A History of Government Public Relations in the United States

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Mordecai Lee

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MAJOR ABBREVIATIONS

AP	Associated Press (newswire service)
APSR	*American Political Science Review*
BOB	US Bureau of the Budget (after 1970: Office of Management and Budget [OMB]), an agency in the Executive Office of the President
CLA	Center for Legislative Archives, NA, Washington, DC
CR	*Congressional Record* (official gazette of the US Congress)
CSM	*The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston)
CT	*The Chicago Tribune*
FDR	Franklin D. Roosevelt, president (1933-1945)
FDRL	Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, NA, Hyde Park, New York
FY	Fiscal Year. *Note*: Fiscal years are named by the year they end in. The traditional fiscal year in the US public sector begins on July 1 and ends on June 30. Hence, FY 1974 began on July 1, 1973, and ended on June 30, 1974. In 1976, Congress bumped the federal fiscal year forward by a quarter. After that, the federal fiscal year begins on October 1 and ends on September 30. Most state and local governments stayed with the traditional July-June fiscal year.
GPO	Government Publishing Office, an agency in the legislative branch
GPR	government public relations (as a generic activity in public administration, i.e., by civil servants, not elected officials)
LAT	*The Los Angeles Times*
NA	National Archives
NA II	National Archives II, College Park, Maryland
n.a.	no author, such as on an archival document
n.d.	no date, such as on an archival document

n.t.	no title, such as for a document or the name of a congressional subcommittee
NYHT	*The New York Herald Tribune*
NYT	*The New York Times*
PAR	*Public Administration Review*
PRR	*Public Relations Review*
RG	Record Group (agency-based collection of documents), NA
WP	*The Washington Post*
WPA	Works Progress Administration (1935-1939), then Work Projects Administration (1939-1943), New Deal relief agency. (Confusingly, the Public Works Administration [PWA], 1933-1943, was a separate agency.)
WS	*The Washington Star*
WSJ	*The Wall Street Journal*

PREFACE

In a democracy, government is accountable to the citizenry. When this principle is applied to politicians, their accountability is straightforward: elections. For example, when an incumbent runs for reelection, the voters decide if they approved of that elected official's service and record. When there is no incumbent, the voters make similar judgments based on a candidate's past record of service (perhaps in a lower elected office), qualifications, and views on important issues.

But what about the sprawling administrative state? How are bureaucracies accountable to the public-at-large? Certainly, executive branch agencies are substantially accountable to presidents and to Congress. However, that form of accountability to the public-at-large is indirect and mediated. What about public servants having some degree of direct accountability to the citizenry in a democracy? The fields of political science and public administration gradually developed a normative doctrine that civil servants should also consider themselves as partially accountable to the public. That meant government managers were expected to engage in vigorous external communication programs so that the public-at-large would be informed about each agency's activities and record. This has been the underlying imperative of government public relations (GPR). To implement these kinds of public relations programs, agencies gradually opened external communication offices and hired public information specialists. In all, government public relations has evolved significantly since the end of the nineteenth century. One consistent theme of this history is that government PR has become a permanent and important obligation of government agencies. It is one of the ways to harmonize democracy and bureaucracy.

It is probably important at this point to emphasize the scope of government public relations, what it encompasses and—just as important—what not. The focus here is on the external communication activities of government agencies, of—crudely put—bureaucrats. Hence the focus is on the work of public management and public administration. GPR is distinct from political public relations (by politicians, candidates, and elected officeholders), legislative public relations, and PR by senior presidential appointees, particularly when acting as members of a president's official "family." The latter tend to be by officials serving at the pleasure of the president and

appointed to pursue the administration's political and policy goals in the agencies they oversee. These other PR foci are important within the larger topic of public relations conducted in the extended and broadly defined public sector. But they are distinct from what civil servants working in government agencies do. Generally, these managers are given a mission based on a law (passed by Congress and the president jointly) and then they focus on implementing the laws that their agency is responsible for. This is (largely) distinct from external communication by politicians, elected officials, and presidential administrations.

Finally, there's a need for splitting hairs about presidential and White House PR. The predominant literature on these topics is about the president as a politician, party leader, and elected official. When acting in that capacity this kind of presidential PR belongs outside the boundaries of GPR. On the other hand, sometimes a president is clearly acting as the *manager* of the executive branch, involved in matters that largely relate to public administration rather than politics. This has been less interesting to presidential PR researchers. Nonetheless, such White House activities should fall just within the GPR tent because those kinds of presidential actions are about the chief executive's management powers and constitutional responsibilities. Admittedly, at times there can be overlapping and mixed motives by a president's action. Regardless, I'm hoping the general logic of the differentiation is helpful. For applicability to GPR, consider it as a kind of subfield relating to presidential management PR. Inherently, a president has a foot in both camps.

The recent academic literature on GPR published in scholarly peer-review journals has been expanding relatively rapidly as the twenty-first century unfolds. For example, according to Google Scholar, there had been 651 publications in 2024 using the term "government public relations" in their titles or text. From the beginning of the decade, it was 2,440. These statistics indicate the rapidly expanding interest by academic researchers in government PR.

The increased pace of research has been so significant that a 2023 review of the literature in a top-tier journal used the acronym of "GPR" in the article's title (Dong, Zheng, and Morehouse 2023). Clearly, these researchers and the editors of the journal concluded that this subject matter was becoming so common that the acronym "GPR" was broadly recognizable and was coming into common usage. This indicates the crossing of a threshold signaling that academic interest in this topic was taking off and gaining momentum. (I was identified as "the most published author.") Another

important detail is that their literature review identified "history of GPR" as one of five "clusters" in the larger subject. This suggests that historical studies are gradually becoming a recognized subfield of the published literature on GPR. However, excluding my own writings, I have been disappointed to locate only a handful of articles during this decade using the phrase "government public relations history" or "history of government public relations" in their texts. This might convey the benefits of this book, its uses, and the interest it might stimulate to further expand the historical literature on GPR.

Uses of the Book

The subject of government public relations and its history is at the intersection of several academic fields, including public administration, American history, political science, public relations, public management, communication, and organization theory.

This book is intended to be used in three ways. First, it presents a comprehensive and integrated overview of the subject for use as a textbook and as a reader. In its subdivision into five parts, this structure enables a detailed examination of discrete subtopics (or silos) within the broad scope of GPR history in the twentieth century. I expect that this volume will be useful to practitioners-in-training, such as students working toward graduate degrees in public administration (the MPA degree), political science, public relations, and American history. They would benefit by having a more in-depth perspective on some of the important issues relevant to their chosen professions as well as the historical context of those developments. Similarly, the book would also be a good fit for advanced courses for upper-class undergraduates (juniors and seniors) majoring in those fields. The reason for presenting references at the end of each chapter is to permit a chapter to stand on its own as a complete whole. This structure can be particularly useful when assigned readings do not cover the whole book but rather specific chapters and perhaps even in an entirely different sequence than presented here.

Second, the book is intended for those with a more advanced academic and research interest in the subject, whether from the perspective of—again—political science, American history, public administration, or public relations. Hence, it should be useful to graduate students and doctoral candidates in these fields. For advanced researchers, the book is intended to be beneficial both to current faculty and to faculty-in-training who have an interest in this subject. Third, as a comprehensive volume of peer-reviewed

research in this topic, the book would be of interest to academic libraries seeking to enhance their collections in such disciplines as history, political science, public administration, public relations, and communication.

My thanks to Cambridge Scholars Publishing for providing this opportunity to pull together my research on GPR during the twenty-first century. I have selected seventeen pieces that present a *tour d'horizon* of the subject. This book is also the fifth in an informal pentalogy of my research that Cambridge Scholars Publishing has issued. The other titles of this quintet (published between 2023 and 2025) are *The Emergence and Scope of the Voice of Government*, *A History of Public Administration in the United States: The Rise of American Bureaucracy*, *A History of the American Nonprofit Sector: The Rise and Professionalism of Doing Good*, and *Congress Wrestling with the Rise of the Administrative State During the 20th Century*. Please note that this volume does not duplicate any chapters in *Emergence and Scope of the Voice of Government* (nor any of the other three books). While both are about GPR, the emphases—and therefore the contents—are completely different. I'm also glad to have the opportunity to express my high appreciation to two of the professionals in the publishing house for helping bring these five volumes to life: Adam Rummens, Senior Commissioning Editor, and Amanda Millar, Typesetting Manager. Both showed extreme patience with a perfectionist and worrier of a professor. Tom Petty was right; the waiting *is* the hardest part.

Research Methodology and Presentation

Research methodology for the book entailed mainstream historical techniques. I found triangulation to be an exceptionally useful methodology for reconstructing the record of a historical event, particularly because reliance on multiple independent sources helped fill a lacuna related to any individual source. Triangulation can also be helpful in identifying discrepancies about those unfolding events. For example, McNabb noted that archives "are particularly valuable as a source for cross-checking interview and narrative study data. In this way they contribute to improved validity through triangulation—using several approaches in a research study" (2021, 256). One benefit of this approach is building "a chronological reconstruction" of events and developments (van Thiel 2014, 149). For historical studies of American government, three high-quality primary sources for triangulation are archival materials (such as the National Archives), contemporaneously published government documents (such as congressional hearings), and print media coverage. Admittedly, newspapers and magazines could be

deemed by some researchers as secondary sources. However, the journalist did not know how events would turn out and was limited to observing how things looked at that moment. As such, journalism has much to contribute to watching as history unfolded in the present tense. Individually, these three sources each have strengths and weaknesses. Triangulation helps overcome the demerits or bias of one source through the strengths of other sources. Riccucci described this approach to triangulation as mixed-methods research based on qualitative methodologies (2010, 114-15).

Given that the book seeks to integrate various aspects of GPR history into a whole, in many chapters I inserted a note flagging for the reader instances where the text refers to a subject covered in more detail in another chapter. Those cross-references are presented in this way: (see chap. __). I hope this will help readers gradually see how the various parts of the book are related pieces that comprise a bigger picture, components that synthesize into a larger historical narrative. Nonetheless, I edited each chapter so that each can stand on its own without a reader needing to have read any other chapter(s) first. To accomplish that, there is a modest amount of repetition and duplicative references between chapters, but not significantly so. With the same goal in mind, I placed references at the end of each chapter, instead of presenting a very long, integrated bibliography at the end of the book. This should make it easier for a reader to identify a source cited in that chapter.

In general, I revised and updated all the chapters as appropriate. However, I abstained from extensively updating the text and referenced sources because I wanted each chapter to convey how things looked at that point in time rather than benefiting from too much hindsight and later developments. After all, this book tries to convey a sense of history unfolding, sometimes quite unpredictably. For example, I edited chapters 14 through 16 as minimally as possible so that a reader would "see" how things looked around the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. When history is presented in the present tense it can convey events much more vividly and understandably.

Referencing Style

Generally speaking, parenthetical citations of sources within the text are the most concise for traditional published sources, such as academic articles and books. They are also effective for citing journalism, whether an article was bylined or not. For non-bylined newspaper articles, I have presented a truncated version of the headline of the article or editorial in the

parenthetical citation. However, in-text referencing is very cumbersome when sources come from unpublished materials, such as archival documents, online sites, and interviews. Citations for such sources would be quite prolix in parenthetical citations. Therefore, to save such excessively long citations within the text of a chapter, I have instead mostly used endnotes for these categories of sources. Endnotes are much more concise and less verbose.

Some chapters are a mix of, on one hand, conventional published sources and, on the other, archival documents and similar unpublished sources. Therefore, for those chapters I used a dual reference style. The eighteenth edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* (2024) gives authors and publishers a specific guideline in this situation: "As long as a consistent style is maintained within any one work, logical and defensible variations on Chicago-style source citations are acceptable" (§13.4). Cambridge Scholars Publishing permitted me to use this dual approach in my four preceding titles in the series. I have again used this mix of both referencing styles in about half of the chapters. The numbered endnotes are located after the conclusion of the text. They are then followed by the customary bibliographic listing of academic and other published sources that were cited in the chapter's in-text parenthetical citations.

Reflecting current style, I adapted references to be as succinct as possible. The goal is to provide the reader with sufficient information to locate the cited source but otherwise to avoid cluttering sourcing with nonessential detail, excessive capitalization, or dense and distracting punctuation. Some chapters needed more updating than others. For example, if a cited book had since been reissued in a later revised edition, I cited the most recent edition. Similarly, if a cited book had been republished (even without changing the original text), I cited the most recent republication because its rerelease indicated the continuing relevance and importance of the book. To reduce the number of references at the end of each chapter, I inserted citations of federal laws into the text (e.g., 39 *Stat*. 15) as well as from the *Congressional Record* (e.g., *CR* 59: 5 [April 1, 1920] 5091).

Many changes were made to ensure a consistent style throughout the volume, which would be advantageous to the reader. Some of these nonsubstantive and modest changes included assuring standard citation formats and spelling to have a uniform style throughout. In another effort to assure that the book would be as up to date as possible, I reviewed the URLs that had been cited originally and updated those that are still online so that readers can access the source easily. Alas, some were not. For those

situations I noted it for the reader. Similarly, I routinely deleted anachronisms or substituted more current published discussions and references (sometimes a later writing by the same author) for older ones that seem to have already passed their freshness date. Hence, the oddity of a chapter in this volume containing sources that had not yet been published when the original piece had appeared.

Plan of the Book

The plan of the book is to present history as it unfolded from the late nineteenth century through the first quarter of the twenty-first. This permits pulling together into a more coherent telling of the relatively haphazard and ad hoc ways that government public relations evolved. It also notes the on-and-off hostility (usually on) by Congress to federal agencies having direct contact with, and accountability to, *their* constituents. A generic hostility to GPR often included the news media, too. History permits us to see trends and themes that probably were not as clearly apparent at the time.

The democratic push for bureaucratic accountability to the public-at-large jelled during America's Progressive Era (about 1890-1920). Good-government reformers sought to increase the professionalism of government agencies by strengthening civil service systems. Civil servants would be permanent employees of the government regardless of election results. On a nonpartisan basis, they would be professionals and experts to serve the public. As unelected public servants they nonetheless had a democratic obligation to inform the public. During this period, early efforts at government public relations began with public reporting (chap. 2), such as annual reports by agencies that were broadly disseminated to the citizens. Later initiatives included budget exhibits and other forums like open houses and gazettes (chaps. 3-4). In the 1920s, a federal agency called the Bureau of Efficiency created a public information bureau to answer general questions from citizens about the federal government (chap. 5).

Government PR greatly expanded during the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933-1945) as did strenuous opposition from Congress's conservative coalition (and the press). As part of his response to the Great Depression, FDR created an agency to focus on explaining to the public the multiplicity of New Deal assistance programs. It maintained field offices in every state (chap. 6). Separately, his initiative for the federal government to promote domestic tourism through public relations received—unusually—the enthusiastic support of business, which otherwise was implacably opposed to the New Deal, as well as the somewhat grudging endorsement

by Congress (chap. 7). With war clouds looming during the 1930s, the military drafted contingency plans for any potential wartime emergency based on the lessons of World War I (then called the Great War). The plans anticipated creating a central federal agency with a monopoly on government public relations during the emergency and this agency would be under the direct control of the Army and Navy. President Roosevelt disagreed and killed the plan. He said that a president, not the military, should always be in charge of how government communicated with the public, even during a war (chap. 8).

When America declared war on Japan on December 8, 1941 (and a few days later, Germany), FDR initially expanded an obscure federal agency called the Division of Information (chap. 9). It became the largest PR agency in Washington. In mid-1942, he merged it into the new Office of War Information. One of Roosevelt's major PR initiatives during the war was the construction of the federal Information Center in downtown Washington (chap. 10). It dealt with the many visitors coming to the city and the wave of letters coming from citizens requesting information about the war effort. One agency that came under severe attack from conservatives during the war was the Farm Security Agency, which conservatives claimed was hostile to free market capitalism. An exceptionally talented PR specialist for the agency tried to combat those attacks without stepping too far into the political arena (chap. 11).

In the second half of the twentieth century, government PR became such a major enterprise that a reporter coined the term "government by public relations." The term, implicitly negative, identified the growing importance of how government *looked* to the public as well as what it actually *did* (chap. 12). The growth of government PR also led to the creation of a university research center on the subject (chap. 13). External trends were also affecting GPR. First, the media environment was shifting away from traditional coverage of government, prompting the need for agencies to learn to communicate via an indifferent, sometimes hostile, media world (chap. 14). Second, notwithstanding the increasing importance of GPR, in the last decades of the twentieth century academic interest in the subject and for training future practitioners waned sharply (chap. 15).

Government PR continued evolving in the twenty-first century. To the surprise of organization theorists expecting a convergence of the organization and management of the business, nonprofit, and governmental sectors, GPR's "publicness" was a qualitative distinction that could not be disregarded vis-à-vis PR by the corporate and nonprofit worlds (chap. 16).

Nonetheless, the digital and online revolutions offered GPR some new ways to practice its historical and traditional activities. This led to necessary and constructive adaptations of "near history" such as in media relations, accountability, and potential governmental e-news sites (chap. 17).

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INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

AN OVERVIEW OF GOVERNMENT PUBLIC RELATIONS AND ITS HISTORY

Why Is Government PR Such a Touchy Subject?

Elected officials consider themselves as the direct bosses of government agencies. (Of course, it's a bit more complicated than that.) Presidents who subscribe to the legal doctrine of a "unitary executive" (instead of shared power with Congress) believe they can tell all federal agencies within the executive branch what to do and, just as important, what not to do. In parallel, US senators and representatives usually view themselves as, at least, the governmental equivalent of a corporate board of directors. What they say goes—and they control the money, too. The same approach applies to, respectively, governors and state legislatures, county executives and boards of county supervisors, and mayors and boards of alders.

In this relatively one-dimensional perspective, these politicians view the bureaucracy as the governmental equivalent of children in the Victorian age: to be seen but not heard. If an agency has decided to award a contract based on competitive bidding, then the chief elected executive and legislator from that district think it's their prerogative to make the announcement. Why? Because it makes them look good to the voters. Why is that important? Because it might help them get reelected or elected to higher office. The same holds true for just about anything a government agency does that would be considered "good news."

Conversely, when a government agency is compelled to make a "bad news" announcement (e.g., terminating a contract for misfeasance), politicians are nowhere to be seen. "What, who me?" they innocently react. They'd reflexively claim to be "shocked, shocked" by this development, that this is an example of bureaucracy gone amok, that there needs to be an investigation of this matter, and that the agency head should be hauled in to a legislative public hearing and treated like a guilty, irresponsible, and coldhearted bureaucrat.

Now add the media to the mix. Reporters generally don't care about good news; in fact, they rarely consider it news at all. A bureaucracy acting outrageously, now that's like honey to a bear. It's irresistible.

Pity the poor public administrator in such a thankless position. No wonder the practice of public relations in government is sometimes viewed as radioactive and a no-win proposition. Nonetheless, the theme of this chapter is that external communication is an essential ingredient of effective public administration, when done right and carefully. It is a force multiplier, allowing an agency to perform its mission more effectively, more efficiently, and more successfully.

The Do's and Don'ts of Government PR

It's pretty easy to draw the red line between agency PR that is relatively noncontroversial and PR that isn't. Noncontroversial PR is what a politician would consider boring. Controversial PR is what an elected official could view as inherently self-serving propaganda that puts the agency in a good light and the elected official in a bad one (at least implicitly). Another way to put it is that noncontroversial agency PR can be convincingly defended (if it comes to that) as falling strictly within the legal mission of the agency and/or within the general obligations imposed on any public sector agency in a democracy. On the other hand, if a particular PR activity looks like it explicitly is trying to influence public opinion and propagandize elected officials, it's out of bounds (Lee 2025, chap. 13). Now for the best part: Let's say an agency has engaged in a vigorous outreach effort to locate citizens who might be eligible for a new program or service assigned to it by formal action of the elected executive and legislative branch. To make the point even more strongly, let's say the agency's outreach campaign includes a message like "Does anyone in your family or who you know have the medical syndrome of XYZ? The ABC agency is now providing new in-home services for qualified residents. Please give them this easy-to-remember URL or toll-free number so that they can contact us to enroll." Would this kind of public service campaign reflect good public administration? Yes. At the same time, might it make the agency look good? Yes, too. But the latter benefit is incidental to the inherent and explicit purpose of the PR effort. A politician who views the agency with enmity and perceives even this latent benefit may still feel free to criticize the agency for inappropriate PR that is tantamount to political propaganda. But such an accusation is unlikely to gain any significant traction.

This scenario is not wholly fictional. It is roughly what happened when the federal Department of Health and Human Services opened enrollment for the new Affordable Care Act (ACA; aka Obamacare) in 2014. From the point of view of the bureaucracy, Congress had passed a law assigning it to run a new program of eligibility for lower-cost health insurance. The duty of a public administrator was to implement the law. How to do it? Lots of ways. One piece of the overall communication strategy was a public service campaign on TV, radio, social media, online sites, and billboards to reach citizens who might qualify for the new program. From the point of view of apolitical public administration, the more people who signed up, the better a job the agency was doing.

But, to the diehard opponents of Obamacare (and there were plenty of them), the public service campaign was inappropriate because it inherently promoted a positive image of Obamacare (and, not coincidently, President Obama) and therefore it was more akin to political propaganda than good public administration. The criticism largely failed to get much attention and coverage beyond those who already were against it. Why? Because the ostensible political benefits were incidental to, and inseparable from, the good faith effort to maximize enrollment. Amusingly, the first Trump administration then used ACA's outreach budget to make videos critical of the law (Carlsen and Park 2017). The same cycle recurred during Biden's presidency and Trump's second term.

The generalization to keep in mind is that citizens in a democracy might not like bureaucrats, but they expect a government agency to try to implement its legal mission with as much vigor and efficiency as possible.

Public Relations as a Tool for Doing Public Management Better

Given the potential hostility to public relations from politicians and the media, is it quixotic even to advocate doing it? The answer is a resounding, "NO!" Public relations is both inherent to public administration and a particular tool for helping an agency accomplish its mission. There is much good that can come to a government agency from using public relations to do its job. If there's only one important idea to convey in this chapter, it is this: Public relations can help a public manager do a better job by improving the implementation of the agency's central mission and by fulfilling the democratic responsibilities inherent to government.

As a prelude to a history of the practice of public sector PR, this chapter presents an overview of its different purposes. The focus is on public administrators who are implementing policies already adopted by elected officials/politicians/political appointees. How can public relations help them do a better job? Many PR tools can help accomplish the agency's programmatic mission: delivery of services, customer relations, and so on. Also, public relations can help to promote the democratic accountability of a government agency to the citizenry, an activity unique to public administration in contrast to business administration and nonprofit management (see chap. 16).

Taking them up in reverse order, there are, first, some reasons why public administrators *have* to engage in public relations, whether they like it or not. These are the democratic requirements of government management, closely tied to the "public" in public administration. A second cluster of benefits from public relations are optional. They help an agency do its core mission more effectively and, sometimes, less expensively. These are the pragmatic uses of public relations, focusing on the "administration" in public administration. Third, the most controversial category is the political use of public relations intended to advance the agency's autonomy and power.

Using this threefold typology, here's how the different purposes of government PR fit:

I. Mandatory: Democratic purposes of government public relations:
1. Media relations
2. Public reporting
3a. Responsiveness to the public as citizens

II. Optional: Pragmatic purposes of government public relations:
3b. Responsiveness to the public as customers and clients
(4-7. Public outreach):
4. Increasing the utilization of services and products
5. Public education and public service campaigns
6. Seeking voluntary public compliance with laws and regulations
7. Using the public as the eyes and ears of an agency

III. Dangerous, but powerful: Political purposes of government public relations:
8. Increasing public support

In general, this approach to public relations based on *purposes* is slightly different from the traditional action-orientation of modern life. Yes, our culture seems to admire "action heroes" and "action movies," but that's not a helpful frame of mind for getting the most out of public relations. In fact, usually the opposite. For example, during a lengthy discussion at a staff

meeting of agency managers, some eager beaver might pipe up and say enthusiastically, "Let's hold a news conference!" This might be wholly inappropriate in relation to accomplishing a particular purpose, while perfectly on target for another. In other words, the purpose of the effort needs to be identified before any plan of action can be constructed. Having a social media account is only valuable if it has a specific purpose that such a platform is uniquely positioned to accomplish (Winkie 2020). When the supposedly staid Federal Reserve Bank wanted to reach children to educate them about financial literacy, it began issuing comic books (Sommer 2019). So, what's the *purpose*?

The focus on the purposes of government public relations is also helpful because once that particular goal has been identified then the specific communication techniques to use will flow naturally from the purpose itself. For example, a news release might be useful for notifying the entire populace about a new regulation that affects the citizenry-at-large. However, if a new program targets, say, new immigrants from a specific country, then there are likely to be communication channels that are much more specialized to reach such a narrowly defined demographic.

So, before studying, practicing, or analyzing GPR, it's important to identify *why* a government agency is considering using news releases, social media, websites, podcasts, public information campaigns, and so on. *What* is it trying to accomplish? The various GPR tools are methods to reach specific goals that most government agencies have. Public relations can help accomplish the eight specific purposes. They are clustered around the stuff an agency's gotta do, stuff that might be a good idea to do, and finally, powerful stuff if the agency is willing to risk a lot as well.

I. Mandatory for Government Agencies: The Democratic Purposes of Government Public Relations

First, public managers need to recognize that some aspects of public relations are forced upon their agencies by dint of being in the public sector. Communication with the citizenry is a basic prerequisite for democracy. That means the communication obligations of a government manager include responding to inquiries from the media, reporting to the electorate on agency activities, and generally, being responsive to the public. These are not luxuries in the context of democratic governance. Rather, they are obligations that can't be ignored, even if and when a politician denounces them as self-serving and wasteful propaganda.

The qualitative difference between public administration and business administration is the public sector context of agency management (see chap. 16). In a democracy, public administrators must engage in certain activities that are expected as the sine qua non of government. For example, government managers must respond to inquiries from the news media, whether the particular issue would put the agency in a good light or a bad one. Similarly, given the central role of public opinion in a democracy, public administrators have a duty to report to the citizenry on the work of the agency and its stewardship of taxpayer funds. Hence, when focusing on these purposes, public relations is integral to public administration, not ancillary to it. Even secret agencies sometimes feel compelled to engage in public relations (McCarthy 2018)!

1. Media Relations

The link between public administration and media relations is practically a tautology. Government managers are public servants. They are accountable to the public, not quite like elected officials, but accountable nonetheless. One way that this accountability is operationalized is by the obligation of public administrators to work transparently, including the duty to respond to media questions, inquiries, and requests. "No comment" is not an acceptable answer from a civil servant whose salary is being paid by the taxpayers (with the justifiable exceptions for reasons such as law enforcement investigations and privacy rights).

The First Amendment to the federal Constitution is chock-full of rights that inure to each individual American citizen: speech, assembly, religion, petitioning government, and so on. Only one clause in the amendment grants a right to an institution: freedom of the press or, what we now call, the media. Why the selectivity? In the eyes of the Founders, journalism had to be independent of government so that citizens could obtain information about what government and elected officials were doing from sources other than the government and the elected officials themselves. In that framework, the news media was to be an independent instrument of democracy, serving as the feedback loop of the democratic process. So, the tautology is that government agencies engage in media relations because government agencies in a democracy have the obligation to cooperate with the news media.

However, government–media relations tend to be stormy. Besides a built-in skepticism about "official sources" that is part of journalistic culture, there are several factors that specifically contribute to the difficulty of a public

administrator having, consistently, good relations with the media. They include:

- The negative image of the bureaucrat in pop culture and public opinion
- The profitmaking motives of the media
- The entertainment motives of the media
- The increasing competitiveness of old media versus new
- That government agencies tend to generate inherently nonvisual and undramatic news, often unattractive to the media
- The built-in predisposition of reporters to archetypal stories that, by their very nature, put public administration in a bad light, such as a citizen being unfairly victimized by a heartless bureaucrat, an agency wasting money, or an agency standing by idly (or incompetently) while some people are suffering (see chap. 14)

President Obama provided a trenchant critique of the trends that were becoming apparent early in the twenty-first century regarding media coverage of government (both of politics and public administration):

> Despite the big stories of our era, serious journalists find themselves all too often without a beat. Just as the news cycle has shrunk, so has the bottom line. We fill that void with instant commentary and celebrity gossip and the softer stories . . . rather than the hard news and investigative journalism. . . . "What happened today?" is replaced with "Who won today?" The public debate cheapens. The public trust falters. We fail to understand our world or one another as well as we should—and that has real consequences in our own lives and in the life of our nation. We seem stuck with a choice between what cuts to our bottom line and what harms us as a society. Which price is higher to pay? Which cost is harder to bear? (Obama 2013, 361)

Still, love 'em or hate 'em, the public administrator in a democracy must cooperate with the media. That's one price of working in the public sector.

2. Public Reporting

By cooperating with the news media, a public servant is being held accountable to the citizenry indirectly through media coverage. However, the democratic obligation of public accountability can also be operationalized by directly informing the public-at-large. This is called "public reporting." It is a generalized duty to convey information to the public on the agency's stewardship of its mission and its use of taxpayer funds. This is usually a post hoc activity, focusing on the past, "Here's what we did last year" kind of information. It is information for information's sake, not really "doing" anything tangible, rather simply furthering the goal of an informed citizenry.