

Background

At the request of Ed Wolahan of the National Academy of Corrections, NIC Information Center staff conducted a national mail survey of heads of correctional agencies between November 15 and December 16, 1991. The survey addressed the following general aspects of media relations: who has responsibility for media relations in corrections agencies; whether the position is full- or part-time; and to what extent correctional agencies have been the subject of national media attention. The survey was also designed to determine the interest of agency heads in participating in Academy-offered training in FY 1993.

Method

Survey questionnaires were sent to those on the mailing lists for the following Information Center publications: ***Corrections Quarterly Summary***, ***Large Jail Network Bulletin***, and ***Community Corrections Quarterly*** (medium to large community corrections agencies only). The total number of surveys disseminated was 267.

As agreed at the start of the project, Information Center staff made no follow-up calls to those who did not respond to the survey. By December 16, 128 surveys had been returned. The summary of results that follows is based on those surveys, which represent a return rate of **48** percent.

Results

1. Breakdown of responses by type of agency

	Total Responding Agencies	Percent of Total Responses
Community corrections agencies	49	38%
Large jails	32	25%
State corrections departments	47	37%
Total	128	100%



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2. Responsibility for media relations

	Total Responses	Percent
Full-time public information officer	54	42%
Staff person with public information and other duties (often a deputy administrator or general counsel)	30	23%
Agency director/director designee, or team including director	41	32%
Other	3	2%

3. Agency appearance in national media In the past year

	Total Responses	Percent
Agency appeared in national media	84	66%
Agency did not appear in national media	40	31%
N/A	4	3%

4. Interest In participating in FY '93 training

	Interested	Not Interested	N/A	Percent indicating interest
Community corrections agencies	38	8	3	78%
Large jails	31	2	-	97%
State corrections departments	41	6	-	87%

5. Preferred training approach

	Total Responses	Percent
Training for director only	16	12%
Training for team of director and PIO staff	97	78%
Either	3	2%
N/A-	8	6%

6. Suggested topics for media Issues training

General media management & awareness

- Identifying local media resources
- Creating/maintaining good and professional working relations with local media
- Tapping the national media
- Controlling the media; tricks of the trade; making the media work for you

- Generating good news; getting the media to report the positive
- Developing trust between agency and media
- Agency's right to demand responsible reporting
- What can happen if an agency doesn't have a media program
- Local media relations for branch agency managers (community corrections)
- Preparing materials for audience-specific information/education programs: courts, prosecutors, service providers, the public
- Proactive media approaches to benefit the agency
- Handling sensitive cases effectively
- What is "success" in media dealings?
- Responding to politically sensitive/emotionally charged issues, especially for TV
- The need for a full-time PIO vs. a multi-hatted person
- Sharing media efforts/resources among jurisdictions
- Case studies/discussion of successful corrections agency PR campaigns; overview of how other corrections agencies work with the media
- Examination of the relationship between media and government
- Creative financing of media projects during periods of budget curtailment
- Prevention strategies and the media
- When to complain about coverage/when not to

Community relations

- Using media to maintain positive community relations
 - Speakers' bureau: developing/training for/using
- Editorial board conferencing
- Accessing community groups and public forums
- Development of corrections marketing strategies-how to be proactive at low cost
- Proactive means of using PSAs
- Coordination of regional events (Corrections Officer Week activities)
- Enlisting the citizen in the shared responsibility of corrections

Media techniques

- How to prepare press releases/media statements
- How to give the broadcast media what they need
- How to prepare for/conduct oneself in interviews
- How to select information to be provided to media
- How to select and groom reporters
- How to use videos for good PR
- How to prepare for appearing on camera
- Responding to the press pool
- Teleconferencing
- Appropriate use of terminology/language
- How to avoid the "no comment" comment
- skills in writing editorials
- Use of electronic/desktop publishing

- Use of visual aids to communicate “1,000 words”
- Redefining difficult questions to make them answerable
- Voice and delivery
- Gaffe prevention: “every mike is a live mike.”

Negative media situations

- Dealing with media “feeding frenzies”
- Handling a hostile press
- Using a “divide and conquer” vs. a press conference approach
- Alleviating the results of inaccuracies, sensationalism in reporting, especially in cases
 - where the agency has already shared valid information
- Strategies for dealing with “tabloid” media: print/broadcast, local/national
- Erasing negative images in public mind: “Is there life after Rodney Ring?”
- Putting a good face on bad news
- Dealing with the media bias against public agencies
- Controlling the press in a crisis situation
- Reporting disasters/disturbances
- Damage control/reacting to adverse publicity
- Determining level of agency response to incidents: at what point does the agency chief take over media relations in a crisis situation?

Agency administration’s role In good media/public relations

- Media relations as a management team effort rather than a function of a separate PIO; role of the management team in PR
- How to educate staff/administrators on what is newsworthy; involving local administrators/staff in developing positive story i&as
- Importance of the agency media person being included on the management team
- Educating new administrators on media relations; media coordinator’s role
- Administrators’ role in public education on corrections issues
- Need for senior management to understand importance of media relations
- Sensitizing department managers to media relations/public information, especially in crisis. Manager training.

Managing release of Information

- Establishing a public/media relations system
- What material is “public record” and what isn’t? (Photos, internal investigation material)
- Response to media when legal aspects (confidentiality, records disclosure) prevent release of information
- Are there questions the media can’t legally ask?
- Can an agency deliberately withhold information from the media?
- Responding to information that has leaked out
- Liability for statements to the media
- Applicability of public record law to electronic mail, phone mail, computer information

- Managing media access to public information
- Model policies/procedures on media interaction
- Training materials for departmental training
- Model job description for a PIO/media representative
- Role of the media representative during a disturbance
- Handling “investigatory reporters”
- DOS and don’ts for the media representative
- How to handle FOIA requests
- Privacy of peace officers and prisoners
 - Handling inmate interviews
- Media access to prisons/facilities (*Pell v. Procunier*, U.S. Sup 1974)
- Recovering costs of duplication/production of archived information for disclosure to media
 - Long-range PR planning
- Developing objectives for a PR program

Correctional Issues coverage In the media

- How to train the media on modern corrections: new generation concept, “guard” vs. “correctional officer” language, corrections professionalism
- Corrections as crime prevention
- Promoting community corrections as a utilitarian response to crime
- Promoting prevention, treatment programs
- Handling jail and prison crowding as a media issue
- Educating media/public on sentencing systems/policy and its impacts: state vs. federal sentencing, determinate vs. indeterminate sentencing, parole aspects, furloughs, release of repeat offenders due to statute
- The importance of a continuum of services for a successful transition from jail/prison
- How to get coverage for successes in parole
- Covering specific issues and problems: extraditions, AIDS, drugs, medical services, youthful offenders, suicide, escape, etc.
- Dealing with union, racial, inmate grievance issues
- Public information/support for sentencing and program options: boot camps, intermediate sanctions, community service, sex offender sentencing/programs
- Creating ‘feminism’ approach in response to crime
- Police issues
- Death penalty and execution procedures
- Increasing awareness of community partnerships
- Positive information on the prison system-getting media interested in staff accomplishments, new programs, etc.
- Discussion of recent court decisions
- Correctional industries-inmates taking jobs from private industry
- Cost of corrections vs. other public needs in a recession
- Siting new facilities

Non-media communications Issues

- Making employee relations material useful, non-propaganda
- Multicultural training
- Improving staff morale during layoffs
- Legislative lobbying
- Information sharing among state agencies
- Departmental newsletter development
- Crowding-walking the line between real resource needs and your administration's budget request