

PRL 206: Public Relations Principles and Practices

Fall 2024

S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications

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Disclaimer:

This portfolio contains mock research, campaigns, and content created as part of a class project. NYPD was selected for academic purposes only. All ideas, strategies, and materials presented are entirely fictional and are not affiliated with, endorsed by, or created in partnership with NYPD. The following work, entirely done by Arianna Savino, was developed solely for educational use during the semester.

To: reporter@media.com

Subject: NYPD Public Forum Event

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NYPD TO HOST PUBLIC FORUM WITH NEW COMMISSIONER

NEW YORK, N.Y. – The New York City Police Department is proud to announce we are hosting a public forum on Monday, Dec. 2, titled “Behind the Badge.” The event will take place in Central Park and is open to all residents of New York City. To answer questions will be executives such as the new Police Commissioner, Thomas Donlon, First Deputy Commissioner, Tania Kinsella and Chief of Department, Jefferey Maddery. Despite the recent controversy over previous executive staff members, we are confident in the ability of Commissioner Donlon and would like to showcase this to the public.

At 2:00 PM Est., the NYPD will conduct a series of speeches given by the names previously listed. To follow, we will encourage citizens to exercise their first amendment freedoms through asking questions to our executives. At approximately 3:00 PM Est., we will dismiss the audience and offer an assortment of snacks and refreshments. During this time, the Police Commissioner will be present, making conversation with the public. As we constantly encourage safety, we aim to have about 100 officers in Central Park during this time, as well as our Manhattan Mounted Unit. There will also be a “Junior Officer” badge experience. Children can receive “official” badges, attend an interactive session on community service, and join officers in activities. This creates positive early associations with the police, and families can take photos, sharing them on social media under the hashtag: #BehindTheBadgeNYPD.

With the recent appointment of Commissioner Thomas Donlon, the public has an opportunity to hear directly from him, along with other high-ranking officials. Understanding their perspectives, especially from Donlon, with his background in the FBI and national threat management, could reassure the public about the NYPD's commitment to safety and transparency. Given recent controversies, this forum allows the NYPD to demonstrate transparency and rebuild trust. The department's leadership aims to directly address public concerns.

The NYPD is a world-renowned department. We believe our people deserve nothing less than quality. Therefore, we know it is essential to address their concerns and needs. We are aware that recent controversies may stir doubts. However, we are confident in our ability to clear these doubts through the words of our knowledgeable executives.

“We know uncertainty is unsettling. The goal was to declare leadership to someone who knows membership and will boost morale. We yearn to declare a permanent commissioner after having three in about a year. We will establish structure, confidence, and get rid of uncertainty” - Chief Jason Savino

“There were a number of reasons I decided to join the New York City Police Department back in 1984. I felt a calling to protect and serve my neighbors, and I wanted to reform negative departmental practices from within. On top of those factors, becoming a police officer gave me a pathway to the middle class.” - Mayor Eric Adams

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Research:

The New York City Police Department is the largest, most notorious police department in the nation. The NYPD was established in 1845 and is responsible for policing an 8.5-million-person city by performing a variety of public safety, law enforcement, traffic management, counterterrorism, and emergency response roles. The NYPD is headed by the Police Commissioner, who is appointed by the Mayor. His function is to carry out the department's mission: ensuring a safe, secure environment for all New Yorkers. In the past two years, the NYPD has held three Police Commissioners, each of whom stepped down due to a scandal.

The NYPD has faced several high-profile scandals recently, contributing to a rapid turnover in its leadership. In September 2024, Commissioner Edward Caban stepped down amid a federal probe that implicated his brother and several associates close to NYC Mayor Eric Adams. The investigation focused on whether Caban's brother's nightclub security business benefited from connections within the police department. Federal agents searched Caban's home, as well as those of other top city officials, raising further concerns about the integrity of leadership within the NYPD and Adams' administration. Following Caban's departure, Tom Donlon, a former FBI agent, took over as interim commissioner. However, he, too, faced scrutiny, with reports of federal agents seizing materials from his home.

The NYPD's inconsistency creates significant public relations challenges. These issues demonstrate a pattern of instability and leadership corruption within the department. This not only complicates the city's message on public safety but also calls into question the department's ability to maintain consistent leadership and uphold public trust over time. From a public relations standpoint, constant change makes it difficult to maintain a positive image. Aware of this, the NYPD is proud to host a public forum in Central Park titled "Behind the Badge." Open to all residents who may be questioning the ability of the department, Behind the Badge aims to bring people together. Given that uncertainty is unsettling, executives such as the new Police Commissioner will be addressing concerns to reduce any fear or anxiety.

Audience:

Although the NYPD aims to reach all citizens of the city, there are specific target audiences that are essential to the success of Behind the Badge. Union members and blue-collar families are a primary focus as they represent a large fraction of the NYC workforce. Residents of lower-income neighborhoods as they may experience unique challenges that the NYPD hopes to address. Community volunteers and small business owners, who are actively engaged in their neighborhoods and foster a close relationship with the city. Additionally, reaching eligible voters is crucial for promoting civic engagement. Finally, news audiences and media consumers are

vital to the NYPD's efforts through their constant spread of information. The NYPD aims to gain complete trust of these demographics, as they are a crucial deciding factor in the image of the department.

Goals:

The primary goal of the NYPD is more than being portrayed well in the media, but also gaining the trust and integrity of citizens. By openly sharing information and addressing challenges, the department seeks renewed collaboration with the community. The NYPD will execute the power of transparency during Behind the Badge. The department has trained their executives to react accordingly to questions, while providing as much information as possible. Following the forum, the Commissioner and his team will remain open to conversations as they will mingle at the reception, catered by small businesses.

Additionally, children will be invited to interact with officers, such as the NYPD mounted unit, at “Junior Officer” badge experience. Children can receive “official” badges, attend an interactive session on community service, and join officers in activities to create early positive associations with the police. Families can take photos, sharing them on social media under the hashtag: #BehindTheBadgeNYPD. To increase accessibility, the NYPD digital communications team will live stream the event on social media so the larger public can tune in, ask questions, and watch in real-time. This allows those who couldn’t attend to still participate, extending the NYPD's outreach to the digital community. The goal is to not only bring together the community but remind citizens of the department’s goal: to enhance the quality of life in New York City.

Objectives:

The goals of Behind the Badge are specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time-driven. For example, the NYPD aims to reduce public complaints by 20% in a year. The response team will set up a system to track and analyze monthly complaints, then measure monthly progress and calculate the percentage reduction. Per the 12-month deadline, there will also be quarterly checkpoints to assess progress and make any necessary adjustments. Additionally, the NYPD aims to boost social media engagement by 15% within the next 60 days following the event. The 2-month time frame promotes urgency in campaign efforts and allows for rapid progress. The NYPD digital communications team will monitor follower, like, and comment count, as well as positive mentions on X, Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok.

PESO-Analysis:

To ensure success, the NYPD will be following the PESO model, using paid, earned, shared, and owned media.

For paid media efforts, the NYPD will focus on promoting Behind the Badge on social media and the streets of NYC. To successfully reach the intended target audiences, the NYPD will put advertisements in publicly accessible places. This includes ads on NYC buses, taxis, and in newspapers. Since there will be events for children, there will also be handouts in NYC public schools, and posts on neighborhood parent Facebook groups.

For earned media, the NYPD will rely on news audiences to spread information about the event, aiming for coverage within local media to enhance the campaign's reach. For example, the department could increase media presence by offering exclusive interviews with Commissioner Donlon, press releases about Behind the Badge, and inviting journalists to engage in live Q&As at the event.

For shared media, social media is essential. Since the event also seeks to reach younger voters, the NYPD will post flyers with the date, time, and place of the event on Instagram stories, TikTok, and X. Additionally, the NYPD also encourages families to share their experiences on social media using the hashtag #BehindTheBadgeNYPD. This will amplify the campaign's message organically through user-generated content.

For owned media, the NYPD website and Instagram will play a critical role. The digital communications team will upload a Q&A prior to the event to build anticipation, as well as extending relations to the digital community. The NYPD will answer questions on their Instagram story, enhancing user engagement. After the event, clips and highlights will be published on the NYPD website. This will reinforce the department's efforts following Behind the Badge.

Conclusion:

The NYPD's Behind the Badge public forum in Central Park is a pivotal step toward enhancing public engagement and rebuilding trust with diverse communities. Acknowledging the lack of consistency in leadership is key to restoring the department's professional image. This will be addressed through speeches from trusted individuals within the department. By offering transparency to key groups such as blue-collar and union workers, small business owners, youth, and families, the department aims to restore its reputation amidst recent scandals. The interactive activities and open dialogue during the event will create a cooperative relationship between the NYPD and the public, while live streaming ensures that those unable to attend in person can still participate in the conversation.

Using the PESO model, a combination of paid, earned, shared, and owned media will allow the event to thrive. By collaborating with local news outlets and encouraging online interactions on social media, the NYPD yearns to amplify its message of community engagement and public safety. With measurable objectives, such as reducing complaints and increasing social media engagement, the NYPD is focused on tangible outcomes that will demonstrate its commitment to improving public relations. Guided by its mission statement— "to enhance the quality of life in New York City by working in partnership with the community to enforce the law, preserve peace, protect the people, reduce fear, and maintain order"—this event will ultimately drive meaningful progress in strengthening relationships with the community.

Public Relations: Insights, Evolution, and Innovations

In a world where perception can outweigh the truth, the art of public relations (PR) can be the key to an organization's success – or the root of its downfall. Grunig and Hunt's definition of public relations is one of the best-known and widely cited; “the management of communication between an organization and its publics” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Before PR was a profession, it was a practice. However, PR can be traced back to ancient civilizations. Ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome collectively practiced public relations in the form of inscriptions. These expressions were often persuasive, and used to glorify their leadership, leaving a lasting impact on their audiences. Greek philosophers, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, recognized the significance of public opinion through psychology and sociology. They taught noblemen the art of persuasion through rhetoric, creating a foundation for public relations as we know it today.

Public relations pioneers have been crucially influential in shaping the evolution of PR. During the 18th century, Ivy Ledbetter Lee, often regarded as the "founder of modern PR," became known for his straightforward approach. Lee introduced the Declaration of Public Relations, which encouraged transparency, even in times of crisis. Another PR pioneer, Edward Bernays, or “the father of PR,” is renowned for his visionary and groundbreaking campaigns. In 1929, he made headlines with his feminist "Torches of Freedom" campaign and forever influenced the PR industry. This inspired individuals such as PT Barnum, who utilized his outlandish circus stunts, dramatic press releases, and media manipulation skills to generate massive public interest in his show. The founding fathers of PR not only established the groundwork for future generations but also served as a stark reminder that true success comes from thinking outside the box.

To succeed in the PR industry, it is essential to understand the evolution from straightforward press releases to the current digital era. Content has become crucial, serving as the deciding factor in whether something captures attention. With the launch of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter in the early 21st century, PR professionals had to adapt to the rapid spread of information these platforms allowed. As a result, understanding your target audience became a key aspect of PR. Shortly after these platforms were released, social media became a toolkit for organizations to directly connect with their consumers. This allowed them to ask questions, address concerns, and amplify messages through content. Promotional posts, influencer collaborations, and informative podcasts elevated marketing to a new level. Additionally, organizations could now measure metrics such as likes, comments, and shares, to evaluate success and pinpoint areas for improvement. Today, platforms like TikTok serve as cost-effective tools for showcasing new ideas, strengthening the relationship between companies and their audiences.

Through the eras of PR, there exists another ‘era’ compilation that serves as a prime example of innovation in the industry. Taylor Swift’s “Eras Tour” is a prime example, becoming a global phenomenon and the first tour to gross over a billion dollars. Swift’s success broke attendance records and raised the bar for PR professionals. Her ability to connect with fans in each city through local-themed PR campaigns was key. In Tampa, she became the ‘honorary mayor,’ and Glendale changed its name to ‘Swift City’ for a day. Similar PR efforts occurred in the UK, such as a bagpipe performance of ‘Love Story’ in Edinburgh and the unveiling of ‘Swiftie Steps’ in London. The tour’s creativity started from Swift’s unique approach to connecting fans of all ages, building a show that reflects her career journey. This became a new way of storytelling, demonstrating the power of creativity and innovation.

The Story Behind the Shield: NYPD’s Historic History

Established in 1845, the New York City Police Department has evolved to be one of the most notorious police departments in the world. The NYPD was created to replace the outdated system with a full-time professional police force. The department was modeled after London's Metropolitan Police, which was formed in 1829. Today, the NYPD is one of the oldest and largest police departments in the United States. It consists of approximately 36,000 officers and 19,000 civilian employees. Civilians, otherwise known as ununiformed employees, have a diverse array of careers to pursue, ranging from traffic enforcement agents to communication coordinators. The department began to professionalize during the 20th century under the leadership of Theodore Roosevelt, who was then President of the Police Commission. Roosevelt set the foundation for modern policing, enforcing discipline while remaining professional. Building on his legacy, the department is now led by Commissioner Jessica Tisch, who was recently appointed by Mayor Eric Adams. Tisch has emphasized technology-driven strategies and community engagement to address the complexity of policing today.

The NYPD is divided into major bureaus for enforcement, investigations, and administration. It has 77 patrol precincts with patrol officers and detectives covering 8.5 million citizens within the city. By performing a wide variety of public safety, law enforcement, traffic management, counterterror, and emergency response roles, the NYPD successfully protects the city of New York. With passion and pride, these heroes remain dedicated to their mission statement; to enhance the quality of life in New York City by working in partnership with the community to enforce the law, preserve peace, protect the people, reduce fear, and maintain order.

Public Perception and Policing: The Role of PR in the NYPD

Bridging the gap between public relations and the NYPD centers around a pivotal question: hero or villain? It was not until the 1960s that the NYPD began prioritizing community

relations, striving to strengthen trust between officers and the citizens they serve. During the civil rights movement's spotlight on police brutality, maintaining a positive public image became critical to the department's image. Public relations efforts became utterly necessary with an increase in mistrust, with many perceiving police officers as ill-intentioned. The NYPD utilized press releases and other PR strategies to showcase their commitment to public safety, aiming to demonstrate their ultimate goal: protecting the city.

Since then, the NYPD's public relations strategies have become nothing short of intricate, ensuring a positive brand image while maintaining transparency with its audience. DCPI (Deputy Commissioner of Public Information) serves as the NYPD's communications unit. It is responsible for managing press relations, issuing news releases, and overseeing all NYPD-owned media, including its social media platforms. DCPI began its Twitter program in January 2014, with the first tweet from Police Commissioner Bill Bratton. The program was seen as a milestone by many officers, as it represented a personal voice from the NYPD, rather than a press release. By the end of the year, more than 100 NYPD officers and chiefs were tweeting. The NYPD Twitter program has now grown to over 100 separate accounts, including all city precincts, housing commands, and many department heads (Adler, 2016).

Within an occupation that can often be controversial, it is crucial to consistently maintain a positive public image, especially during times of crisis. Although a police department may not be the first organization that comes to mind when thinking about public relations, it is arguably one of the most important. Unlike other organizations, its efforts directly impact the well-being and safety of the community. Evidently, in a world where perception can shape trust and accountability, the department's PR tactics are essential to its success.

Beyond the Badge: Interview with NYPD Communications Coordinator, Alexis Stewart

There are no insights as valuable as those gained from someone within the industry. Therefore, I probed Alexis Stewart, Communications Coordinator for the New York City Police Department. Alexis' intensive career journey has led her to her current position. Her credibility and integrity are tremendously beneficial for individuals yearning to enter the public relations industry. Within DCPI is a digital communications unit, in which Alexis stands. The digital communications unit is responsible for monitoring, filming, editing, and uploading content across all NYPD platforms such as Instagram, X, Facebook, and LinkedIn. These posts frequently include events in where the department gives back to the community, how the department trains their staff, and the many unique positions that are offered. "DCPI keeps a balance between being open and honest while sending the right message. Although you cannot be open all the time because some information is sensitive, being honest is important, and that builds trust with the public." (A. Stewart, 2024).

To better understand the foundation that prepared Alexis Stewart for her role, it's essential to explore her early career and educational background. She attended Pace University in New York City, where she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Public Relations. From a very early age, Alexis knew she would pursue a career in this industry. She first discovered her passion for public relations during a "bring your kid to work day" at Quinn PR, a public relations firm in New York. She was captivated by the lively environment, where like-minded individuals thrived on creativity, collaboration, and imagination—qualities she saw in herself. However, it was at One Police Plaza, the NYPD Headquarters, where her career aspirations truly solidified. During her college years, Alexis participated in the NYPD Summer Intern Program. She recognized that many factors contribute to the NYPD's reputation as one of the world's most renowned police departments, including its public relations efforts. Following her summer internship, Alexis became a College Aid during the school year. During this time, she assisted

the DCPI office, contributing to its success—all while still a student. Although Alexis always knew she wanted to enter the PR industry, she questioned what kind of PR she would excel in most. These positions within NYPD DCPI allowed her to realize she is drawn to PR from a law enforcement standpoint, leading to her current position.

Alexis' responsibilities within the NYPD are nowhere short of essential as she plays a crucial role in shaping the department's public image through communications. Her main goal as a communications coordinator is to "get the message of the NYPD out to the public in a timely and trendy fashion [and to] use my voice to showcase what the NYPD is to the people who don't know." (A. Stewart, 2024). A public relations role within a law enforcement agency is vastly different from any other, and Alexis shared valuable insights to highlight these differences. There are many aspects that may allow the digital communications team to excel easily, while others may foster challenges. "Since the NYPD is a community within itself, there is everything. We are never short of content because there is content everywhere. Especially being in New York, there is a vast amount of content to put out there. The ideas are there, and the people are there." (A. Stewart, 2024). While the media often focuses on traditional "cop work," the digital communications team works to highlight the crucial behind-the-scenes efforts that keep the department operating smoothly. A portion of their motivation also focuses on officer recruitment, aiming to reach individuals who are interested in joining the NYPD but may be hesitant to take the leap. However, with such a large group of individuals deserving recognition, there comes the challenge of effectively showcasing them. Alexis claims that scheduling can often become problematic and is a frequent challenge in the office. "You never know what is going to happen. You can set something up so perfectly but then someone has to get up and go somewhere. You must be able to adjust to that." (A. Stewart, 2024).

Alexis' most surprising, yet most favorable aspect of her job is how quickly the office energy can stem from zero and rapidly skyrocket to 100 in the blink of an eye. She describes this as "code switching" and says, "you must know crisis PR in any PR profession." Being able to adapt to crisis in a professional and calm manner is a skill that Alexis has developed in the workplace. Along with crisis management, her skillset also consists of video editing, public speaking, professionalism, and always asking questions. Alexis says she uses all skills to succeed in her position, but editing content is more significant. Since there is so much potential content within the NYPD, "it is important to do research on what is trending, and make it look professional" (A. Stewart, 2024). Remaining constantly professional is essential in this industry as well. "You have to look a certain way and dress a certain way because you never know what is going to happen. PR is a camera job. Also, talking and knowing how to speak, tone of voice, being a good communicator, and being personable" (A. Stewart, 2024). Lastly, not being afraid to ask questions is a key to success in the PR industry. Organizations that have existed for decades, such as the NYPD, tend to lead in very "old school" ways. However, Alexis says it only takes one person to ask "why?" It is crucial to not be afraid of change in an ever-evolving industry.

It was an utter honor to speak with an individual so knowledgeable about public relations. Alexis shared her insights in a very professional and stern conference room at the NYPD Headquarters. I, the interviewer, had every reason to feel intimidated. However, her personability and hospitality allowed me to feel comfortable, resulting in a very successful interview. This demonstrated that Alexis possesses the essential qualities to excel in the PR industry, and I am confident she will have a successful and impactful career. Being in law enforcement, Alexis provided aspiring PR professionals, like myself, with a unique perspective. As Alexis said; "Do not be afraid of change. Be adaptable. That is PR."

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