

American Society of Landscape Architecture

Chapter Public Relations Guidelines

2018

Introduction

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 and 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 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 online and print media outlets and social media.

What is Newsworthy?

News is simply what is new or unique. It does not have to be catastrophic, dramatic, or awe-inspiring. There are five 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)**
- **PARK(ing) Day**

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

Let's look at how these opportunities are newsworthy.

Chapter Awards show that members' projects have an impact on their local communities; **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 show 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 readers or viewers, the more likely a journalist is to post your article.

World Landscape Architecture Month is a great time to announce all of the chapter activities your chapter has planned. It shows community support and development. Reporters may even bring camera crews to get footage.

PARK(ing) Day showcases how landscape architects create vibrant public spaces in areas as small as a parking spot. Use this event to show how your community benefits from turning small areas into spaces to exercise, relax, or make a social statement.

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

Developing a Message and Communications Plan

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.** 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 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, videos, and other visuals clarify and visually enhance the written message? Social media posts are also another type of message that you can easily post and share.

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 sure 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 an essential tool for communicators. It is a short, compelling news story used to quickly publicize information that may impact or be of interest to a large group of people. Anyone can issue a release. A chapter can use releases to convince reporters to do a story. They also serve 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 most journalists. Remember that words, ideas, and terms commonly used in your field may not be familiar to the general public. However, when communicating with a specific audience, such as the readers of *Landscape Architecture Magazine* and other trade publications, jargon should be used to prove oneself and work.

Consider visuals—i.e., photographs, renderings, etc.—to clarify and enhance your written message. Include your chapter's social media handles in your releases.

Media Advisory

A media advisory is an invitation that lets reporters know about your event and gives them the information they need to cover it. E-mail this document before your event. 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)

An op-ed is a brief commentary in your local newspaper's editorial page that can be used to explain your 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 400 to 750 words, depending on the publication's requirements. It should be e-mailed to the op-ed 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 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, depending on your region. 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 to create a 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 will 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 simply email links or attachments to a journalist (see the email pitching tips below).

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 hosting an event, your chapter can hand out kits to the media who attend.

Pitch

Most journalists prefer to receive pitches through email (exceptions might be made depending on your region and closeness with the reporter).

Email Pitching Tips

- Subject line - Highlight the most useful point to readers. Choose a point that elicits the most curiosity.
- Email body - Get to the point right away. Feature only relevant info. Link to more info or press release. Link to high-res images, i.e., DropBox folder. Include a call to action.
- Keep revising.

Email Pitch Example

Hi *First Name*,

April can't get here fast enough—and it will be a time to celebrate World Landscape Architecture Month!

The American Society of Landscape Architects will soon launch its World Landscape Architecture Month social media campaign. This year, student ASLA chapters will take over ASLA's social media accounts to share their favorite designed outdoor spaces. Other landscape architects—and the public—will also share their favorite spaces using the **#WLAM2018** hashtag.

If you'd like more info about World Landscape Architecture Month, I've added the full press release below. I'll also be happy to get you in touch with ASLA leadership and chapters.

Please consider publishing an article/news item or sharing on social media.

Thank you.

All the best,
J.R.

J.R. Taylor
American Society of Landscape Architects
(202) 216-2371
jtaylor@asla.org
[@landarchitects](https://twitter.com/landarchitects)

Full press release in email format:
(*insert press release here*)

Phone Pitching Tips

- Keep in mind that most journalists prefer emails. They don't have the time to field phone calls and are on strict deadlines. Exercise your judgement before picking up the phone. Phone calls are more acceptable if you have breaking news to share. Please make sure that what you are sharing really is news.
- Give reporters time to read your email before calling. Give them a chance to respond. Generally, it is best to wait a couple of days. Use common sense when considering whether to call.
- Create and practice your pitch. Before picking up the phone, practice verbalizing your talking points. 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. Make sure it is voicemail friendly in case the reporter does not pick up.
- 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 your publication would be interested in covering?

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. Post your chapter news on Twitter, 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 @NationalASLA. We will be happy to follow you back and share your tweets.

Tip: Unless you're replying to someone, never start a tweet with a @. Twitter will only display the tweet to people that follow you and the tagged account.

Facebook

Facebook has the most active users of any social media network. Facebook allows you to reach your current followers and inform the public about the profession as well. Similar to Twitter, you should post content that establishes your chapter as an authority on landscape architecture on a local and national level. Additionally, Facebook is an excellent tool to recap events or social media campaigns with photo albums. Follow ASLA on [Facebook](#) 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.

Instagram

Instagram is a wonderful platform for landscape architects to adopt. Instagram is the most visual social media network, which lends itself to share the projects of your members. Additionally, Instagram stories allows you to give a behind-the-scenes look at office life at a firm or a field visit.

Tip: Connect your Instagram account to a Facebook page to convert a personal account into a business account. Business accounts allow your followers to more easily reach out to you.

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 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.

Sample Timeline

One month before event

- Distribute release to local media including TV, radio, dailies, weeklies, and blogs.
- Make media follow-up calls to determine interest.
- Draft message points for host/speakers pre- and post-event announcements; have approved by relevant chapter members and coordinate with appropriate individuals.

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 it 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 2018 LANDMARK AWARD Project Sparked New Era of Design and Community Revitalization

Washington, DC, September 1, 2018 — The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) has announced that the XXX will receive the 2018 Landmark Award during the ASLA Annual Meeting and EXPO, October 19-22 in Philadelphia.

Designed by XXX Firm for XXX Client, 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**"

High-resolution images are available for journalists. Please contact Karen Grajales at images@asla.org.

About the American Society of Landscape Architects

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Grant Announcement

Contact: First Last
ASLA San Diego Chapter
(xxx) xxx-xxxx
email@email.com

Cabrillo National Monument Visitors Center Wins Community Grant Award

CITY, STATE, Date XX, 20XX — The American Society of Landscape Architects, San Diego Chapter (ASLA SD), announces the recipient of the 2018 \$5,000 Community Grant: the Cabrillo National Monument Visitors Center in collaboration with the San Diego Native Plant Society. The grant supports native habitat restoration and enhancement.

The ASLA Community Grant was established in 1997 as a result of the chapter's commitment to the local community. The grant is awarded to deserving community groups pursuing the cultural, aesthetic and educational enhancement of their local environment.

With the guidance of San Diego native plant expert Greg Ruben, as well as documents and planning prepared by local landscape architects, the Cabrillo project involves performing native habitat restoration and enhancement within 15 outdoor areas in the vicinity of the Cabrillo National Monument Visitor's Center complex, comprising 5,990 square feet in total area. Of this amount, the project will completely restore 4,392 square feet of disturbed areas, and enhance 1,598 square feet of landscaped areas by introducing a selection of native plants conducive with the existing ornamental species to remain in these areas.

This project is a collaboration between the Cabrillo National Monument staff and volunteers from the Native Garden Committee of the California Native Plant Society, (CNPSSD) San Diego Chapter.

The purpose of the project is to provide native habitat enhancement/beautification of the grounds immediately associated with the Visitor's Center complex that is both sustainable and educational, thereby fulfilling simultaneous objectives of the U.S. National Park Service.

The CNPSSD Native Garden Committee includes certified landscape architects who will create working construction-level drawings of the native habitat restoration and enhancement areas, including planting plans and specifications. The actual work effort to implement the project will be performed by a combination of Cabrillo National Monument workers/contractors and CNPSSD volunteers.

The ASLA mission is to lead, educate and participate in the careful stewardship, wise planning and artful design of the natural environment. The Community Grant is intended to enhance and to educate the community on landscape architecture, environmental issues and the value of landscape architecture and the use of licensed landscape architects. Each year the grant is supported by the proceeds of the Annual ASLA/Community Grant Golf Tournament.

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, STATE, 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
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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, 2018 — 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 bang 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.

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WORLD LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE MONTH

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: J.R. Taylor
American Society of Landscape Architects
(202) 216-2345
jtaylor@asla.org

ASLA Looks to the Future for WLAM 2018

Washington, D.C., March 6, 2018 —This April the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) will celebrate World Landscape Architecture Month (WLAM) by looking to the future of the profession. As a part of ASLA's "This Is Landscape Architecture" social media campaign, a different student chapter will take over ASLA's Instagram account each day in April. WLAM will also serve as the launch of ASLA's new logo and rebrand.

After a successful 2017 campaign, ASLA will again ask its members and landscape architects around the world to share their favorite designed spaces on social media with a card that reads "This Is Landscape Architecture" with #WLAM2018. These posts aim to help the public connect the term landscape architecture to the work of landscape architects that surrounds them.

In addition, during the campaign, a different ASLA student chapter will take over ASLA National's Instagram account each day. This 30-day takeover will highlight the projects of the next generation of landscape architects and favorite designed spaces on campuses across the country.

"We're really excited about putting the future of the profession and ASLA on display," said Nancy Somerville, ASLA's Executive V.P. and CEO. "We want to showcase the great projects our student members create while we move into a new era for the Society."

ASLA will also debut its new brand identity in April. The rebrand and logo refresh will better embody the entirety of the Society's efforts and the profession as they both continue to evolve.

To find out more about WLAM, or how you can participate, please visit asla.org/wlam.

To learn more about ASLA's rebranding process, please visit our [website](#).

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PARK(ing) Day Media Advisory

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact Information

[NAME]

[TITLE]

[EMAIL]

[PHONE]

[YOUR CHAPTER] Chapter of American Society of Landscape Architects Designs X Parklets for PARK(ing) Day in Denver

What: PARK(ing) Day

When: September 21, 2018

Where:

What: PARK(ing) Day is an annual international event where citizens, artists and activists collaborate to transform metered parking spaces into temporary miniature parks, or parklets. The mission of the event is to call attention to the importance of urban open space, generate a dialogue regarding how public space is created and allocated, and to improve the quality of urban human habitat.

The [YOUR CHAPTER] of the American Society of Landscape Architects will participate in PARK(ing) Day by designing and creating X temporary parklets in [INSERT CITY HERE]. [Briefly describe your parklet(s)]

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MEDIA ADVISORY

Month, Day, Year

CONTACT: Jane Doe, 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 p.m.

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.