**American Society of Landscape Architecture**

**Chapter Public Relations Guidelines**

**2015**

**Introduction**

ASLA National is pleased that you, our member, are taking a proactive approach to media outreach. These guidelines are intended to help ASLA’s state chapters establish an effective public relations program to increase public awareness of the landscape architecture profession.

The ASLA Public Relations team wants to give you every possible tool to create a successful media strategy. We are always on hand to help draft, pitch, or edit your media materials, and are happy to field any questions or concerns you develop while creating your campaign.

**What Is Public Relations?**

Good public relations is not publicity, advertising, or marketing. It is simply what causes various publics interested in (or exposed to) landscape architecture to react favorably towards the profession. Your role, as the public awareness representative, is to build a favorable reputation for both your chapter and the landscape architecture profession. Public relations include ongoing activities to ensure the chapter and profession have a strong public image. Often, public relations is conducted through the media, i.e., newspapers, television, magazines, websites, etc.

**What is Newsworthy?**

News is simply what is new or unique. It does not have to be catastrophic, dramatic, or awe-inspiring. There are four essential media opportunities for each state chapter every year:

* **Chapter Awards**
* **A Project** that affects the local community
* **Expert Tips** from local landscape architects
* **World Landscape Architecture Month (WLAM)**.

At the end of these guidelines, you will find either a template or example press release/media advisory for each of these occasions.

Let’s look at how these opportunities are newsworthy.

**Chapter Awards** show that local members’ projects have an impact on their community; if the projects are not local, that the member is an award-winning professional of which the community should be aware.

**A Project** may or may not be newsworthy, so use your judgment. Does the project you are promoting positively reflect on the profession? Has there been disagreement internally surrounding its implementation? Does it change or influence the community for the better? Is it incredibly innovative? Ask yourself these questions before pitching a journalist.

**Expert Tips** shows a journalist that you care about your community and can provide good articles that are interesting and pertinent to their readership. The more tailored the tips are to a community, the more likely a journalist is to post your article.

**WLAM** is a great time to announce all of the chapter activities your chapter has planned. This shows community support and development. It also may be a place that reporters will have camera crews cover to get footage for local nightly news. Find out if your local TV station has special segments that highlight local businesses or small business owners who are improving the communities in which they live.

These four events create opportunities to educate your cities about landscape architecture, the varieties of projects landscape architects work on, and promote the importance of landscape architecture.

**Developing a Message and Communications Plan**

Your story is newsworthy, but why do you want everyone in your state to know about your accomplishment? Any good media outreach effort starts with a goal, to connect with the community by building positive relationships and promoting two-way communication. This section will help you formulate a strategy to accomplish your chapter’s specific goal(s) and a communications plan. The development of objectives will also establish criteria against which campaign results can be measured.

Here are some steps developed by Bradford Fitch, author of the *Media Relations Handbook for Agencies, Nonprofits and Congress*:

1. Agree on your goals. Make sure everyone in your chapter agrees on the message goals. It should tie in to the chapter’s core mission and values.
2. Identify target audiences. Who is the message intended for? What are their needs, interests, and aspirations? What are their values and how do those values related to your chapter? Fitch notes that “narrowing the goals and audiences will greatly enhance the likelihood that a campaign message will be successful and will be very helpful when determining which communications vehicles to use.”
3. Develop and clarify language. Words are the building block of any public relations campaign. Develop your chapter’s message with your fellow chapter members, and draw on all key volunteers. Everyone must be comfortable with the language the chapter will repeatedly use. Also consider the language that will be resonate with your target audiences.
4. Get creative – develop novel strategies that help the message stand out. According to Fitch, a boring message “deserves to fail.” There is also intense competition for the media’s and public’s attention. What will make your message stand out? What phrases or images are most likely to connect with your audience? Don’t forget nonverbal support—how can photographs, graphs, films, artwork and a webpage clarify and visually enhance the written message? Bar graphs or pie charts are easier to understand than columns of numbers.

These steps take you through the thought process of any PR professional when identifying their client’s needs. The steps ask questions and demand direct answers allowing the professional to filter out unnecessary elements and create a concise, well-written, and attention-grabbing media outreach plan.

**Developing a Communications Plan**

According to Fitch, creating a good communications plan involves asking questions designed to evoke ideas that will capture the attention of the media and the public. For example, how does what we do affect people’s lives? What is the average person interested in? What would make the front page of the paper or the top TV story? In general, keep these questions and answers as broad as possible.

1. Identify and clarify objectives. Objectives are different from goals. For example your goal may be to increase teenagers’ awareness of the landscape architecture profession. Your campaign message may be that landscape architecture fuses art and science and is a fun profession. Your objective may be to get more teens to visit your pop-up park by the high school.
2. Establish milestones and timelines. As you develop your communications plan, identify the key milestones that will represent the building blocks of your plan. These milestones may be attached to such dates as World Landscape Architecture Month, Olmsted’s birthday, and Park(ing) Day. Map these events on a calendar, and make your chapter has the resources to fulfill your objectives.
3. Develop an action plan. It should include the tasks to be performed, person(s) assigned to the task), and timeline or deadline for the assignment. Keep in mind other events that might be occurring that could compete for the media’s attention.
4. Conduct contingency planning. Consider what you would do if something goes wrong. Also, what you could do if you had additional resources. For example, your plan may include emailing 20 press releases and doing follow-up calls to 25 percent of your media list. You could double this to 50 percent if some tasks get done more quickly than anticipated. Or consider writing an op-ed.

**Press Release**

A press release is the number one tool for communicators. You will use a press release to convince reporters to do a story. You can also use them as historical records of your chapter’s events and announcements.

Please look at the press release template at the end of this handbook. The first paragraph of a press release should summarize the major facts of the story. Use the five “Ws and one H” of journalism: Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How. Subsequent paragraphs should fill in the details, and contain facts of lesser importance. Use a clear headline telling what will happen. Always include contact information.

When writing your press releases, stay focused on your chapter’s objectives, but also keep in mind ASLA National’s goal. If fitting, perhaps take a paragraph to speak about the benefits that only landscape architecture could have contributed to a particular project.

Avoid jargon when communicating to daily newspapers, general interest magazines, and especially national media. Remember that words, ideas, and terms commonly used in your field may not be familiar to most members of the general public. However, when communicating with a specific audience, such as the readers of *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, jargon should be used to prove oneself and work.

Consider visuals—i.e., photographs, graphs, videos, artwork, and a webpage—to clarify and enhance your written message.

**Media Advisory**

A media advisory lets reporters know about your event and gives them the information they need to cover it. E-mail this document before your event, and be sure to call reporters to make sure that they got it. Use a short, clear headline telling what will happen. Always include contact information. Keep it short. You can put more information in a press release later on. Also, remember to write in the future tense: your event hasn’t happened yet.

**Opinion-Editorial (Op-Ed) Piece**

An op-ed piece is a brief commentary in your local newspaper's editorial page that can be used to examine an issue or to explain your opponent’s position on an issue. Start out with a premise and support it with facts, expert opinion, and personal experience. The piece should be no more than 750 words, and should be e-mailed to the opinion-editorial editor. To learn more about writing an op-ed, read the editorials in your local newspaper. If you are planning an event, send out a related op-ed piece two weeks prior.

**Pitch to Print and Online Media**

It is now time to implement everything you have just read. Pitching to the media requires three things: a media list, media kit, and pitch.

*Media List*

A media list is a list of pertinent journalists and publications who are most likely to pick up your story. It may include TV, radio, print, and online magazines/blogs. It may include up to 30 local journalists and producers. If you are pitching to a niche audience, then perhaps the list will have only a few, key contacts listed.

ASLA National’s public relations and communications coordinator is happy to use ASLA’s media database service to create a media list for your pitch. The coordinator has vast experience working with the media and creating lists. If you, as the member, explain your goal and objectives to the coordinator, they should produce a list of local or regional media tailored to your needs.

*Media Kit*

A media kit may be as simple as a press release. It could also include elements such as a FAQ sheet, PowerPoint files, etc. Whatever forms your media takes, the purpose should be to give more information to the journalist with whom you are communicating.

It is usually not necessary to create large, expensive media kits. Most often, you can email the press release and FAQ sheet to a journalist. You can paste the entire release into the body of the email and attach the FAQ sheet for more information.

If you have a member who has volunteered their time to pitch to the media, the media kit outlines the messages and pitch points you’d like them to use. If you are having an event, your chapter can hand out kits to the media who attend.

*Pitch*

Organize your pitch before you start calling reporters. A pitch made over the phone should be rehearsed, be only 30 seconds long, and in that 30 seconds, contain everything a reporter or producer needs to know: Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How.

*Pitching Tips*

* Create and practice your pitch. Before picking up the phone, practice verbalizing your talking points.
* Do not be discouraged by “no’s” or voice mails. Journalists have strict deadlines and can be hard to reach. When targeting a particular publication, radio station, or TV affiliate, consider identifying several reporters or editors at that same outlet who might be interested in your story.
* Make it relevant. Make sure the story idea you are proposing is suitable for the reporter you are calling.
* Be clear, concise, and convincing. If you need to leave a message, speak clearly and be sure to provide your phone number directly after stating your name, then leave your number again at the end of the message. Avoid providing too many details or talking points in a voice message.
* Follow-up. Always provide a reporter with follow-up communication. For example, if you had a conversation with a reporter who seemed interested, you should aim to follow-up that same day with an e-mail containing supporting, value-added information. This can help build your relationship and credibility with the media.

*Telephone Pitch Example*

Hi, my name is (NAME) and I am calling from the (STATE) chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects. I wanted to let you know about the pop-up park that (CHAPTER NAME) will create for Park(ing) Day over by the state capitol on Main Street (PROJECT NAME AND LOCATION).

Pause here to see if reporter says anything; continue with pitch if nothing is said during the pause.

(PROJECT NAME) is significant to our community because it… (give two reasons why it is important or improves the area).

Would you be interested in covering (EVENT)?

Or

Would this be something you publication would be interested in covering?

Okay, thank you for your time.

**Social Media Tips**

Utilizing social media is the fastest and easiest way to get your message out and build relationships with members, sponsors and the community.

*Twitter*

When you set up a Twitter account, you want it to attract your members as well as non-members. You should use Twitter to post your chapter news, but don’t hesitate to post news stories, pictures, and other commentary in an attempt to establish your account as the local authority on all facets of landscape architecture. Once you create an account, follow ASLA at @landarchitects. We will be happy to follow you back and share your tweets.

Tip: You only have 140 characters, so make them count. Shorten links with bit.ly and keep your message concise.

*Facebook*

Though the content shared on Facebook should be similar to the information on Twitter, you are able to better integrate visual elements into your posts. For example, a picture album or video should be shared on Facebook. News stories will automatically have thumbnail pictures alongside of the posts. Follow ASLA at <http://facebook.com/americansocietyoflandscapearchitects> to see the content that we provide to our followers every day.

Tip: Setting up a Facebook **page** is the best way to attract followers. Facebook **profiles** are for people who need to accept or deny requests. Since you will not want to approve every friend request, this can be a waste of time. A Facebook **group** can get the message out in a similar way, but these updates rarely show up on a follower’s news feed, making it harder for a user to get the information you send out.

*Others*

Other social media accounts are not necessary, but they will help you promote your chapter in a professional or personal setting. LinkedIn is helpful, as your members will want to connect with your chapter for more news and to virtually meet other members. ASLA uses Instagram, Pinterest, and Houzz to reach a different audience, mostly non-members, to raise awareness to those outside of ASLA and further our voice in the profession and in the green community.

**Timeline**

*One week before the event/announcement*

* Email a media advisory to local television stations and newspapers.
* Start calling reporters once the media advisory has gone out.

*Day before the event/announcement*

* Resend the media advisory and continue to follow-up with reporters.
* Check in with reporters who expressed interest for onsite interviews or having a camera crew attend.

*Pre-Event*

* Distribute press release announcing the event to all media outlets. Bring copies to have on hand at the event and to provide to any attending reporters.
* Continue to make follow-up calls the morning of your event.
* Follow-up with television stations again to determine if any will be sending camera crews.

*At the Event*

* Have all members of the media sign in with their contact information for tracking and follow-up purposes.
* Introduce yourself to all media who attend the event. Provide them with your contact information.

*Following the event*

* Follow-up with journalist who attended your event to make sure they received all of the information they need to complete their story.
* Monitor the media outlets that attended your event for media coverage.
* Have ASLA National conduct a local, regional, or national media scan.

**Conclusion**

Thank you for taking the time to read this manual. We hope that is helps you and your chapter get some very valuable media attention.

ASLA National has a team of public relations professionals to help guide you through the entire media relations process. If, after consulting this manual, you have questions, feel free to consult with any PR team member during any stage of your outreach process. We are always on hand to help promote your projects, awards, and issues.

Contact:

James “J.R.” Taylor
PR and Communications Coordinator
(202) 216-2345
jtaylor@asla.org

Karen Grajales
PR Manager
(202) 216-2371
ktgrajales@asla.org

*Reference*

Fitch, Bradford. Media Relations Handbook for Agencies, Associations, Nonprofits and Congress. 2004, TheCapitol.Net.

**AWARDS**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Karen Grajales **(Input your information here)**

American Society of Landscape Architects

(202) 216-2371

ktgrajales@asla.org

**XXX WINS 2014 LANDMARK AWARD**

**Project Sparked New Era of Design and Community Revitalization**

**Washington, DC, September 1, 2014** — The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) has announced that the XXX will receive the 2014 Landmark Award during the ASLA Annual Meeting on November X in Denver.

Designed by XXX with XXX, the **(general description of project and why it is significant)**

The Landmark Award recognizes a distinguished landscape architecture project completed between 15 and 50 years ago that retains its original design integrity and contributes significantly to the public realm of the community in which it is located. Previous recipients include the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, Golden Gate National Recreation Area near San Francisco, and the Charleston Waterfront Park.

The awards jury called the design "**General quote from jury and or president about project"**

*About the American Society of Landscape Architects*

Founded in 1899, ASLA is the national professional association for landscape architects, representing more than 15,000 members in 49 professional chapters and 72 student chapters. Members of the Society use "ASLA" after their names to denote membership and their commitment to the highest ethical standards of the profession. Landscape architects lead the stewardship, planning and design of our built and natural environments; the Society’s mission is to advance landscape architecture through advocacy, communication, education and fellowship.

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**PROJECT ANNOUNCEMENT**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: First Last

(State Chapter) American Society of Landscape Architects

(xxx) xxx-xxxx

email@email.com

 **PROJECT NAME UNVEILED (ALL CAPS)**

**Short one liner describing project and significance**

**CITY, ST, Date XX, 20XX** — Two or three sentences that describe the project, who made the project, and why it is significant to/has impacted the community

“This is a highly deserving project,” said Local Official or Chapter President, Their Title here. “Quote continues.”

A longer description of exactly how the project has been used, should be used or what the projected impact will be on the community.

Continuing from previous paragraph, adding to the information.

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**EXPERT TIPS**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Karen Grajales

American Society of Landscape Architects

(202) 216-2371

ktgrajales@asla.org

**DON’T SKIMP SOPHISTICATION WHEN CREATING CURB APPEAL**

**Different Strategies Apply to Landscape Design, Other Home Improvement Projects**

**Washington, DC, March 31, 2014** — Home improvement projects can add significant resale value to homes. For homeowners looking to create a stunning first impression, landscape design can add as much as 15 percent over comparable houses. When choosing what projects to invest in before selling a home, different strategies apply between landscape design and traditional home improvement. The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) recommends the following guidelines to maximize your return on investment.

**Don’t Skimp Sophistication**

Typically, the biggest gang for your home improvement buck comes from easy, cosmetic changes like a fresh coat of paint. However, going big pays with landscape design. Research by Michigan State University found that consumers valued sophisticated landscapes over minimal designs. In fact, limited designs with small plants could even reduce the value of a home.

**Exceed the Joneses**

Clemson University found that home price increased more when upgrading a good landscape to excellent versus an average to good. It takes more than having a gardener come every Saturday to make your home stand out to potential buyers. Consider highlighting your entrance with a stone path to your front door. Add some color by planting a small, flowering, fruit tree. Plums trees have dark bark, bright green leaves, and cute pink blossoms in the spring and summer. Not to mention they provide healthy summer-time snacks for you and your family.

**A Growing Investment**

Michigan State University also found that people preferred larger plants over small. This makes designed landscapes one of the few home improvement projects that actually increase in value over time. For those not selling their home this spring, a new landscape can reap even greater return several years later.

There are many ways to add value with landscape architecture. To learn more or find a landscape architect near you with Firm Finder, visit [www.asla.org/residentialinfo](http://www.asla.org/residentialinfo).

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**WORLD LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE MONTH**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Karen Grajales

American Society of Landscape Architects

(202) 216-2371

ktgrajales@asla.org

**APRIL IS WORLD LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE MONTH**

**Landscape Architects Launch Campaign to Grow Profession**

**Washington, D.C., March 31, 2013** —The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) encourages students and parents to “Discover Careers in Landscape Architecture” this April as part of World Landscape Architecture Month. The month encompasses Earth Day on April 22 and the birthday of Frederick Law Olmsted on April 26, founder of the American landscape architecture profession.

The Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics projects the number of jobs in landscape architecture to grow by over 16 percent during the next eight years. ASLA is working with Heisman Trophy winner, former NFL Pro-Bowl running back, and landscape architecture firm principal Eddie George, ASLA, to promote career opportunities to young people. ASLA chapters across the country will host activities throughout the month of April, highlighting what landscape architects do and the broad range of careers available in the field.

XXX XXXX, FASLA, president of ASLA, has launched an “XXXXX” campaign, challenging each of the Society’s 15,000 members to reach out to at least one K-12 student during April to introduce them to careers in landscape architecture.

A recent survey shows that the average landscape architecture student receives XXXX job interviews during their final semester at school, resulting in two job offers. The starting salary for graduates with undergraduate degrees is $XXX and with graduate degrees is $XXXX. The annual salary and bonus for all landscape architects averages nearly $XXXX, with experienced landscape architects and firm owners earning much more.

To learn more about landscape architecture or to find local events in your area, visit <http://www.asla.org/lamonth/activities2008.html>.

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**MEDIA ADVISORY**

Month, Day, Year

**CONTACT:** Elise McElwain, 123-456-7890, email.

**Dayton Area Landscape Architects to Host Public Activities Showing How Landscape Architecture Is Your Environment, Designed**

**WHAT:** From Alaska, Florida, and everywhere in between, landscape architects across the country will hold simultaneous events to educate the public that landscape architecture is your environment, designed. Downtown Dayton will host local landscape architects who will create chalk drawings, hand out information and be available to answer questions about the profession at the Cox Media Group Building.

**WHO:** Dayton area landscape architects

**WHEN:** Wednesday, August 17

12 Noon to 1 PM

**WHERE:** Cox Media Ground

 1611 South Main Street,

 Dayton, Ohio

**WHY** Landscape architects design iconic places like New York City’s Central Park and the FDR Memorial in Washington, D.C., but also downtown squares, local parks and even backyards. The simultaneous events are part of a larger campaign to help bring awareness to works of landscape architecture and the designers who create them.

View all scheduled events nationwide via Google maps at <http://bit.ly/oG4Hxf>.

Learn more about landscape architecture on 08.17.11 at [www.asla.org/design](http://www.asla.org/design).