local community or the nearest large centre. Written and oral examinations are now fully decentralized to local societies to minimize travel for candidates and examiners.

### **December**

You receive formal notice of your performance in the accreditation process. If you are successful, you will be recognized as an accredited member following the presentation of your certificate and accreditation pin at the annual National Conference of the National Society. **Congratulations!**

## APPEAL PROCESS

Accreditation is recognition of a practitioner's experience and competence. It is bestowed only on those individuals who exhibit the skills to perform as well-rounded general practitioners

### ELIGIBILITY

Candidates who have applied to enter the accreditation process, but whose eligibility was not recommended by the Deputy Presiding Officer (Eligibility) because of their eligibility requirements or because of their work sample overview may appeal the decision.

A) If the candidate does not meet the eligibility requirements (5 years experience in Public Relations and references), the candidate may appeal to the Deputy Presiding Officer (Appeals) care of National Office, supplying additional information or evidence to support eligibility.

B) If the candidate's work sample overview does not meet the eligibility requirements (scope and ownership), the candidate may appeal by contacting CPRS National Office.

### WORK SAMPLE

Any candidate receiving a grade between 55%-60% on their work sample evaluation and wishing to appeal the evaluation may write to the Chief Examiner, in care of the CPRS National Office, within 60 days of receiving notice and the summary comments. The candidate has two options.

A) The candidate can request that the work sample be re-graded, in which case the Deputy Presiding Officer (Appeals) will appoint three different graders to review the work sample. The appeal examiners grade the candidate's work sample according to the scoring guidelines. The appeal examiners do not have access to the original grades or comments on the candidate. The decision of the appeal panel is final. If the candidate is again unsuccessful, the candidate will have the opportunity to resubmit a work sample within the next two-year period.

OR

B) The candidate may choose a coaching option. In this case, unsuccessful candidates submit a *revised* work sample to the Chief Examiner prior to the written and oral examinations or within the next two examination cycles. If the candidate fails to re-submit the work sample ***within the next two years***, all fees paid will be forfeited. The candidate may choose to begin the process again in any subsequent year, with a completely new work sample, and on payment of full fees.

If exceptional circumstances prevent the candidate from proceeding and the candidate decides to withdraw completely from the accreditation process, the candidate will forfeit \$200 of their fee and receive a refund of \$200. The candidate may then begin the process again in any subsequent year, with a completely new work sample, and on payment of full fees.

## WRITTEN AND ORAL

Any candidate receiving a grade between 55%-60% on their written and/or oral exam evaluation and wishing to appeal the evaluation may write to the Chief Examiner, in care of the CPRS National Office, within 60 days of receiving notice and the summary comments. The Deputy Presiding Officer (Appeals) will appoint three different graders to review the examination. The appeal examiners grade the candidate's written or oral examination answers according to the scoring guidelines. The appeal examiners do not have access to the original grades or comments on the candidate. The decision of the appeal panel is final. If the candidate is again unsuccessful, the candidate will have the opportunity to retake the examination within the next two-year period.

If the candidate is unsuccessful after **three attempts** at the written and/or oral examination, the candidate has to reapply to the accreditation program.

Candidates should note that following a third unsuccessful attempt at the written and/or oral examinations, they will be required to wait **a minimum of one full year or one full examination cycle**, whichever is greater, before being able to reapply for accreditation. Candidates are expected to use this time to improve in their areas of weakness. An individual reapplying for accreditation will be required to submit the full accreditation fee, new references, a new work sample overview and a new work sample.

An appeal may also be granted if a candidate's examination experience is so unusual that in the view of the Deputy Presiding Officer (Appeals) an appeal is appropriate.

## DEFERRALS

Candidates who have started the accreditation process, but did not submit a work sample, may have their files reactivated during either of the next two accreditation cycles. They must confirm, in writing, their intention to re-enter the program. Deferral forms must be submitted to the National Office.

Following submission of a successful work sample, should the candidate be unable to complete the accreditation process because of extenuating personal or professional circumstances, they may request a deferral of the written and oral components.

**Special Leave: An allowance of one additional year may be granted to candidates upon approval of Council for special leave (i.e. parental leave, elder care, critical illness, etc.).**

Your written request must be made to the Presiding Officer of the National Council on Accreditation, in care of the CPRS National Office. The Presiding Officer will consider your request and may grant a deferral. You must complete the remaining components (i.e. written and oral examinations) within the next two years of having completed the project addressed in your work sample (otherwise, the grades obtained on the work sample become obsolete since the work sample must be initiated, completed and evaluated within two years).

If your request for a deferral is denied and you are unable to complete the current accreditation process, your accreditation fee is forfeited. You may be required to reapply and submit another work sample.

### **UNSUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES**

If examiners come to a consensus that a candidate does not yet have the level of experience and competence required of a general practitioner, that candidate is not granted accreditation. To enhance the professional development aspect of the accreditation experience for unsuccessful candidates, the Chief Examiner advises them of their area(s) of weakness so they may use this constructive feedback to improve their overall proficiency before reapplying for accreditation.

Candidates who received a total aggregate mark within five (5) points of the minimum passing grade of 65% will be given an option to redo **any or all** of the three components of the examination which were below 65% in order to attain a passing average within three years. There is a nominal \$50 fee to retake the examinations.

## CHAPTER THREE

### WORK SAMPLE, WRITTEN AND ORAL EXAMINATIONS

The structure of the accreditation examination process recognizes that a single evaluative instrument cannot adequately assess your professional knowledge and competence. Consequently, CPRS combines three methods – each one providing a different insight into your approach to communications practice. Together, they give examiners a comprehensive view of your ability to approach public relations work with integrity, professionalism, intelligence, and strategic and executional skills.

Specifically, examiners will be looking for, and taking into account, the following attributes of a public relations professional:

- the breadth of skills acquired, and demonstration of the ability to transform theory into action;
- the range of communications tools effectively used;
- reaction to challenges in solving, issues management, etc;
- relevance of answers to questions asked;
- readability of the written word through composition, grammar, spelling and syntax;
- articulation of the spoken word;
- ethics, including adherence to the CPRS Code of Professional Standards;
- objectivity;
- logic;
- imagination;
- persuasiveness;
- personal composure.

**To be successful, candidates must achieve a minimum score of 60 per cent on all three components of the accreditation examination AND an overall score of 65 per cent.**

## THE WORK SAMPLE

Your work sample allows examiners to gain insight into your own particular philosophy and skills - i.e., your ability to plan, analyze and execute within the context of current public relations theory and practice.

Your work sample is a description of a public relations program, special project, outstanding event or other public relations exercise. Because it is intended to portray your competence at the time of being accredited, the work sample should be as current as possible (e.g., a work sample will be considered if it was initiated, completed and evaluated within two years prior to your application for eligibility.)

### Form and Content

Since it is you who will carry the APR designation, it is your work that must be assessed. Ideally, you will have had responsibility for strategic planning. You must have been involved at every stage of the project.

**We strongly advise you to review the literature on the writing of formal business reports, especially the presentation of a BUDGET. The latter is an essential component of the work sample, and must be described in sufficient detail to warrant a passing grade for this item in the scoring. If confidentiality prohibits including actual budget numbers, you may use percentages to show how the budget for your project was apportioned.**

**Marks will be deducted if your work sample abstract and/or report exceeds or falls below the stipulated word count. To eliminate this possibility, we encourage you to demonstrate your ability to write within prescribed limits and to take the time to show the word counts on both your work sample executive summary and case study portion.**

Your work sample should demonstrate your knowledge of, and ability to execute, the key elements of public relations planning and programming, and clearly reflect to readers your role as initiator, planner, controller and evaluator.

Your work sample should be presented as a formal business report and include at least the following:

- an executive summary of no more than 500 total words, providing a clear, comprehensive overview of your submission; and
- a case study or analytical discussion of no more than 2500 total words, detailing your planning, execution and evaluation of the project.

In addition to these required elements, you may include as appendices, collateral such as news releases, brochures, photographs, scripts, newsletters, etc. Complete budgets may also be included as appendices, but discussion of them must appear in the main body of your submission. Do not include large or bulky items (T-shirts, hats and other similar promotional items) as these add significantly to the cost of shipping your work sample to different regions for grading.

Appended materials will be considered by evaluators for their illustrative value only, not as evidence of your proficiency or of your program's quality. Therefore, please do not include in the

appendices information or materials that are crucial to the understanding of the subject of the work sample – evaluators may or may not review the appendices in detail.

## **Evaluation Criteria**

Chapter four outlines the essential elements of the public relations process that examiners expect to see as the backbone of your work sample. Examiners use their professional judgment in determining how well you apply these elements to the subject of your work. It must be clear to them that your submission is a legitimate example of public relations work, and that all key elements of the overall planning, execution and evaluation process are both present and adequate. You will receive marks for the quality of your submission in a number of categories. All graders in every region use a standard score sheet (available online at [www.cprs.ca/accreditation/e\\_accredguide.asp](http://www.cprs.ca/accreditation/e_accredguide.asp)) to evaluate your work.

Your work sample accounts for 20 per cent of your total accreditation score.

## THE WRITTEN EXAMINATION

The written exam is used primarily to examine your theoretical and practical knowledge, professional ethics, judgment and philosophical approaches to the practice of public relations.

### Form and Content

The written examination covers a wide range of topics and issues, including history, theory, fundamentals of practice and professional ethics. Knowledge of the CPRS Code of Professional Standards is necessary. You are expected to be knowledgeable about any area of public relations practice – even those in which you may not have practised.

**The examination is divided into three sections: Professionalism, Communications Planning and Public Relations and Society.**

### Part 1 - Professionalism

Candidates are required to answer three questions in this section, selecting either the (A) or (B) option of each pair. The recommended time allocation for each answer is 20 minutes.

### Part 2 – Communications Planning

Candidates are required to select and answer **ONE** of the options given. Recommended time allocation is **90 minutes**. Develop a public relations approach, including the key elements of the **R-A-C-E FORMULA** to guide the development of your communications plan. Preface your response with a brief analysis of the situation, as you understand it. You must include a budget in your approach.

### Part 3 – Public Relations and Society

Candidates are required to answer **three** questions in this section, selecting **either** the (A) or (B) option from each pair of choices. Recommended time allocation for Part 3 answers is **10 minutes**.

The additional 30 minutes is to give you time to read through the examination and proofread your answers.

Samples of written exam questions and answers from previous years are available on-line. The following are examples of questions you might expect in the first and third sections:

- Professionalism -- If a young person comes to you for advice about the field of public relations, what would you tell him/her, and what would you recommend? Courses? Books or other guides? Some form of work of apprenticeship? Other? Give reasons for your answers.
- Public Relations and Society -- If you compare hiring for an entry level public relations position today, would the skills and knowledge you require of candidates differ from those of 20 years ago? Why or why not? Explain the differences you believe exist.

## **Taking the Written Examination**

The written examination is three and a half hours in length and open-book. While you may take reference material into the exam with you, you should discuss the value of doing this with accredited members. Some have found it reassuring to have materials with them, while others have found there is little time to review the information unless specific sections have been highlighted beforehand in anticipation of possible questions.

Please note that pre-pasted answers brought in on diskette are not allowed. The purpose of the written examination is to challenge candidates to express themselves in their own words within a certain time frame, which is a reflection of real-life situations for many practitioners. A career in public relations is more than an open-book examination. PR professionals must have the ability to express themselves, in writing or orally, on the spur of the moment, and to give advice often without the benefit of any notes. Even though you are allowed to bring reference material, the information must be handled only as inspiration. In the end, examination answers must reflect what you understand and are able to compose in your own words, in “real time.” A cut and pre-pasted answer to a question is not a reliable indicator of this skill.

You should consider that examiners are looking for evidence of your thoughtful, reflective consideration of public relations issues and practices. Candidates must achieve an overall score of 60 per cent on the written examination. Candidate must achieve an aggregate score of at least 65 per cent on all three components.

Carefully reading each question is key to successfully completing the written examination. Words like “outline”, “describe” and “discuss” tell you what is expected in a response. You should also watch for questions that require more than one task. For example, questions are often structured so that several points of basic knowledge must first be set out, then used in a specific way.

You should use a computer to complete the examinations. A hand-written examination is also acceptable, but it must be clearly legible to the examiners. Should your computer malfunction, you will be expected to hand-write the examination rather than forfeit it or request a deferral. Examinations will take place in computer labs at Canadian universities and colleges wherever possible.

## **Evaluation Criteria**

To ensure you have the opportunity to fully present your ideas and to demonstrate your writing skill, all questions on the written examination are designed for essay-style answers. Graders in every region are provided with guidelines on distinguishing between strong, average and weak answers. They use standard score sheets and marking guidelines. The answers to the questions in Sections One and Three are graded for each question in its entirety, while the Communications Planning is graded from four perspectives (research; analysis; communication; evaluation).

While you are expected to turn in a written examination that contains few grammatical, spelling or typographical errors, examiners are prepared to forgive typographical mistakes somewhat more readily in your written exam than in your work sample. However, errors in spelling and grammar that clearly demonstrate a knowledge deficit will weigh against the total mark. No additional time beyond the three and a half-hour limit is provided for proof-reading or spell-checking.

Your written examination accounts for 45 per cent of the total accreditation score.

## **THE ORAL EXAMINATION**

The oral exam complements the work sample and written examination by allowing examiners to explore in greater depth your knowledge of public relations and approaches to practice. In addition, it allows them to evaluate your personal presentation capabilities, as well as your oral language and interpersonal skills.

### **Taking the Oral Examination**

Your oral examination usually takes between 45 and 60 minutes. Depending on the number of candidates, it may take place at the end of your written exam or be scheduled for another day. The Regional Examiner, whenever possible, will conduct your oral examination with two other accredited members who have attended a grader orientation session.

Your oral examination will be audio recorded so that if a question or concern arises, the audio can be reviewed. For your own benefit, you should assure yourself the recording equipment is operating and that the voices of everyone participating can be clearly heard.

The Chief Examiner provides standard questions for the Regional Examiner to include in your oral examination. In addition, examiners may ask questions that arise in the normal course of your conversation relating to your responses to previous questions. They will also ask questions about your work sample.

The questions may be wide-ranging, covering topics or issues which may or may not have been part of the written examination. For example, they may involve current events with which you could be expected to be familiar, hypothetical situations or case analyses. You could also be asked questions related to your education or career, on-the-job or extra-curricular activities, or participation in CPRS or other professional association activities.

Examiners may not ask you questions that might be deemed to compromise personal or professional integrity, or which may be seen as prejudicial under the laws of Canada. If you believe such a question is being asked, you may refuse to answer. In a situation where you believe the integrity of the oral examination itself is in jeopardy, you may request that the exam be ended. You are responsible for reporting the circumstances directly to the Chief Examiner within 24 hours.

Examiners may also suspend the oral examination if a candidate does not arrive at the scheduled time, if a candidate appears to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or if a candidate falls ill before or during the exam. In each of these cases, the Regional Examiner is responsible for reporting the circumstances directly to the Chief Examiner within 24 hours.

### **Evaluation Criteria**

The oral examination gives you the opportunity to present yourself as a confident, knowledgeable professional who is comfortable discussing issues related to public relations.

All graders in every region use a standard score sheet to evaluate your oral examination. In addition to evaluating your knowledge, oral language skills and ability to clearly articulate ideas, examiners consider appropriate manner and dress, confidence, interpersonal skills and professional commitment.

The oral examination accounts for 35 per cent of the total accreditation score.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE PUBLIC RELATIONS PROCESS**

#### **THE ENVIRONMENT**

The practice of public relations is inextricably bound to influencing public opinion, attitudes and behaviour in order to manage the relationship between an organization and the environment in which it exists. By creating and maintaining effective relationships which foster mutual understanding with internal and external publics, public relations assists organizations to achieve their mission and goals.

Just as the practice of public relations has become more sophisticated through the years, so has the methodology of influencing opinion. This process involves a series of complex, logical activities planned and executed by a seasoned PR practitioner. This combination of skills, knowledge, planning and communication provides a formula for effective public relations which has been identified as:

- 1) fact-finding and feedback;
- 2) planning and programming;
- 3) action and communication;
- 4) evaluation.

The Canadian Public Relations Society and the Public Relations Society of America recognize this four-step public relations process as the RACE formula: Research, Analysis, Communication and Evaluation. While the RACE formula is used extensively by CPRS and PRSA, it is only an acronym. What is important is that the RACE process represents the steps imbedded in all accepted models designed for planning and implementation programs for positive results in business.

Application of the RACE formula depends on a practitioner's knowledge and skills related to public relations practice. As a candidate for accreditation, you should become familiar with the RACE formula as a guideline for the planning and implementation of an effective public relations program.

Successful public relations practitioners are people who understand the realities of human nature. A familiarity with the humanities and social sciences is essential for anyone wishing to establish, influence or modify public opinion and prevailing attitudes. The RACE formula is a valuable tool for anyone concerned with such endeavours. Materials identified in the Reading List located at the back of this handbook explain the role of social science and the importance of research, analysis, communication and evaluation.

## RESEARCH

Before launching an effective public relations program, you must understand an organization's environment – especially the prevailing attitudes and issues as they are perceived by employees, shareholders and residents of the community or communities in which a program will run.

The attitudes and issues identified through this research dictate the approach and scope of any public relations activity. For example, research may show that attitudes toward the organization are generally positive, indicating the need for a less aggressive, perhaps more focussed, public relations program. Less favourable results may indicate the need for immediate and intensive attention to address specific concerns.

An effective research program identifies the action / reaction equation in an organization's environment. Its purpose is to:

- identify groups within the organization's environment;
- determine current attitudes of these groups toward the organization;
- isolate factors that determine these attitudes;
- identify issues that may alter these attitudes; and
- determine how a public relations program may affect issues and influence attitudes / behaviour.

Some of the most common objectives of public relations research are to:

- identify a problem or opportunity;
- identify or measure the level of understanding of the organization among target groups;
- identify or track current and potential issues;
- shape and pre-test a specific message; and
- evaluate and measure changes in perception.

Popular research methodology and research tools include:

- polling;
- communication audits;
- mail, email and telephone questionnaires;
- person-to-person interviews;
- participant observations;
- content analysis; and
- issues identification and trend tracking.

Valid research must be thorough and complete. If any of the elements within an organization's environment are improperly or inadequately identified and measured, a public relations program will not achieve its objectives.

## ANALYSIS

Research provides you with the knowledge and evidence required to proceed with a comprehensive and effective public relations plan. Once the research is complete, the immediate task at hand is to make sense out of the data collected and to develop accurate conclusions. It is in the “analysis” phase that the public relations practitioner uses all the information at hand to develop communication objectives which will assist the organization to improve in specific areas, manage an issue or crisis, or to move in new directions. Without clearly defined and measurable objectives, you will not be able to proceed.

Drawing upon your experience in human relations and social sciences, you can use this information to build an appropriate program. If your analysis of the available data does not allow you to thoroughly understand the problems or to identify opportunities to affect attitudes, your research is probably insufficient. Identify the additional facts and feedback required and revisit your research phase so that your program is built on a solid, defensible foundation.

Once the problems and opportunities are identified, planning appropriate solutions is feasible. While many management principles could be applied to arrive at a viable solution, virtually all are variations of a basic problem-solving process:

- identify the problem(s);
- determine the factors contributing to the problem;
- identify the critical factors;
- identify possible solutions;
- choose the best solutions; and
- apply solutions through the program.

Scott Cutlip and Allen Center, two of North America’s most noted practitioners, advocate a similar formula under the title *Strategic Analysis*:

- identify objectives;
- consider alternatives;
- compare risk benefits;
- consider consequences;
- make the decision; and
- plan tactics.

Whatever system of analysis is employed, it is critical to ask yourself three key questions:

Where do I want to go?  
What obstacles are in my way?  
How do I overcome them?

The answers to these questions help you prepare an outline of the program, taking into account the communications resources available. You are then ready for the final phase of analysis – refining the methods you will use to achieve your program objectives.

## COMMUNICATION

Communication is the action step of the public relations process. In simple terms, communication is a two-way transmission – a message is sent from one person or group of people to another, with feedback coming from the receiver to the sender. These messages are transmitted in many ways, including print and electronic media, direct mail, and person-to-person discussions. They are interpreted by receivers in many ways as well. Variables such as pre-existing emotional factors, ethnic backgrounds and community dimensions have a significant influence on the way a message is received.

Your challenge as a public relations practitioner is to isolate target groups and design messages so precisely that your intended message is easily and clearly received.

During the research and analysis phases of this process, you identify those factors which may inhibit effective communications. Things like attitudes, awareness, preconceptions, predispositions, group allegiances, levels of education, language, ethnic background, religious affiliation and household income have a definite influence on your program and may enhance or hinder the effectiveness of your efforts.

Armed with a detailed profile of target groups, you are in a position to design specific messages for each group. These are variations on your main theme, individually tailored to the interests of each group by taking into account diverse factors which apply to the groups.

Proper research and analysis also identifies potential barriers to communication activities, referred to in a communications model as noise. Isolating the noise in the various media of communication helps in the selection of methods to be employed.

When planning the communication elements of the public relations process, keep in mind:

Target groups or audiences consist of people who live, work, worship and play in the framework of social institutions in cities, suburbs and villages – consequently, each person is subject to many influences, of which the practitioner's message is only one;

People tend to read, watch or listen to communications that present points of view with which they are already sympathetic or in which they have a deep personal stake;

The mass media create their own separate communities – those who read newspapers constitute a community separate from those who rely on television, radio or the internet for information; and

The mass media influence individual behaviour in a number of ways, not all of which are measurable.

## EVALUATION

The success of your public relations program is essential if you hope to contribute to your organization's goals. Predetermined goals and objectives are critical, not only for the satisfaction of the practitioner, but also for the organization. The work sample and the written oral examination will offer the accreditation candidate opportunities to demonstrate their ability to set reasonable and measurable communication objectives and to evaluate their success.

A public relations plan must include a measurement system to gauge the success of the program and to signal where the program may not be reaching its full potential. This is why it is critical to measure and evaluate the impact of your efforts continually during the implementation phase.

Cutlip and Center say that "evaluation is an ongoing process that enables executives to make the corrective adjustments required to guide an organization safely through the tides and wind of turbulent seas of opinion." Mindful that communication is a two-way process, they also caution that "... dissemination does not equal communication".

Systematic evaluation includes:

- selecting the rationale for evaluation;
- specifying evaluation objectives;
- collecting data;
- analysing data;
- reporting results; and
- applying the results to decision-making.

Evaluation seeks to ascertain:

- whether target groups are receiving the message(s);
- whether specific target groups are responding to the message(s);
- what lasting impression the message(s) leaves in the minds of the target groups; and
- whether the channels of influence and mechanisms of persuasion generated by the message(s) are recognized in terms of positive and favourable responses.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### GRADING GUIDE FOR ACCREDITATION

#### THE WORK SAMPLE

The work sample accounts for 20 per cent of the total accreditation evaluation. The minimum passing grade is 60 per cent. Anyone whose work sample does not reach this minimum passing grade is not eligible to continue with the accreditation process.

Graders carefully review your work sample to assess (*see also Chapter Three*):

- the explanation of your organization's key objectives and the extent to which your program or project advanced these objectives;
- the validity of the program and its effectiveness in modifying or changing attitudes, opinions, behaviour or the public relations environment, and in meeting your project objectives;
- the adequacy of your research in identifying factors bearing on the rationale for the program;
- the appropriate analysis of pertinent stakeholders and related environmental issues;
- evidence that the principles of sound public relations practice have been applied in the search for solutions;
- the development of an appropriate budget and its assignment to each element of your program or project;
- employment of a full range of public relations skills in the conduct of an ethically based program and a method for evaluation;
- demonstration of a well-rounded understanding of the ongoing nature of the public relations process;
- your ability to communicate effectively through the written word, particularly the quality of your paragraph and sentence structure, grammar, syntax and readability; and
- the conciseness and clarity of your abstract.

## **THE WRITTEN EXAMINATION**

Your written examination is worth 45 per cent of your total accreditation evaluation. The minimum pass mark is 60 per cent. You must receive at least this minimum passing grade to qualify for accreditation. (There must be unanimous agreement among the examiners that you have attained the minimum passing grade).

Your written examination is reviewed by each of the examiners using the following criteria:

**RELEVANCE:** Are your answers clear, complete and to the point?

**CLARITY:** Do your answers show an ability to arrive at practical conclusions?

**KNOWLEDGE:** Do you make assumptions in your search for answers which demonstrate imaginative application of public relations theory, recognition and understanding of the RACE formula, and professional skills?

**COMPETENCE:** Do your answers clearly illustrate competence? Do they encompass the application of public relations theory and communications tools, in keeping with the CPRS Code of Professional Standards?

**SKILLS:** Do your answers indicate well-honed communication skills and the application of logic and appropriate conclusions to public relation problems?

## **THE ORAL EXAMINATION**

Your oral examination is worth 35 per cent of your total accreditation evaluation. The minimum passing grade is 60 per cent. You must receive at least this minimum passing grade to qualify for accreditation.

Your oral examination is a 45 to 60 minute interview. The examiners evaluate your performance using the following criteria

**KNOWLEDGE:** Do you demonstrate a level of knowledge indicating familiarity with the practice of public relations, the CPRS Code of Professional Standards and the application of these standards to hypothetical situations?

**PRESENTATION:** Do your responses demonstrate good language skills, an ability to be articulate and persuasive, a wide range of personal interests and a standard of education based on experience and academic achievement?

**COMPETENCE:** Do you demonstrate competence in the diverse elements necessary to arrive at practical solutions and contribute to the practice of public relations, in keeping with the CPRS Code of Professional Standards?

POISE: Do you exhibit confidence and composure responding to questions from the examiners?  
Do you advance positive views on the past, present and future of public relations as an emerging profession?

### **ATTAINING YOUR ACCREDITATION**

In order to ensure fair and accurate evaluation of all candidates, the National Council on Accreditation adheres to a long-standing policy of unanimity among members of the examination panel. This holds true for all components of the accreditation process as well as the aggregate grade.

Once the evaluation of all work samples, written examinations and oral examinations is complete, the Chief Examiner reviews the overall evaluation of each candidate's performance. While the passing grade for each of the three components is 60 per cent you must achieve an overall average of at least 65 per cent.

When you accomplish this level of performance, you deserve accreditation and your APR designation. **Congratulations!**

## CHAPTER SIX

### ADMINISTRATION OF ACCREDITATION

#### ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- 1. The National Council on Accreditation** administers, manages and shall have power to develop terms of reference for the Accreditation Program subject to regulations adopted by the National Board of Directors.

The National Council on Accreditation shall establish and administer the use of the term “Accredited, Public Relations” designated by the suffix, “APR”.

- Develop policy and procedure as it relates to the administration of Accreditation
- Develop and deliver the Accreditation examination process.
- Promote the value of Accreditation
- Monitor that only eligible Accredited members use the designation.
- Administer Accreditation maintenance.

The National Council on Accreditation shall consist of a Presiding Officer, at least four (4) and not more than nine (9) Accredited Members and two (2) representatives appointed by the Board.

- The members of the National Council on Accreditation shall serve a 3 year term renewable once to a maximum of 6 years, the terms so arranged that retirement is on a rotation basis.
  - Members of Council must be Accredited members in good standing who have maintained their Accreditation through the Accreditation maintenance program.
- 2. The Presiding Officer** is responsible for ensuring that the National Council on Accreditation carries out its mandate.
  - 3. The Chief Examiner** is responsible for the development and delivery of the examinations to the eligible candidates in accordance with the guidelines of the National Council on Accreditation. The Chief Examiner is responsible for the recruitment of the Regional Examiners.

The Chief Examiner provides the grader training necessary to ensure that all candidates receive the same equal and fair treatment in the examination process. They work closely with the National Office in all aspects of the process from the time a candidate applies until the completion of the accreditation process.

The Chief Examiner also provides guidance and direction to the Regional Examiners, particularly to ensure objectivity and fairness on behalf of all candidates for accreditation and to ensure that candidate confidentiality is upheld.

- 4. Local Chairs of Accreditation:** An APR from within a member society who is available to provide the necessary information and guidance at the local level. This individual serves as the local bridge between the candidate and the Regional Examiners, who for the purpose of ensuring professional objectivity, should refrain from contact with the candidates on matters directly related to the written or oral examination.

Responsibilities include having regular and ongoing contact with candidates throughout the process, and would involve such tasks as:

- hosting accreditation readiness information sessions
  - encouraging practitioners to participate in the process
  - answering questions about the process at various stages once a candidate has applied
  - assisting the candidate in working through the selection of work sample topics
  - ensuring that candidates receive copies of previous examinations for study purposes, along with copies of the grading guidelines
  - keeping in contact with other accredited practitioners who are willing to provide editorial feedback to candidates prior to submitting their work samples
  - communicating with candidates in the months leading up to the exam
  - arranging for suitable examination facilities, in conjunction with the National Office
  - notifying candidates of the location, time, date, etc. of oral and written examinations
- 5. Regional Examiners** are responsible for the co-ordination of the examination process at the regional level. They ensure that for the various regions, e.g. Atlantic, that the process is co-ordinated, oversee the logistics of the process and ensure that the examinations are carried out as per prescribed procedure and the completed exams are forwarded to the National Office for grading. The Regional Examiners also administer and grade the oral portion of the examinations. In regions where candidates are likely to know one or more of the examiners, the examiner whom the candidate least knows would take the lead role in the oral portion of the exam.
- 6. CPRS National Office** acts as the focal point for dissemination of all communications to candidates, from application, acknowledgement, acceptance into the process, submission of work samples, and results of the process. In addition, the National Office co-ordinates the receipt of work samples, sending them to graders, receiving the samples back and recording the results and returning the work samples to the candidates at the end of the process. Please note that National Office does not copy work samples.

For the written exams, the National Office co-ordinates the distribution and collection of exams, and the tabulation of marks for work sample, written and oral exams results. The National Office also serves as liaison for inquiries regarding accreditation and ensures that inquiries are channelled to the appropriate persons at the local society level.

The National Office is also responsible for advising local accreditation chairs and Regional Examiners of the final results for candidates in their jurisdiction.

7. **The Presiding Officer (Eligibility)** determines eligibility of candidates to the program and ensures that only persons qualified are able to participate in the accreditation process. He/she assesses candidates' experience and determines to what degree, if any, work prior to becoming a member of CPRS qualifies for "time served" in the five year experience window. He/she also reviews the work sample overviews and provides feedback to candidates on whether their work sample project meets the requirements of scope and ownership.
8. **Accreditation Examination Development Committee** works with the Chief Examiner in developing questions for the accreditation exams. This committee encompasses accredited practitioners from all regions, who collectively possess expertise in a broad range of public relations work (i.e. corporate, not for profit, government, agency and the education community). This committee is responsible for ensuring that the written examination is fair, representative of the industry and that it contains a balance of questions to test not only the candidate's grasp of theory, but more importantly, their ability to demonstrate their practical expertise.

## **HELPING OUT**

Accreditation is one of the most important programs sponsored by the Canadian Public Relations Society.

By volunteering to help with the administration of the process, accredited members make a valuable contribution to the future of professional communications practice while remaining connected to the program in whose credibility they have a major stake. In addition, they benefit from a special professional development opportunity, participating in discussions about accreditation itself and various aspects of current public relations practice.

The National Council on Accreditation welcomes any current APR to support the accreditation process by volunteering for one of the following roles:

- Chief Examiner
- examination development committee
- local Accreditation Chair (an APR chosen by the local Society)
- Regional Examiner (five positions, minimum two-year term)
  - region 1 (British Columbia societies)
  - region 2 (Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba societies)
  - region 3 (Ontario societies)
  - region 4 (Quebec society)
  - region 5 (Atlantic Provinces societies)
- grader (no limit on the number of positions or term of appointment)

## GRADER ORIENTATION

The paramount objective in administering the accreditation process is to ensure objectivity, consistency and fairness in the evaluation of candidates across the country.

As a practical way of achieving this objective, a **grader orientation** session is held periodically in each region. Any current CPRS member who has held their APR designation for over 5 years is invited to attend these sessions and become a grader. These sessions allow graders to discuss accreditation issues; approaches to evaluating work samples, written exams and oral exams; and the evaluation of the examination for the coming year. Graders will have a sense of how everyone will consider various types of work or responses to examination questions.

**No one will invigilate or grade components of the accreditation exam without having attended at least one grader orientation.**

All examiners and graders are encouraged to attend the grader orientation as often as possible in order to participate in the discussions and stay current with the views of people across the country. Member society Accreditation Chairs are also urged to attend orientation sessions. They may be able to provide more meaningful assistance to candidates and more capable support to Regional Examiners if they have participated in these sessions.

All accreditation volunteers involved in the accreditation process must sign a confidentiality and privacy declaration to protect all candidates' personal and professional information that they may encounter throughout the accreditation program.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **GUIDE FOR ACCREDITATION CHAIRS OF MEMBER SOCIETIES**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Attaining accreditation is an important milestone in the career of a professional public relations practitioner. It recognizes personal achievement, experience, and competence in the field and, as such, is an important measure of success and self-awareness. The accreditation process is a serious, professional endeavour and must be managed in this manner. Candidates must realize the full experience and rewards of pursuing this recognition.

For this reason, this chapter has been prepared especially for the Presiding Officers and Accreditation Chairs. It will assist in developing effective accreditation programs within the societies so they can offer the guidance, advice, instruction, and reinforcement required to support their public relations colleagues.

Both candidates and accreditation chairs should realize that:

- the APR (Accredited, Public Relations) designation is recognition of effective public relations capabilities and current membership in CPRS;
- the accreditation program is the Society's contribution toward developing and maintaining high professional standards of its members; and
- achieving accreditation status is a source of self-satisfaction for CPRS members and fosters greater recognition of their professional stature among peers, employers and clients.

The primary objective of the accreditation chair is to encourage eligible members with the appropriate qualifications to undertake the accreditation process. Some members may be ready and eager to accept the challenge. Others may be hesitant and need reassurance. The success of the accreditation process, as with any public relations program, begins with identifying and analysing your local situation.

It is important that members understand the true purpose of the accreditation process. Accreditation is a personal challenge - an odyssey that helps them realize their professional strengths, abilities, and growth. It must be stressed there is certainly no need to fear the process, or the thought of facing examinations.

An important factor in reassuring a candidate is to emphasize that the accreditation process is confidential. Until candidates are actually in the examination room, they may not know the identity of other candidates. The results of the work samples, the written examinations, and the oral interviews are known only by those doing the evaluation, the Chief Examiner, Regional Examiner and the CPRS National Office.

## **THE MEMBER SOCIETY'S ACCREDITATION PROGRAM**

The local Accreditation Chairs must be accredited members of CPRS.

Members should consider their position on the committee as a 12-month assignment and develop an action program as soon as possible. Members should keep in mind that candidates sit for examinations in late October of the following year.

If a committee is established, the Accreditation Chair should inform the Presiding Officer of the National Council on Accreditation and the Chief Examiner (through the CPRS National Office) of the names of all individuals serving on the committee. The National Council on Accreditation will gladly advise the committee or assist it with the development of an action plan.

During the month of September, the CPRS National Office sends the Accreditation Chair of each Member Society's accreditation committee a list of local members who may be eligible for accreditation the following year. Eligibility criteria, as noted previously, include membership in the Society and at least five years of full-time employment in public relations (up to six months may be credited for public relations practicum or co-operative education experience offered by a recognized college or university).

Upon examination of an application, the Deputy Presiding Officer (Eligibility) may determine that a candidate does not meet the eligibility criteria for the accreditation process. Any candidate wishing to appeal this decision may do so through the Deputy Presiding Officer (Appeals), supplying additional information or evidence to support eligibility.

The Member Society's Accreditation Chair should begin each year by identifying, with the assistance of the National Office, local members who appear to be eligible during the next accreditation period. They should be contacted and asked if they understand the accreditation process and if they are interested in pursuing accreditation.

The number of eligible members and their individual needs determine the extent of the accreditation chair's activities. These may include an introductory information session to which all eligible members are invited, follow-up training sessions and individual counselling sessions or follow-up calls.

The general information session should be organized as early as possible so that candidates have time to consider the process - its requirements and commitment. In planning this information session, the Accreditation Chair and committee members should prepare to discuss:

- the strict confidentiality of each candidate's application;
- the CPRS accreditation process;
- the application and prequalification process - completing the form, providing references, preparing the work sample overview, etc.;
- the examination content - using previous examination questions as examples;
- the content, approach, subject matter and format of the work sample; and
- books, periodicals and abstracts which may be of value in preparing for the examinations.

Suitable work samples of former candidates who have received accreditation may be obtained online or from the CPRS resource centre located at Mount Royal College in Calgary.

Contact:

Pam Bannister  
Library Information  
Mount Royal College  
4825 Mount Royal Gate SW  
Calgary, AB T3E 6K6

Phone: (403) 440-7789

Fax: (403) 440-6778

<http://library.mtroyal.ca/cprs/>

The information session may close with a discussion and explanation of the value of accreditation for CPRS members, which can be easily reinforced by personal testimonials from committee members (all of whom must be accredited members). The committee should also contact eligible members who were unable to attend the information session.

Those who attend the information session should be contacted shortly afterward to determine whether they are interested in participating in the next wave of examinations. Accreditation Chairs should be prepared to assist anyone who makes the decision to apply just prior to the deadline for applications.

The Accreditation Chair and accreditation committee members should confirm that all applications, references and work samples have been sent to National Office before the deadline and ensure that this material has been received in good order.

During the quest for new candidates, accreditation committee members should keep in mind they may have several colleagues already participating in the accreditation process. They should devote equal time and energy to these members as well. Between December and April, each Member Society accreditation committee should convene a seminar to review work sample requirements with the candidates (*see Chapter Three*). This should be followed by a series of study sessions during the May to September period in preparation for examinations in the fall. This help will ensure candidates are well prepared and confident entering the final phase.

Study sessions can be easily structured to meet the individual needs of candidates and should cover these basic requirements:

- a successful study schedule (*see Chapter Two*);
- study material (*see Reading List*);
- the responsibilities of examiners; and
- what to expect from the written and oral examinations.

The Accreditation Chair is responsible for selecting and reserving a location for the examination, approved by National Office, as well as any logistical planning or assistance required

On the day of the examination, the Accreditation Chair or a member of the committee should be present to organize infrastructure requirements or provide any other assistance. This person should also arrange, with the Regional Examiner, a schedule for the oral examinations.

In keeping with the essence of quality public relations programs, the Accreditation Chair should prepare a comprehensive report following the accreditation process. This report will brief the incoming Chair and committee members so they are aware of objectives, activities, strengths and weaknesses of the program.

## **APR STUDY OUTLINE\***

### **I. BACKGROUND AND BASIC PREMISES OF PUBLIC RELATIONS**

- A. Definitions
- B. Objectives or purposes
- C. Benefits
- D. History including events, dates, people, trends, developments
- E. Socio-economic and political factors influencing practice of public relations.

### **II. PUBLICS AND PUBLIC OPINION**

- A. The Concept of Publics
  - 1. Definition
  - 2. The public at large
  - 3. Special publics
  - 4. Fact-finding sources and references
- B. Public Opinions, Attitudes and Propaganda
  - 1. Definitions
  - 2. Expression of opinions and attitudes
  - 3. Nature of propaganda
  - 4. How opinions and attitudes are formed
    - a. The role of culture, acquired knowledge, biological and social factors
    - b. The role of opinion leaders and non-personal forces and institutions
  - 5. Dynamics of group action
- C. Research: Measurement and Interpretation
  - 1. Informal methods of fact finding; information sources
  - 2. Conditions requiring more formal methods of opinion research; use of research in predicting reaction of publics and in solving problems
  - 3. Research methods
  - 4. Research as a means of program evaluation

### **III. PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE**

- A. The Function of the Public Relations Professional
  - 1. As employer
  - 2. As outside counsel
  - 3. As manager of public relations projects, programs, and people.
  - 4. Organizing the public relations staff according to function and according to publics; centralization versus decentralization; methods of control

B. The relationship of the Public Relations Professional to Management

1. As interpreter of the external environmental trends and issues
2. As evaluator and interpreter of public attitude and opinion
3. As adviser on the public relations significance of contemplated actions
4. As communications expert

C. The Public Relations Program

1. Defining the basic objectives of the enterprise
2. Basing a public relations program on an institution's objectives
3. Defining the publics
4. Using research in developing the program and in problem solving
5. Counselling management regarding an institution's performance and policies
6. Adopting program strategies and tactics; managing the public relations program "by objectives"
7. Supporting marketing and sales
8. Determining communications priorities and aims
9. Staffing
10. Determining costs and budgeting
11. Measuring results
12. Preparing emergency and disaster plans

D. Areas of Public Relations Practice

1. Classified by field of interest of principals or clients, for example, business and industry, financial, international, non-profit, government
2. Classified by special publics of principals or clients, for example, stockholders, employees, customers

IV COMMUNICATIONS

- A. Communications process: theory and models
- B. Barriers to effective communications
- C. Method of communication: visual, auditory, audiovisual
- D. Understanding symbols: verbal, non-verbal expression, graphics
- E. Semantics and readability
- F. Importance of feedback in effective communication
- G. Channels of communication that can be controlled by the communicator
- H. Mass media
- I. Emerging technologies
- J. Advertising as a public relations tool
- K. Pre-testing and post-testing of message

## V ETHICS, LAWS AND REGULATIONS AFFECTING PUBLIC RELATIONS

- A. Reasons for professional ethics
- B. The CPRS Code of Professional Standards
  - 1. “Declaration of Principles”
  - 2. Mission Statement
  - 3. Enforcement of the Code
    - a. Roles of the Board of Directors and Ethics and Judicial Committee
    - b. Nature of the judicial hearing
    - c. Penalties for violation
- C. Laws and Regulations Affecting Public Relations Practice

## VI PROFESSIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS

- A. Purpose and value of professional organizations
- B. The Canadian Public Relations Society
  - Qualifications for membership; organizational structure, membership services; publications
- C. A career track for the public relations professional; continuing education and professional development

## VII PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS

- A. The public relations counsel
- B. Relationship to counsel to client
- C. Relations of counsel with internal public relations staff
- D. Procedures in serving clients
- E. The professional attitude
- F. Economics of public relations practice such as determination of costs, method of compensation, billing procedures, need for working capital

\* Adapted from the PRSA Accreditation Study Guide

## READING LIST

This reading list is provided as a guide to books and periodicals which contain a good selection of the prevailing ideas regarding public relations theory and practice. It does not list or outline **all** the books or periodicals which constitute a public relations body of knowledge, nor is that its purpose. These publications are included because they contain the ideas that have contributed to our current understanding of public relations in terms of its origins and history, principles, and practices.

As you prepare for the accreditation examinations, your goal is **not** to attempt to read all these publications. The examinations are not about what or how much you have read, nor are examination questions drawn directly from these materials. Candidates will not be rewarded on the examinations for simply feeding back the ideas found in these publications. **This is not a study guide**. Instead, these materials present the foundational ideas from which you should form your own thoughts and opinions, and which you should test and evaluate through your practice. The examinations will offer you the opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge of the key ideas these materials contain and your experience in applying them.

A reference list is included in the Body of Knowledge which is available online <http://www.cprs.ca/MbrArea/Accreditation/BodyKnowledge.pdf>.

### ENGLISH

#### PUBLIC RELATIONS AND MASS COMMUNICATION TEXTBOOKS

BEVINS, Thomas. Handbook for Public Relations Writing. Chicago, NTC Business Books, 1988

BROOM, Glen, and DOZIER, David. Using Research in Public Relations: Applications to Program Management. Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1990

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CUTLIP, CENTER and BROOM. Effective Public Relations, Eighth Edition Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 2001

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SINGER, Benjamin D., Ed. Communications in Canadian Society. Toronto, Nelson Canada, 1995

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WRIGHT, W. John, and Christopher J. DuVernet. The Canadian Public Affairs Handbook: Maximizing Markets, Protecting Bottom Lines. Toronto, The Carswell Company Limited, 1988

### **CRITICAL AND CONTEXTUAL WORKS**

ALTSCHULL, J. Herbert. Agents of Power. New York, Longman, 1984

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TARAS, David. *The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics*. Toronto, Nelson, 1990

### **PERIODICALS**

IPRA Review. *International Public Relations Associations*. 50 Pine Grove, London, N20 B1A, United Kingdom. (semi-annual).

*Managing The Human Climate*. Philip Lesly Co. 130 Randolph, Chicago, Illinois, 60601, U.S.A. (bi-monthly).

PR Reporter. Box 600, Exeter, New Hampshire, 03833, U.S.A. (weekly)

Public Relations News. (Denny Griswold, Ed.). 127 East 80<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, New York, 10021, U.S.A. (weekly).

Public Relations Quarterly. (Howard Penn Hudson, ed.). 44 West Market Street, Rinebeck, New York, 12572, U.S.A. (quarterly).

Public Relations Review. 7398 Baltimore Boulevard, College Park, Maryland, 20740, U.S.A. (weekly).

Public Relations Strategist. Public Relations Society of America. 33 Maiden Lane, New York, New York, 10038-5150, U.S.A. (quarterly).

Public Relations Tactics, Public Relations Society of America, 33 Maiden Lane, New York, New York 10038-5150 U.S.A. (Monthly)

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