

The Emergence and Scope of the Voice of Government

The Emergence and Scope of the Voice of Government:

*Propaganda, Civic Information,
or Both?*

By

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MAJOR ABBREVIATIONS

AP	Associated Press (news wire service)
ASPA	American Society for Public Administration
CR	<i>Congressional Record</i> (daily gazette of the US Congress)
CT	<i>Chicago Tribune</i>
FY	Fiscal Year. <i>Note:</i> The traditional fiscal year in the American public sector starts on July 1 and ends on June 30 of the next calendar year. FYs are titled by the year they <i>end</i> in. For example, FY 1941 started on July 1, 1940, and ended on June 30, 1941. In the mid-1970s, Congress bumped federal fiscal years forward by a quarter, beginning on October 1 and ending on September 30. Most other governments retained the traditional fiscal year.
GPO	Government Printing Office (a federal agency, formally part of the legislative branch)
JPA	<i>Journal of Public Affairs</i>
NYT	<i>New York Times</i>
PAR	<i>Public Administration Review</i>
POQ	<i>Public Opinion Quarterly</i>
PRR	<i>Public Relations Review</i>
WP	<i>Washington Post</i>
WSJ	<i>Wall Street Journal</i>

PREFACE

Nowadays, we all tend to complain about bureaucracy and about propaganda, if only because both touch our daily lives. This book examines the intersection of those two subjects: external communications in public administration. When bureaucracies communicate with us directly or through the media, are we being bombarded with self-serving propaganda or with helpful information to improve our lives? Or perhaps such messages mash up both purposes together?

This study of the public voice of bureaucracy encompasses several (somewhat overlapping) disciplinary fields: public administration, political science, public relations, communication, and history. Whether we like it or not and wherever we might live, bureaucracies touch our lives, probably daily. Renewing a driver's license, going to the post office, complaining about garbage pickup, or a health advisory concerning a virus, all these are routines of modern life that relate to services we receive from government. They, in turn, are organized and managed by large pyramidal organizations in the public sector. These kinds of activities relate to public administration and political science.

Similarly, government public relations (GPR) sends messages aimed at us all day long: perhaps a media story about a new agency website and the services it now provides, a postcard from the local recreation department of upcoming classes, an email from city hall about a local celebration event, or a flyer from the public library inviting parents to bring their children to a book reading. All these are the end result of deliberate and planned public relations by government agencies. These subjects are of interest to the fields of public relations and communication.

History probably needs less explaining. In the context of public sector PR, how did we get where we are now? When did it begin? What happened? What's happening? History gives us the backstory, context, and insight into the modern administrative state and the communications apparatus that is so integral to its functioning.

There has been an increase in research about external communications in public administration. More researchers in political science and public

administration are becoming interested in this aspect of government management. In parallel, more scholars in communication and public relations have been exploring the practice of their field in the public sector. Finally, historians are gradually giving a higher profile to reconstructing the emergence and development of external communications by government agencies.

This volume is an effort to contribute to that rising level of academic interest. It presents some of my research over my career as a professor. It began with my 1975 dissertation in government PR as part of my doctoral studies at Syracuse University in upstate New York. I conducted the field research as a Guest Scholar at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC. After a career in politics (legislative assistant to a Member of Congress, elected to the Wisconsin State Legislature's Assembly and then the Senate), and in nonprofit (NGO) management, I began my academic career at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 1997. I picked up where I had left off with my dissertation on government PR and then continued to do so for the next 25 years. Now, holding emeritus status, Cambridge Scholars Publishing has provided this opportunity to pull together some of these research efforts. This book presents twenty-three chapters that are a *tour d'horizon* of the subject, including the scope of the field, the hostility of the media to being manipulated by bureaucratic propaganda, the cross-cutting pressures of being an agency spokesperson, how agencies should report to the citizenry in a democracy, wartime propaganda, how US presidents have viewed executive branch communications, legislative hostility to agency PR, and the origins of scholarly research in the 1920s and -30s into what was a relatively new phenomenon of the administrative state: government PR. For readers interested in pursuing the matter further, the volume ends with an appendix presenting a bibliography of my other writings on this extensive subject.

I expect that this volume will be useful to those seeking more than a how-to book for future practitioners of public sector PR. (I'm not knocking it, I co-edited a recent textbook: *The Practice of Government Public Relations*, 2nd ed., 2022.) This book is also intended for those with a growing interest in the subject, but who would not find useful conventional academic handbooks, which are at times arcane tomes summarizing in great specificity the latest research and status of the academic literature. (Again, no criticism intended. I've contributed to several handbooks, too.) Hence, this book tries to find a goldilocks spot between those two academic poles. It is likely to appeal as a reading assignment for graduate students and doctoral candidates in public administration, political science, communication,

public relations, or history. It should also be a good fit for advanced courses of upper-class undergraduates (juniors and seniors) majoring in those fields.

For researchers and colleagues, the book is intended to be similarly beneficial to faculty in public administration, political science, communication, public relations, or history who have an interest in research on external communications by government agencies. Finally, as a comprehensive volume of research results in this subject matter, the book would likely appeal to academic libraries that seek to develop and enhance their collections in these disciplines.

This book can be used in two different ways. First, it presents a comprehensive and integrated overview of external communications in public administration. By being subdivided into nine parts, this structure enables a detailed examination of discrete subtopics (or silos) within the broad scope of government public relations.

Second, the book can be used as a reader. For the latter use, individual chapters (as well as any of the nine parts) are designed so they can be read as freestanding units and not require familiarity with preceding chapters or parts. To accomplish that, this necessitated some inevitable overlap of the treatment of specific subjects. However, I have tried to keep that to a minimum. To further the possibility of using the book as a reader, each chapter has its references at the end of the chapter rather than presenting a uniform bibliography at the end of the book. Also, to assist in using the book as a reader, when a chapter discusses in passing a subject covered in more depth elsewhere in the book, I have inserted a parenthetical note in the text flagging that related chapter. Perhaps curiosity might lead the user to seek to learn more about the related subject. I hope this will also encourage an awareness of the interconnectedness of the subtopics within the larger subject of external communications in public administration.

A note to readers on referencing style used in this book. Generally speaking, parenthetical references are the most concise for traditional published sources, such as academic articles and books. However, the parenthetical referencing style is very cumbersome when sources rely heavily on unpublished archival documents and non-bylined newspaper articles. (The latter were quite common in the twentieth century.) Citations would be quite prolix if using in-text parenthetical referencing. Therefore, to save excessively long parenthetical references within the text of a chapter, I have instead used endnotes in those situations. Endnotes are much more concise and less verbose for these particular kinds of sources. Chapter 16 is so

heavily based on archival documents and interviews that the entire chapter uses endnotes. On the other hand, chapters 12, 17, 20, and 22 are a mix of, on the one hand, conventional published sources and, on the other, archival documents and non-bylined news stories. Therefore, for those chapters I used a dual referencing style. The 17th edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* (2017) gives authors and publishers a specific guideline in this situation: “As long as a consistent style is maintained within any work, logical and defensible variations on the style” are permitted (§14.4). These four chapters cite sources in a mix of both referencing styles. Archival documents, nonbylined journalism, and ancillary comments are referenced in numbered endnotes after the conclusion of the text. The endnotes are then followed by references to conventional academic and other published sources (such as bylined news stories) that had been cited in parenthetical references in the text of the chapter.

The chapters represent an adaptation of my published research on the subject. As appropriate, I updated the text and references to reflect the contemporary state of the subject. This involved adding relevant and newer contributions to the literature as well as modifying the text as appropriate to reflect current thinking. Sometimes this involved inserting new text or excising text that has been superseded by later developments. Also, some changes were made to assure a consistent style throughout the volume, which would be advantageous to the reader. In order to have a uniform style throughout the volume, some of these adaptations included assuring a standard citation format and spelling in all the chapters. In another effort to assure that the book would be as up-to-date as possible, when I finished the manuscript, I reviewed all URLs and updated them as necessary so that these external sources are as easily accessible to the reader.

Some chapters needed more adapting than others. For example, the subject of crisis PR needed discussion of the latest in the unprecedented experience with the Covid-19 pandemic. While the Covid virus might turn out to have been a one-time, but *extended* crisis, I suspect that the 2020s experience with it may foreshadow increasingly dangerous viruses jumping from nonhumans to humans. If Covid-type events indeed become a new normal, then we would need to redefine how governments should communicate in such situations of *long* emergencies (see chapter 6).

In several chapters I also added a postscript with brief discussions to add further context about the chapter or a backstory relating to the subject matter and my interest in it. Again, given that the book seeks to integrate different aspects of government PR into a whole, I inserted a parenthetical note in the

text flagging relevant chapters elsewhere in the book. I hope this will help readers gradually see how the various parts of the book are related subjects that comprise a bigger picture, components that synthesize well into a common theme.

I leave it to readers to come to their own conclusions about government public relations. Propaganda or civic information? Are external communications from government agencies a positive and useful manifestation of the administrative state? Providing us with helpful information that improves our daily lives (“buckle up!”) and improving our democratic ability to hold government accountable? Or, at the other end of the spectrum, is government PR a *de facto* form of self-serving propaganda by autonomous bureaucracies that are intent on maintaining their existence and expanding their size? There is no point in being coy about my own personal conclusions after studying the subject during my professorial career. I believe that the answer is both simultaneously, most of the time. In most cases I give the benefit of the doubt to the government as offering justifiable information that benefits the public-at-large. As emphasized in this volume, my focus is on exploring the specific *purpose* behind any agency PR initiative. Generally, external communications from government bureaus have laudable and positive purposes, even if—indirectly—they might also reflect well on the bureaucracy itself.

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PART I

OVERVIEW

CHAPTER ONE

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: AN INTRODUCTION

The terms “public relations” and “bureaucracy” are both epithets in common and near-universal usage. Public relations (usually shortened to “PR”) is viewed as, at the very least, manipulative and misleading communication. At its worst, PR is thought to be outright propaganda and lies. It conveys a contrived, artificial, and deceitful form of communication. Probably the apotheosis of the evolution of the negative and vacuous meaning of PR is contemporary celebrityhood, people who are famous for being famous, without any authentic real-world professional accomplishments. Through a shrewd manipulation of PR and social media, they become seemingly important and major, but actually are lacking in gravitas or any substantive achievement. Similarly, the term “bureaucracy” conveys red tape, unresponsive and pompous bureaucrats, inefficiency, wasteful spending, and callous of innocent citizens. Therefore, any discussion of public relations by the bureaucracy starts off with these two strikes against it.

This is all too bad. After all, for public administration, the term “public relations” can be interpreted with a positive, or at least neutral, meaning. As citizens in a democracy, we would *want* all government agencies to relate to us, the public. The bottom line for public administration is that it is public. In that sense, PR *is* public administration. We could conceive of a governmental agency engaging in too little PR: not transparent enough, not enough presence online, too hard to reach, seemingly unaccountable to the citizenry for its actions, and with horrible customer service. On the other hand, it is hard to imagine a government agency engaging in *too much* PR. In this context, an ideal public sector bureaucracy is very transparent, has an easy-to-use website, is easy to reach, invites citizen participation, and has terrific customer relations. Good PR is a central goal of public administration that is never quite finished. New efforts, new initiatives, and

new technologies offer government managers additional ways to further improve their interactions with the public.

Trying to step back from the stereotypes of the negative meanings of PR and bureaucracy, it is reasonable that the universal and indivisible public services we want and share in common (such as homeland security or clean air) are valuable and important. Taxes, after all, are the price of civilization. How, then, should our tax funds be spent? In modern and developed societies, we have turned to a corps of civil servants to do so. Certainly, the tangible delivery of services (such as food service at schools, garbage collection) could be done by private and nonprofit contractors. Fair enough. But even when there's maximal contracting out by a government, someone still has to oversee them by evaluating their delivery of services, inviting competitive bids for such contracts, considering complaints, and auditing spending to prevent misuse of tax funds. We can't expect elected officials (whether legislators or chief elected executives) to do that by themselves. They need competent, disinterested, and expert professionals to do it for them. Even then, some public services are not good candidates for privatization and contracting out. The navy? Auto safety rules? Environmental protection?

Briefly, public managers have to engage in PR, 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 PR are optional. They help an agency do its core mission more effectively and, sometimes, less expensively. These are the pragmatic and managerial uses of PR, focusing on the "administration" in public administration. Third, the most controversial goal is the political use of PR intended to advance the agency's autonomy, power, staffing, and budgets.

Given this inherent need for government agencies staffed by politically neutral career civil servants, an automatic issue quickly arises, namely what is their obligation to the public? Whether these agencies oversee contractors or deliver services directly, they should be accountable to elected officials, such as the legislative branch which appropriates funding to them and to the chief executive (such as a president, prime minister, or mayor) who manages them. Is that it? Do public administrators have any *direct* obligations to the citizenry?

The answer to this question has evolved historically, but the short version is yes. Initially, early modern governments expected that public agencies would engage in reporting, by issuing annual reports on their activities.

These were formally submitted to elected officials, but came to be viewed as reports to the citizenry. With the rise of professional journalism (as opposed to the early partisan press), reporters expected that civil servants would answer their questions—and promptly, as well as accurately. Hence emerged a series of public relations obligations of the bureaucracy which were all tied to the implementation of modern democracy.

The rise of professional management of government agencies and the increasing specialization of public programs led to the insight that external communications could be helpful in implementing the core mission of an agency. For example, given that the role of the US Department of Agriculture was to educate farmers in best practices, the agency needed to reach all farmers or, at least, as many as possible. Maintaining an extension system of county agents was helpful, but they couldn't reach everybody personally and individually. Hence the department recognized that another platform for reaching more farmers would include such activities as easy-to-understand printed brochures that were widely disseminated, news releases with helpful information, and material for publication in rural weeklies.

Finally, bureaucracies understood they were operating in a political context. Decisions affecting their fate were made by politicians. There was a temptation to use external communications not only for democratic and mission-oriented purposes, but also to promote public support for the agency itself. This is a major no-no in the eyes of politicians. Agencies doing so are putting themselves at risk.

Political Hostility to Agency External Communications

This gets to the heart of why government public relations (GPR) is such a touchy subject. First, the way it looks to Congress is that the bureaucracy is horning in on their prerogatives. Before the modern era (about 1900 or so), senators and members of Congress were the direct personal link between citizens (aka voters) and the federal government. Through newsletters, columns in local papers, and mailings (using their “frank,” i.e., their free use of the mail), legislators were in a position to keep their constituents informed on what the federal government was doing, what new programs and services were being offered, and offered advocacy for citizens having problems with federal agencies (also known as casework). This was a way for elected officials to take credit for whatever good things the federal government was doing. The rise of bureaucratic PR nullified that role by legislators. Now citizens could receive information directly from federal

agencies on new services being offered and how to access an agency's programs.

Legislators were appalled at becoming marginalized. During the twentieth century, they began enacting increasingly tight laws constraining and reducing agency external communications (Lee 2011). Successively, Congress terminated funding for the press agent of the Panama Canal Commission (1905), prohibited the US Forest Service (a bureau within the Department of Agriculture) from paying for press coverage (1908), banned federal agencies from employing "publicity experts" (1913), criminalized agency efforts to lobby Congress (1919), limited the number of mimeograph machines agencies could own (1920), banned agency spending on publicity and propaganda (1951), banned agencies from appealing to the public to lobby Congress on behalf of the agency (1951), and banned video news releases that did not identify the agency that released it (2005). For some additional examples of Congressional hostility to agency PR, see Part VIII of this book.

Second, some presidents were also wary of agency PR that was, ostensibly, subject to the oversight of the chief executive because those agencies were within the executive branch. For example, President Lyndon Johnson (1963-1969) often seized upcoming news releases from agencies and released them from the White House. He, like legislators, wanted to get the credit for good things happening in the federal government that would trigger citizens' approval. For an example of presidential hostility to agency PR, see chapter 17.

This antagonism by legislators and presidents is much more than the simple motivation of who gets the credit for federal activities. When an agency develops a positive, even laudatory, image with the public at large, it gradually achieves an autonomy from political oversight. This phenomenon was described by Francis Rourke in a now-classic formulation:

Basic to any agency's political standing in the American system of government is the support of public opinion. If it has that, an agency can ordinarily expect to be strong in the legislative and the executive branch as well. Because public opinion is ultimately the only legitimate sovereign in a democratic society, an agency that seeks first a high standing with the public can reasonably expect to have all other things added to it in the way of legislative and executive support. Power gives power, in administration as elsewhere, and once an agency has established a secure base with the public, it cannot easily be trifled with by political officials in either the legislative or the executive branch. (1984, 50)

Hence, the core of the fight between elected officials—whether on Capitol Hill or in the White House—and the bureaucracy is external political control vs. agency autonomy.

Third, another institution in the American governmental system is hostile to agency PR: the news media. Reporters have a reflexive fear of being manipulated by agency public information officers. Reporters say they want facts, not spin. And they want to talk directly with the policy-maker, not the professional flack erecting a wall between reporters and newsmakers. For a more detailed discussion of the antagonism of the media toward the bureaucracy, see Part III.

Yet, on the down-low, reporters know that they couldn't do their jobs without the assistance of agency spokespersons. These officials know the intricacies of the agency and its policies while also understanding the needs of the media. As a result, there is built-in stress for the spokespersons who are trying to do their jobs. See Part IV.

What All-Out Government PR Looks Like

One of the most impactful examples of the power of executive branch PR and the hostility of legislators to it occurred in 1917-1919. Shortly after the American declaration of war for what came to be called World War I, President Wilson signed an executive order creating the Committee on Public Information (CPI) and appointed George Creel to head it. CPI became a heavy-handed propaganda agency, largely bending the media, entertainment industry, and public opinion to its will. CPI was like a megamall of government PR. It flooded the country with news releases, brochures, advertising, speakers to civic groups, speakers at movie theaters (called "Four Minute Men"), and every other mode of communication.

For example, CPI monitored rumors and gradually developed a strategy to counter them. According to Hamilton, "unfounded rumors vexed the government" (2020, 200). Eventually, CPI's reflexive response was to undercut rumors by asserting that *all* of them originated with German agents and propaganda. If all rumors were ostensibly from Germany, they were, *ipso facto*, false. CPI enunciated this central policy in a 1918 report to its Four Minute Men to use when they spoke at movie theatres and to the media. Its theme was that rumors needed to be met with neither denials nor counter-information, but rather with the challenge of "where did you get your facts?"

There is a great need to drive it home in the minds of millions of Americans today, so that vicious rumors may be certain to meet—and therefore to be crushed by—its sledge-hammer directness. The surest possible way to stop the spread of rumors which may well prove to be enemy propaganda is for those who repeat that sort of thing to be met, instantly, with the blunt question: “Where did you get your facts?” and to be pinned down to a definite answer. ...The great object to be attained is to send each member of our audiences away with the resolve to fling that question in the face of the first and of every person who repeats vicious rumors in his hearing. Let us resolve to fix that test question so firmly in the mind of America that every lie and sneer hereafter shall surely be met not by a hesitant “You don’t say?”, but by the cold, incisive, definite demand, “Where did you get your facts?” (CPI 1918a)

Another (somewhat contradictory) initiative was using a fact vs. fiction approach. The agency presented rumors and then provided varying levels of response and refutation. In 1918, it issued *The Kaiserite in America: One Hundred and One German Lies* (CPI 1918b). This was a republication of a collection of local rumors and refutations prepared by the newspaper *St. Louis [MO] Republic*. Some were based on questions from readers and others were widespread rumors. The refutations were rarely detailed or even fact-based, at times simply asserting that the rumor was incredible. CPI’s introduction blamed German agents and its supporters (disloyal Americans!) for originating all these rumors. CPI also asserted that it was not censoring newspaper coverage and that its own announcements were exclusively fact-based. This publication was aimed at the public-at-large. Then, CPI reissued it as an edition for “Commercial Travelers of America” (i.e., traveling salesmen), saying that they were in a unique position to hear rumors in their travels and to refute them. According to CPI, “You traveling men are summoned to accept the responsibility of putting an end, once and for all, to the work of these plotters against the nation” (CPI 1918c, 3).

To amplify the reach of this publication, CPI also issued a news release about it, which invited the public to mail in requests for a free copy. CPI’s advertising division also distributed a mat layout that newspapers and weeklies could reprint (as a public service, not as paid advertising). It briefly summarized the contents of this publication and, again, invited readers to request copies. The head of the CPI’s advertising division confessed to the difficulty of dealing with rumors. He said:

The Government has been greatly puzzled to decide just what was the best method of handling these stories. They have feared that an official ‘denial’ from headquarters would merely serve to give the original tale wider circulation; and anyway you can never catch up with a lie. However, it has

finally been decided to take the bull by the horns, and put the people definitely on their guard by means of advertising; at the same time answering and denying some of the most widely-circulated stories so that those to whom these tales are told will be able to identify them as propaganda. (Bliven 1918, 20, 25)

In general, CPI's strategy was heavy-handed and suppressive, conceding no possible truth to rumors. In an unpublished postwar memoir, one senior CPI executive conceded that "others besides German agents were responsible for rumors," including people who were opposed to the war or were political opponents of President Wilson (Hamilton 2020, 201). Creel's postwar memoir was unequivocally unapologetic. He claimed that the news releases from CPI were "so frank, complete, and accurate that in time it developed a public confidence that stood like iron against the assaults of rumor and the hysteria of whispered alarm" (Creel 1972, 75). However, he conceded that "the rapid spread of idle or vicious rumors" could sometimes be traced to "a picayune politician" rather than German propaganda (115-16). Hamilton concluded that CPI's "suppression of news was a Petri dish for rumors, as was the CPI's relentless propaganda about spies" (201).

The take-away by Congress and by the media from CPI's behavior was a kind of never-again stance. This principle sank deeply into the political culture and, to this day, is ever present. Down with propaganda! Fair enough. For further discussion of war propaganda, see Part VI. But, apart from wartime, when exactly is agency PR truly propaganda and when is it helpful civic information? The verdict is in the eye of the beholder.

External Communication in Public Administration as Useful *and* Dangerous

Hostility to agency PR was in part a reaction to CPI's propaganda activities, institutional fears in Congress of an autonomous bureaucracy, presidential anxiety about controlling executive branch agencies, and hostility from the media. These all contributed over time to a hesitation by public administrators to engage in external communication as an element of management. Why poke the bear unnecessarily? As a result, public relations became something of a stepchild of the tools of government management, there for the taking, but with a certain potential for radioactivity.

Nonetheless, the normalization of agency external communications has gradually been occurring over the last few decades. There are plenty of benefits to an agency in terms of democratic accountability and pragmatic

delivery of services that PR can help accomplish. A public administrator's choice to use PR should be driven by the *purpose* intended to be accomplished and the concrete benefits that flow from the utilization of such PR activities. It is a useful, helpful, and an important aspect of managing government agencies. Managers can use PR to (1) accomplish the democratic responsibilities associated with being in the public sector; (2) implement the central missions of their agencies on a cost-effective and efficient basis; and (3) contribute to public support for their agencies. With the acceleration of digital and online technologies in the twenty-first century, the importance for public administrators to manage external informational relationships is certain to increase. In part reflecting the pace of technology, there is a convergence underway regarding public communications in government. In the past, separate functions such as marketing, branding, transparency, citizen participation, coproduction, and social media were viewed as distinct and different activities. Now they are undergoing a convergence, a trend that is mashing all of them together. PR can be a helpful prism for the integration of these previously free-standing activities and then their synergistic use for the betterment of public administration and, as it should be, for the public-at-large.

It is the intent of this book to explore government PR, its scope, benefits, and some historical examples of how this element of public administration has evolved to demonstrate its fuller potential, along with its dangers.

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CHAPTER TWO

GOVERNMENT PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

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Public relations practice in the US and Canada's public administration evolved in similar ways. There are, though, important differences between these two countries: culturally, politically, economically, legally, and the manner in which activism is perceived. This chapter explores how government communication and public relations came to be structured in these two national governments, how it developed, and what is unique about the history of this sectoral practice on the two sides of North America's 49th parallel.

Much of the attention of the popular and academic literature on the history of public sector PR has focused on *political* public relations, which is conducted by candidates in election campaigns and subsequently in office. This historical review focuses on the permanent government (often called the bureaucracy), namely external communications conducted by civil servants who don't serve at the pleasure of political appointees and don't change based on election results. Their focus is on use of PR for the furtherance of their agencies' missions as set by elected institutions.

History of Public Relations in US Public Administration

Early American Practice

External communication by government agencies is as old as the Republic. In the beginning, there were annual reports. For executive branch departments and agencies annual reports were a routine form of accountability to the legislative branch. In those days, newspapers published articles that

contained long excerpts of official documents. Knowing this, some media-savvy department heads began writing their annual reports in a popular style that would engage lay readers. Gradually, the motive of contributing to an informed public became an underlying justification for external communications by government agencies, usually indirectly through such press coverage and later with publications mailed directly to interested audiences (see chapter 3).

The Progressive era in the US (1890-1920) was a period of major political and economic reform, largely triggered by industrialization and urbanization. This period saw an increasing professionalization in the fields which came to be called public administration and public relations. The former occurred in the context of the assassination of President Garfield in 1881 by a disappointed seeker of a patronage job in the federal government. In abhorred reaction, public opinion pressed for installing a merit-based civil service system in the federal government in lieu of patronage. While the original scope of the US Civil Service Commission covered only a minority of federal employees, that proportion gradually increased to a majority, especially by the actions of President Franklin Roosevelt (1933-1945).

In parallel, the profession of public relations was emerging in the American private sector as a way of influencing public opinion. Early practitioners were press agents seeking to improve the standing of their corporate clients or enhance fundraising by private universities. Coming from a different direction, Progressive era civic reformers saw publicity as a power for good, whether through journalistic muckrakers writing exposés about corporate malfeasance, calls for transparency of corporate documents submitted to federal regulatory agencies, and good government reform initiatives by civic organizations (Greenberg 2016; Sheingate 2016).

Publicity became a tool for public administration as well. Besides using public relations to contribute to an informed citizenry, civil servants quickly saw that extensive public communication activities could be used to help implement their agencies' missions. These bureaucrats also realized that a positive public image increased an agency's ability to maintain its autonomy from meddling by politicians on Capitol Hill. The epitome of the power of agency public relations was the work of Gifford Pinchot, head of the US Forest Service (a bureau within the Department of Agriculture) during the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909). Pinchot blanketed dailies, weeklies, and special audience publications with all manner of press releases, columns, useful information, and reports about the importance of conservation and how the bureau managed forests (Ponder

2000). He became so popular with the media and the public that he was untouchable by his conservative Congressional opponents. Other relatively early examples included the campaign by the US Children's Bureau to reduce infant and maternal mortality (Straughan 2007) and the efforts by the Army's Chemical Warfare Service to counter hostile public sentiment in the aftermath of World War I (Faith 2010).

By 1920, it was common for major federal agencies to employ public relations specialists, but not by that moniker. In 1913, Congress had passed a law prohibiting federal departments from employing "publicity experts." These and other Congressional prohibitions on public relations in public administration were not much of a barrier. In the case of the ban on having publicity experts on staff, only the names needed to be changed to protect the innocent (Lee 2011).

A political game of hide-and-seek became a fixed element of Washington life, with politicians attacking propaganda from the bureaucracy and public administrators vehemently denying they were doing any such thing. They were merely disseminating information, they said. Sometimes this was an explicit part of their statutory mission, such as the US Department of Agriculture distributing brochures with helpful information for farmers or the National Weather Service releasing its forecasts to radio stations. Furthermore, accountable governance called for a dedication to what was eventually called transparency. Agencies also claimed they needed staff professionals to deal with inquiries and requests from the media.

The New Deal, 1933-1940

These early manifestations of public relations in American public administration became common in the 1920s and early 1930s. But the big bang moment came in 1933 when newly inaugurated President Franklin Roosevelt (FDR) launched the New Deal. It was ground-breaking in terms of significantly expanding the role of the federal government (i.e., bureaucrats and unelected experts) in the daily lives of the citizenry. Inexorably, this affected government public relations as well. Each of the alphabet soup of New Deal agencies required a major effort to do its work. First, in order to provide services to people eligible for a new program, an agency had to publicize the existence of this new entitlement as a way of generating customers who legally qualified for it, but may not otherwise be aware of it. Each agency used public relations to locate its potential clients and bring them into participation in each program. This required extensive publicity, outreach, and field staff. Second, news reporters wanted to tell