

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

### Public Relations Committee

Branches through their PR Committees should establish good relations within their communities by informing the leaders and general public of their involvement in the community i.e. supporting local charities, sponsoring of youth sports, bursaries, and seniors housing.

The Committee should cooperate with all Branch Committees to advertise events or social functions held in the branch and have a template made up for Media releases and a list of media outlets with contact names for their area. It is the responsibility of this committee to ensure the branch has an active presence on Facebook even if there is no website. Often having Facebook or other Social Media pages replaces the need to pay for a website. It is free and easier to keep current. They should ensure that all Social Media site access (i.e., logins and passwords) are retained by the branch and not by individual members.

The PR Chairperson should have a copy of the Legion Magazine Snapshots - Guidelines for Submitting Photos and News booklet, which explains every facet of preparing submissions and photographs to the Legion Magazine and local papers.

Due to the high cost of advertising in the larger daily newspapers it is impossible for most branches to advertise. However, there are community newspapers published on a weekly, biweekly, or monthly basis, which are far less expensive. In some of the smaller communities the Legions have been able to submit articles free of charge. Branches should also look at opportunities for advertising on local cable stations. Where possible the Committee should also look at establishing a web page. It is a good way to get our message out.

The Committee should be comprised of a Chair and a minimum of two (2) members:

- Responsible for promotion of publicity and public relations that furthers the purposes and objects of The Royal Canadian Legion, in accordance with page iv of the *General By-laws*.
- Recommend to the Branch Executive, for approval when the occasion demands, any improvements that could be made in promoting publicity and public relations, particularly in the matter of information on Legion activities or branch affairs being given the widest publicity through social media, the press, radio and television.
- Responsible for issuing media releases to the local media and the forwarding of information on branch activities to the Command News Correspondent for the Legion Magazine.
- Responsible for the compiling and editing of the branch bulletin and moving the branch to an e-newsletter for as many members as possible.

A branch may be in an isolated area but despite its location, small membership or size of the community, it must keep informed on all "Command activities." The works of the branch and the Command must be publicized whenever possible. Local publicity of a Legion project or activity even if the branch itself is not intimately involved can gain the Legion many friends in the community. It will also serve in acquainting non-members with the work of the Legion and may be instrumental in inducing them to join. How often have you heard the remark - "I didn't know the Legion did this kind of work?"

If possible, branches should have a column in their local newspaper where branch and other Legion news is published. All branches should have a printed copy of the annual facts sheet (backgrounder

media release) on hand, for referencing. Easy-to-publish stories which can be submitted; however, meeting minutes cannot be given to outside organizations. Command can also assist by providing suitable material for publication.

A branch should never lose the opportunity to supply speakers at club or school functions, public meetings or any large gatherings. Examples of such opportunities are - anniversary celebrations of other clubs and business associations; schools concerning the poppy campaign; school functions for bursaries or community gatherings. Background information is found on the Dominion Command website under "About Us" where you can find very good material to help with speeches and you can always contact BC/Yukon Command for added help.

It is recommended that at branch and zone levels, a member is appointed as Public Relations Officers. It will be their responsibility to keep the work and achievements of the Legion before the public. It is the Public Relations Officer's duty to forward to BC/Yukon Command reports of branch activities for publication in the Legion Magazine. They should also keep in close contact with local newspapers.

The PR Committee developed the following guidelines to assist PR Chairs at branch level:

### **Action Points and Guidelines for Branches**

The suggestions are intended to help branches improve and increase community awareness of the aims and objectives of the Royal Canadian Legion.

Presenting a positive image to the public is the biggest challenge that is faced. The responsibilities of the PR Committee or publicity Chair at branch level are no different than the responsibilities for that position at zone or the Command levels. The member responsible for PR has to be involved in the work of almost every committee. Whether it is promotion of the poppy campaign, seeking recognition for the charitable donations made by the branch or promoting the membership drive, PR is involved in most branch activities.

If the branch bylaws do not currently allow for a PR Committee, then Branches could review their bylaws and look into making amendments. Branch bylaws should give the President the opportunity to appoint someone off the Executive to be the PR Chair, keeping in mind that the PR Chair will have to work closely with the Branch President. **The Branch President is the Senior Officer and generally the one that should be making statements to the media on behalf of the branch or they also have the authority to delegate those duties. The PR Chair should not make public announcements or statements not previously authorized by the President or the Executive.**

It is recommended that once a PR Chair has been appointed, the PR Committee is given a working budget, since promoting the Legion through stories, articles and advertising will require one. However, like other committees, the PR Committee must develop a business plan and detailed budget for consideration of the general membership.

In establishing the committee members, it is encouraged that the PR Chair include a representative from the Ladies Auxiliary (LA), where applicable. The LA put forward a positive image in the community that only enhances the image of the branch.

## Guidelines

- **PR Committee:** Each branch should designate a member, who will in turn strike a committee (one to three members), to design and establish public relations capability for the branch. These individuals should be responsible for designing **as well as carrying out** the program and must report to the Branch Executive. Persons designated may wish to divide the functions; e.g. in terms of liaison with different target groups.
- The PR Committee should “liaise” with all of the remaining committees in the branch. Members should attend meetings of these committees and explain how to advertise what they do and the results they want to achieve.
- **Use available resources – see listing of references under heading.** If you are promoting a specific Legion project, make sure you gather all material that relates to that subject. As an example, if you were helping the Poppy Committee promote the annual poppy campaign, it would be a good idea to read the Poppy Manual. You need to get an idea of what the poppy fund campaign is all about and how the funds can be spent and how they are raised.
- **Contact list.** The PR person/team should, make up a list of local organizations, groups, media outlets (local newspapers, radio, TV), local politicians and senior civil servants in their area (municipal, provincial and federal) with individual names and contact points. Keep the list current.
- **Activity list.** Make up a list of upcoming local events with which the branch is involved (those associated with financial donations and grants to local individuals or enterprises).
- **Make contact.** Ask for meetings with senior media personnel in your area; newspaper publishers and editors-in-chief, general managers of television and radio stations - **people who set policy**. Go in with a basket of information as to what your branch is doing or planning. Try to get them to designate one individual, reporter, columnist, commentator or editor, with whom you can liaise on an on-going basis. Ask for meetings with your local MLA and your MP. Never forget that the Legion is a large and highly respected organization and is responsible for assisting and being part of communities across Canada.
- **Follow-up.** Maintain the connection, especially after a positive meeting. :
  - i. Ensure to keep the lines of communication open.
  - ii. Follow up with the additional information of materials as agreed.
  - iii. generate a request for more information and,
  - iv. Have someone designated to receive/read it.
- **Be persistent. Be "politely assertive".** Today's society is a mosaic of special interest groups, each screaming for attention. Most media news outlets operate with a bare minimum of staff, limited budgets, are under unremitting pressure, have deadlines and are in a highly competitive environment. If they don't respond immediately, don't give up.
- **Think "event."** Do not simply mail out a cheque and hope somebody notices. Wherever possible try to create an "event" which will draw public interest and thereby engage the attention and attendance of politicians and media interest. They don't have to be spectacular. Look for and invent opportunities. Follow the “Quality of Life” ceremony established by Command. If you want to talk about how that program is arranged call the Command office or

talk to your Zone Commander. Parades to the town cenotaph and associated ceremony on May 8 (VE Day) or August 15 (VJ Day) are surely mandatory. Plan events commemorating other significant dates (they don't all have to be in 1945). Collaborate and co-operate where feasible with other service organizations and other branches.

- **Give them something to remember you by.** Pins, Canadian flags, T-shirts, coffee mugs; there's a lot of inexpensive (sometimes-free) paraphernalia out there and people love it, younger children particularly. While much of it is thrown away, a good deal ends up on shelves and bedroom dressers. They become a frequent reminder to anyone that walks by. One item that was well liked by one branch was balloons with the RCL crest, inflated on a stick and given out by Legion members to the crowds at annual Community Days. This is inexpensive and a big hit with kids in particular, but a great PR exercise.
- **Be imaginative.** Think of ways to project a positive image; promote new kinds of events and events for all age groups, which give you visibility in the community. Fund-raisers for local causes, sporting events, community facilities, youth sports groups, etc.
- **Involve the membership. Identify the talent.** In every branch there is bound to be someone who enjoys promoting and marketing, someone else who enjoys dealing with media, someone who enjoys working with kids, someone with extensive ties to the business community, someone with good political connections. Find out who they are and get them on board. It's amazing what people will do if they are given a challenge, a mandate, a little direction, and, if they feel they're part of a special team with a unique mission.
- **Exchange information.** Sound won't travel in a vacuum. You can multiply the PR effect of your branch's activities hundred-fold by letting other branches know about them and in particular, BC/Yukon Command. BC/Yukon Command's ability to promote a positive image for the Legion in BC is very much dependent on the information it gets from the branches. Without that information, there is not enough of good news to share with the media.
- **Remember what's behind you.** The Legion is a respected organization with a distinguished tradition of national and community service. It has an honourable mandate, a huge communications infrastructure (in terms of over branches nationally, of them in BC/Yukon Command) and it is perceived as having considerable wealth (certainly in terms of capital assets.) It is not an organization to be taken lightly. In representing it at the branch level, you have considerable clout.
- **Watch your flanks.** Identify where you are vulnerable, and take remedial action. All the good work in the world can be undone in an instant by one perceived "scandal" or impropriety. As the media sees its job, it is to spot and probe those weaknesses, not to report your good works.
- **Make the effort. Make it happen.** Long gone are the days when an organization could assume a high positive public profile and approval by simply doing good work. Today, good public relations require extensive thought, planning, knowledge of your market (not to mention of your product) and intensive effort applied steadily over time. One of the most significant points brought forward at a PR meeting in Ottawa was that there is a lack of communication throughout most levels of the Legion - not just PR people, but all members of branch/zone Executive are RESPONSIBLE to become more knowledgeable about all aspects of Legion work and should spread the word both to members of their branches and the public. They

should be aware of all levels of Legion participation in projects from branch support of local charities to BC/Yukon Command supported endeavours and of course to all of the major events sponsored by Dominion Command, i.e. Terry Fox Youth Centre, Encounters with Canada, RCEL, Dominion Track and Field Championships, Guardians of Unity” and all of the other ongoing programs.

- **Legion dress - That first impression.** Remember every time you put on the uniform you are on inspection. You represent the organization and it is imperative that proper protocol be observed with respect to the full Legion uniform. The official description of what constitutes “Legion Dress” is included in Section 1 of the Ritual, Awards and Protocol Manual.
- **Recognition of supportive media.** If you are a branch that has a good working relationship with any outlet of your local media - make sure you recognize their services. The Ritual, Awards and Protocol Manual carries information on how to apply for a Media Award. You can also give Certificates of Appreciation to local media. Everyone likes to be thanked and what better way to ensure good future coverage than by publicly recognizing the contributions made by the media.

### **The Legion Magazine**

The Legion Magazine subscription is included in the per capita tax. Continued delivery depends on prompt payment of dues by a member. The magazine is not continued to members not paid up by 31 January. There are forms available from the Legion Magazine to report deaths of members for the Last Post column.

BC/Yukon Command policy is that every submission received is forwarded to the Legion Magazine. Please keep in mind that neither BC/Yukon Command staff, nor the Command News Correspondent, is responsible to edit any submissions.

The address and guidelines for submissions can be found in the front of each Legion Magazine edition ([www.legionmagazine.com](http://www.legionmagazine.com)).