

Science Alliance

communicating science

a proposal by Larkspur Communications
and River Path Associates

16 April, 1998

This is an outline proposal for the **Science Alliance** communications account from River Path Associates and Larkspur Communications.

River Path bring research and strategic skills to the campaign. They also handle evaluation and publications.

Larkspur offer a full public relations service, including media relations, press office and strategic news management.

Too many communication campaigns start **without a clear brief**.

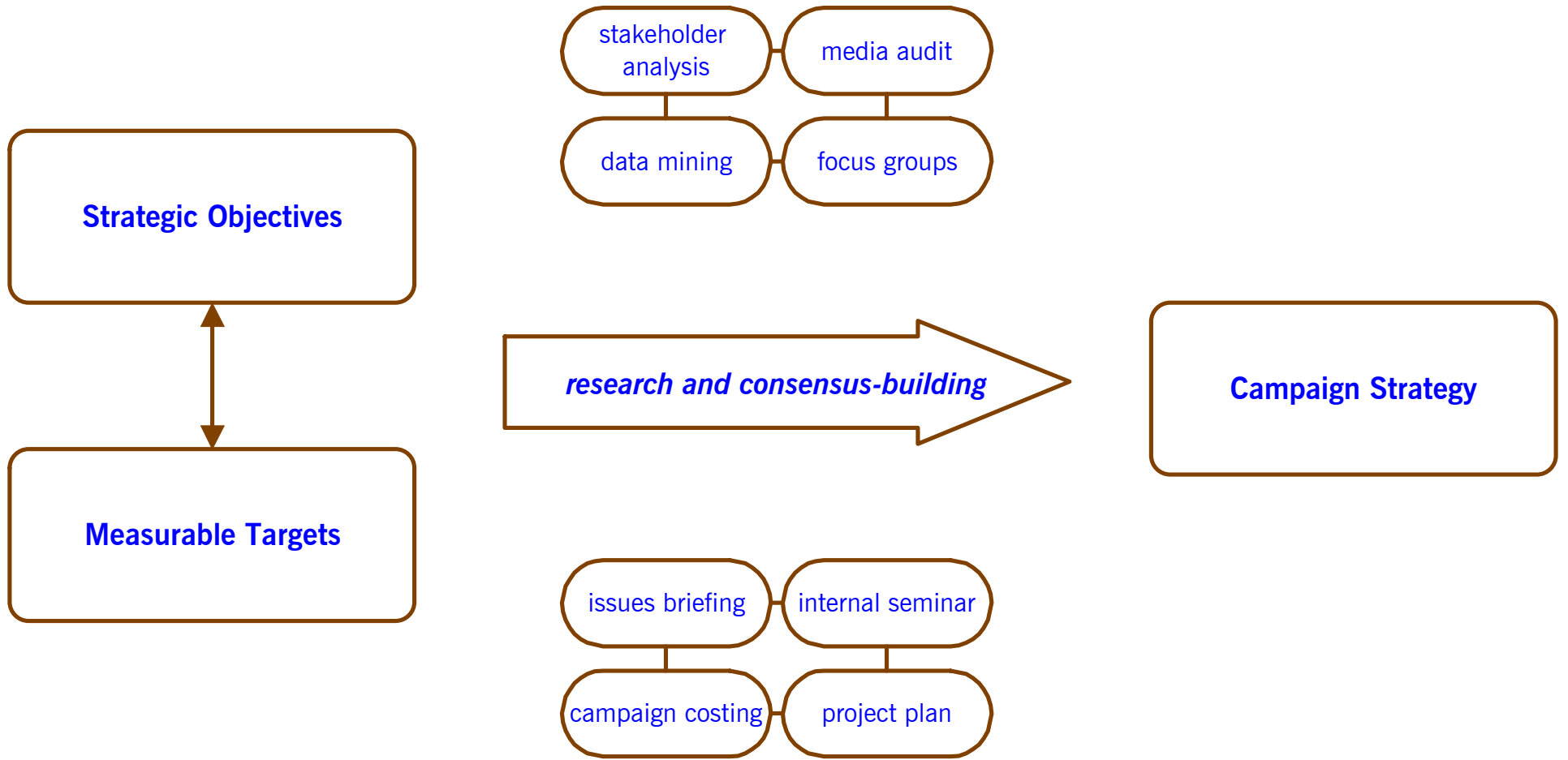
An organisation agrees that “we need to communicate more effectively than before”, but key figures have very different ideas about what this means.

The *Science Alliance* campaign will only function well if:

- ❖ clear strategic **objectives** are agreed *and*
- ❖ **targets** are set, against which progress can be measured

Research will go on to determine who Science Alliance’s **key audiences** are, determine **core messages** and suggest **communication options**.

Costings and a **project plan** will provide the finishing touches to a **communication strategy** which will guide and inform all future work.



planning the Science Alliance campaign

Communication strategy

Public confidence/interest/understanding, research funding, recruitment of scientists, animal experimentation, new technology – there are scores of science issues.

Where can Science Alliance make a difference?

A **briefing paper** will allow the board to make crucial decisions about where its efforts should be concentrated.

The paper will be based on

- ❖ **data mining** existing research
- ❖ telephone interviews exploring the **ideas, attitudes and direction of 30 key external stakeholders** (from government, industry, science organisations, education sector etc.)
- ❖ a **media audit**, exploring the opinions (and prejudices) of 30 journalists (from press, radio and television) – not just science specialists, but those on a news beat who make a crucial difference when a big science story breaks
- ❖ **a review of existing science communication**, covering the work of 40 local, national and international organisations – a collection of articles, publications etc. will show what's being done and what isn't, what's worked and what's going wrong
- ❖ **best practice in other fields** – picking up pointers from the best communication practice in today's fast-changing world

A day-long **seminar** will help the organisation make decisions quickly – and openly. The seminar will focus on agreeing:

- ❖ a clear campaign agenda, supported by those who will implement it
- ❖ campaign objectives, backed-up by quantifiable targets
- ❖ core campaign audiences and key messages for each audience

River Path will follow-up the seminar with a draft **campaign strategy** for testing in the field.

Audience research

The first step is to measure whatever can easily be measured. This is okay as far as it goes. The second step is to disregard what can't be measured or give it an arbitrary quantitative value. This is artificial and misleading. The third step is to presume what can't be measured isn't really important. This is blindness. The fourth step is to presume what can't easily be measured doesn't really exist. This is suicide.

Daniel Yankelovich, American pollster

The campaign strategy will be developed through audience research.

Research will be practical, flexible and high-impact:

- ❖ **mock-up communications** will be developed for each strategic objective
- ❖ **focus groups** will test the communications – using quantitative and qualitative methods
- ❖ **dissemination** is crucial (too much research never gets used), so time will be invested in providing high standards of documentation in the right media (print, presentation, video etc.) – Science Alliance staff will be invited to observe focus groups where appropriate – helping the organisation develop a clear sense of what is happening on the ground

The campaign strategy can now be redrafted and prepared for implementation. Time and money are crucial (as ever) – so careful **costings** must be prepared. Finally, a **project plan** will ensure that different agencies know what they have to do – and when.

A rounded **public relations campaign** contains elements of a wide range of disciplines, which support the central aim of achieving exposure through **good media relations strategy and management**.

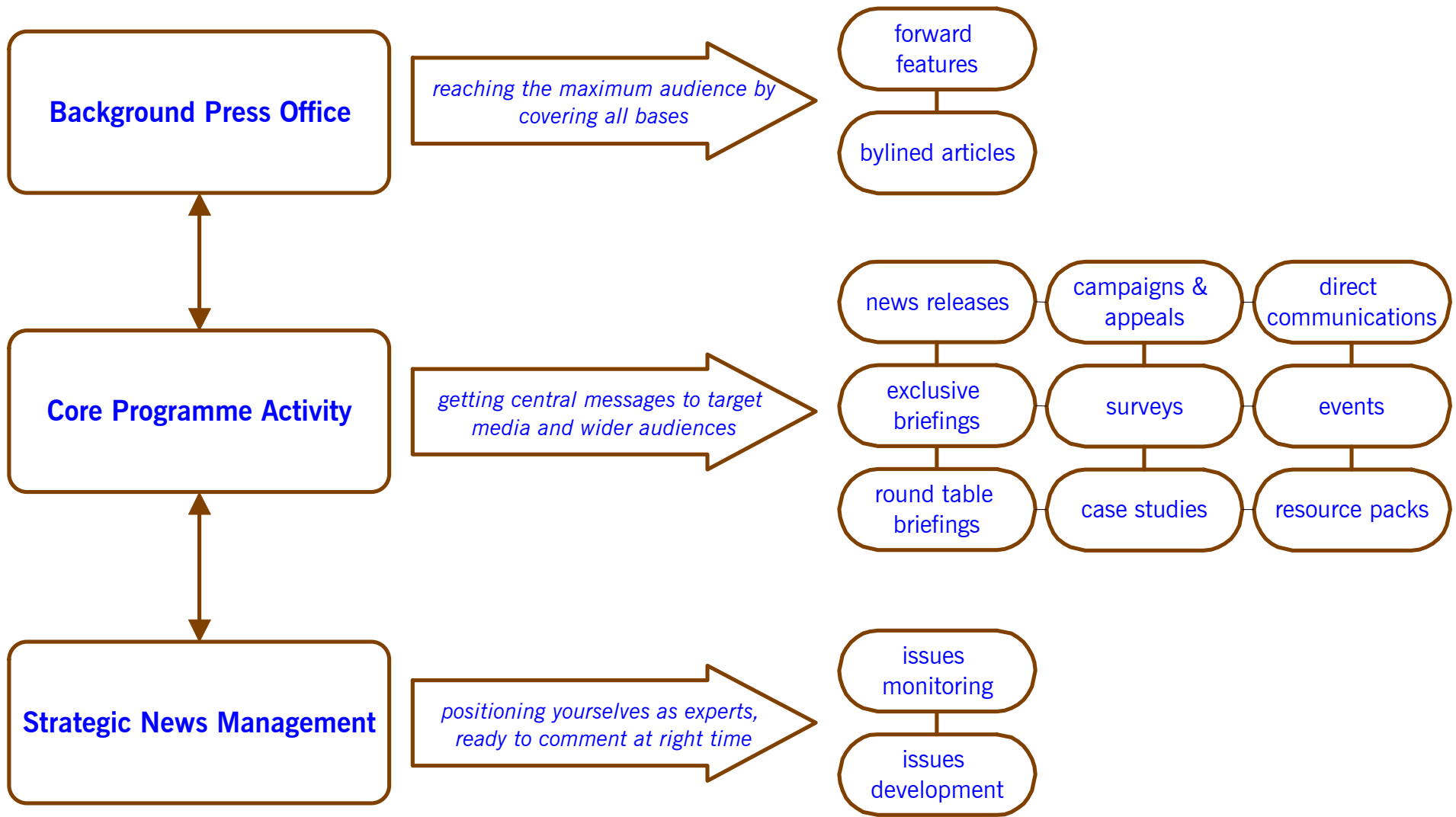
The classic campaign structure contains three distinct strands.

At its heart is a **core programme**, based around disseminating a range of messages to grow understanding and approbation for the client organisation. This should be implemented across a planned timescale.

Supporting the core programme is the **background press office**. This gives the campaign breadth by identifying a calendar of planned events and media features, to which the organisation can contribute as a supplement to its own core activities.

The third strand, **strategic news management**, is both the most difficult to achieve and the most likely to result in a campaign which is not merely successful but ground breaking. It depends on the ability to monitor and use the current news agenda to grow the scope and boundaries of a planned campaign.

The following **baker's dozen of tactics** will be combined to develop a solid programme for Science Alliance – but it is the **creative solutions** we develop from the communication strategy that will produce something memorable and truly effective.



Background Press Office Function

→ Forward features

Dates for forthcoming features across target press can be gathered from the titles themselves, or from specialist directories. Providing information or comment for features is a good way of supplementing a proactive media relations programme, and a well maintained calendar of potential features gives campaigns added depth.

❖ ECA International:

ECA, a unique human resources consultancy, specialising in providing statistical information and trends to managers of employees based overseas, used forward features to great effect in supplementing its media relations campaign.

The consultancy holds a wide range of information that it can offer to journalists – from comparative cost of living statistics for over 200 locations, to complete dossiers on what it is like to live and work in major cities around the world.

To target the regular country reports produced by the Financial Times throughout the year, ECA created the Crib Sheet – ten contrasting facts about a country – as a snapshot of the information it could offer interested journalists. Crib Sheets have resulted in the consultancy being regularly contacted for input into FT Surveys, alongside more established organisations like the EIU.

→ Bylined articles and speaker opportunities

Bylined articles offer an opportunity to establish a key organisation figure as the authoritative voice in a field. Speaker opportunities provide a platform at which key ideas can be shared, and useful feedback gained. As with forward features, details of forthcoming speaker opportunities are available either direct from conference organisers or through specialist directories.

❖ DFID & the Guyana Forestry Commission:

The Department for International Development (DFID) was keen to counter repeated attacks in the UK media on its work with the Guyana Forestry Commission.

The Caribbean Review was identified as providing an authoritative regional platform and Chris Turnbull, DFID's representative in Guyana, was assisted in preparing an explanation of the rationale behind UK support.

The article reflected the complexity of the situation 'on the ground' and argued for an approach that balanced the needs of all stakeholders. It also pointed out that ultimately decisions must be made by the democratically-elected Guyana government – and not by British pressure groups.

Core Programme Activity

→ News Releases

For major stories, released to a defined list of writers for key media, including the national press as well as trade and vertical publications, influential freelancers and any relevant regional media.

❖ One 2 One:

Since launching in 1992, One 2 One has developed a list of key media contacts, all of whom need to be kept informed of news – from the launch of new products, to the arrival of new senior management personnel.

One 2 One's latest customer numbers information, covering the first quarter of 1998 and showing that the company is now the fastest growing mobile phone network in the UK, was released across the press last month and received coverage in all the national broadsheets the next day.

→ Exclusive Briefings

Used in situations where guaranteeing a single piece of quality coverage in a target title is more important for the campaign than aiming for as many hits as possible. Exclusives can be followed up with a wider news release – but be aware that competitor titles will be unlikely to use material already published.

❖ The Civic Trust:

The Civic Trust's annual awards scheme for environmental design is one of the oldest of its type and regularly attracts over 500 entries from around the UK. However, in recent years, national media interest has been focused largely on newer architectural awards, such as the Stirling Prize.

In 1996, the Trust decided to plan and implement a formal media relations campaign to maximise coverage of the scheme – and particularly to boost interest in the central award for urban regeneration schemes.

As the awards ceremony was planned for mid-April, two weeks before the General Election, it was recommended that the Trust enter into an exclusive relationship with a national paper. This approach was designed to ensure good coverage at a time when space on the news pages was going to be hard to achieve without prior planning.

By using the exclusive approach, the Awards were given two full pages in the Guardian. This national coverage was supplemented with articles across a broad range of trade and regional media.

→ **Round Table Briefings**

A way of introducing the campaign aims to a number of key writers and forming or developing important contacts. Usually in the form of a lunch or breakfast meeting, it is important to use a solid piece of news as the reason for bringing journalists to an event.

❖ **ECA International:**

ECA, a unique human resources consultancy, specialising in providing statistical information and trends to managers of employees based overseas, wanted to create a media savvy culture among its consultants to help it maximise exposure for the organisation in the media.

A venue was chosen for a lunch involving four senior consultants at ECA and journalists selected on the basis of their personal reach – perhaps contributing to a national newspaper as well as writing regularly for a trade title.

ECA used the lunch to launch a major research paper called *Managing Mobility* – dealing with a wide range of expatriate issues to provide a broad base for conversation. The journalists at the lunch quickly formed a central group of contacts for ECA, often actively using the consultancy for figures or comment, as well as taking stories as they were presented.

→ **Media Campaigns and Appeals**

For campaigns where it is important to raise awareness of a single issue among an audience, or range of audiences, it may sometimes be appropriate to develop a media based campaign or appeal in conjunction with one title. The success of such campaigns is dependent on selecting the right media partner and on ensuring that there is something compelling for the audience to take part in or sign up to.

❖ **The Dever Society:**

The Dever Society has been fighting a planned development of 800 acres of greenfield land at Micheldever Station since 1990.

The Society has recently decided to supplement its lobbying activity with a campaign to be used first to capture a local audience, and then to bring the issue to the attention of the wider public.

Called the Acre for Acre Appeal, the campaign will run initially in a local newspaper. It will encourage local people to find and nominate a nearby brownfield site and substitute it for the equivalent acreage of greenfield land at Micheldever. The Appeal will gradually produce a brownfield solution to the area's housing needs, giving the Society better arguments against the proposed development, and a clear local mandate to fight the plans.

→ **Surveys**

Surveys offer campaigns a great way of creating media coverage with the advantage of being able to tailor stories both for the media being approached and to suit the messages the organisation is seeking to emphasise. The media as a whole loves statistics – from the best (and worst) beaches in the UK to the most expensive house prices in the world.

❖ **One 2 One:**

As part of its campaign to grow a larger customer base among businesses, One 2 One has commissioned a piece of research to find the best place to set up business in Britain.

Organised as a regional championship, with a grand national final, the survey asks local enterprise agencies across the UK to provide information on setting up business in their area. A regional shortlist of finalists will provide media relations opportunities across a broad range of provincial newspapers, with the added effect of building up local interest for the national final.

The final will be held with a single media partner to ensure good national coverage and will also be released to business-facing vertical titles. Designed to associate One 2 One more closely with the growing small business sector in the UK, results can be used throughout the process to comment on business issues as they arise within the national news agenda.

→ **Case Studies**

Case studies are an important way of illustrating the work carried out by an organisation or company, and provide useful and recyclable snapshots of best practice in action. These can be developed specifically for a media opportunity, either by giving a journalist the chance to interview a client, or by presenting writers with a pre-written story for adaptation. A well written case study with an interesting story will often command more space than a straight news story.

❖ **AZTEC:**

An important part of AZTEC's media relations strategy is to increase the proportion of national and trade coverage it commands, without damaging its relationships with local newspapers. Case studies have helped with this aim – providing a library of stories that can be used more than once, all carrying key messages about what a TEC offers its local community.

In a year when AZTEC has been concentrating on developing the information technology capabilities of South West London, the majority of case studies have been IT led. For example, the release of a story about a new company, backed by AZTEC, offering an online health club service reached three national newspapers, as well as the IT and health press and a wide range of local titles.

→ **Direct Communications**

Direct communications can be used to deliver specific messages to key audiences, such as local MPs or funding bodies. This approach often works best in conjunction with media relations activity – while a newsletter will ensure every message is put across, media coverage carries a third party endorsement that no in-house publication can achieve on its own.

❖ **AZTEC:**

AZTEC was deeply affected by the 1997 General Election campaign, with six of seven local MPs defeated in South West London.

As an organisation funded largely through central Government, it was important for AZTEC to forge good relationships with its new elected representatives. This was achieved through a programme of briefing documents sent to MPs, offering practical information on the area as well as lobbying on behalf of the TEC. MPs have responded well, meeting with senior personnel and attending TEC events.

→ **Events**

Events are a classic method of launching major campaigns, combining news release with an opportunity for the media to interact directly with the organisation. A well planned event can produce good picture opportunities for the press as well as the chance for journalists to try out a new service, or explore key issues through a press conference.

❖ **Institute of Cancer Research:**

Faced with the necessity of raising funds directly for the first time in its history, the Institute of Cancer Research launched an awareness campaign for male cancers in 1997.

Based on encouraging women to persuade men of the importance of screening and self examination for testicular and prostate cancers, the campaign was targeted initially at mid-market tabloids. *Everyman* was launched with a celebrity led event in central London, featuring boxer shorts designed by famous people – from designer John Rocha to footballer Paul Gascoigne and entertainer Bruce Forsyth.

The launch event gathered coverage across a wide range of national media, and was followed up with a programme of media relations activity which included John Rocha appearing on GMTV, and *The Times* adopting *Everyman* as its Christmas charity.

→ **Briefing and Resources Packs**

For audiences outside the media, developing a well planned and attractive briefing pack can ensure that key constituents are equipped with a guide to the facts on a vital issue.

❖ ***earth deserves better:***

earth deserves better was prepared during the election campaign, for the Labour shadow cabinet team on international development. Its purpose was two-fold – to bring together a mass of press releases, factsheets and ministerial speeches into a coherent briefing for journalists *and* to provide an introduction to the issues for first-time Labour candidates.

Strategic News Management

→ Issues Monitoring

Current news issues can often provide a platform to enhance a campaign by positioning spokespeople as experts or by providing a new direction for media relations activity. Action can be confined simply to letters written in response to articles in the media, or can be developed to highlight the concerns or opinions of an organisation and its constituents.

❖ **The Countryside Movement:**

The Countryside Movement, set up in 1995, was designed to articulate the concerns of rural Britain across a broad range of issues, including management of the countryside and maintaining rural communities.

The introduction of the Landfill Tax in October 1996 provided the Movement with an excellent platform to highlight the escalating problem of flytipping on private land, resulting not only in pollution to the countryside, but also in considerable costs to landowners and tenants responsible for disposing of dumped waste.

While the legislation was passing through the House of Commons, the Countryside Movement lobbied MPs to table questions on the possible effects of the Landfill Tax on the countryside, as well as organising a photo opportunity for the press at a farm in rural Hampshire.

This action, and resultant media coverage had the effect of persuading the Environment Secretary of the time, John Gummer, to ask the Environment Agency to look into ways of relieving the burden of disposal on landowners and tenant farmers.

→ Issues Development

In the same way as current issues can be used to drive campaigning, it is sometimes possible to use existing news agendas to achieve the aim of a campaign by using public concern in one area to highlight potential solutions. By harnessing interest from as many sources as possible, a tangential story can be grown to become an issue of national interest.

❖ **ProChile:**

Among the main strands of a media relations campaign on behalf of ProChile, the export agency of the Chilean Government, was the goal of positioning Chile as having a stable, financially dynamic economy among business and investment audiences in the UK.

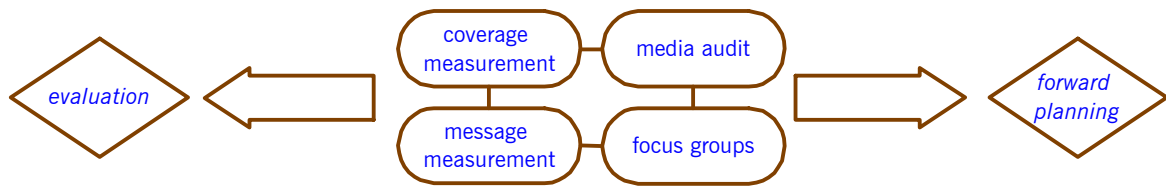
In late 1995, the UK media was concerned by the future of the state pensions system, and the decline of the pay as you go model, in place since the 1940s. The resulting flurry of alarmist headlines provided a unique opportunity to highlight an area where Chile's economy is far in advance of the UK's.

Chile introduced a privatised system under General Pinochet in the early '80s, whereby every person in the country has an individual savings account with one of 30 approved pensions providers. Paying a set proportion of their income into the account each month, Chilean citizens are able to switch providers if they are unhappy with the performance of their account, making the system largely self regulating.

Using research being undertaken by the Adam Smith Institute as third party endorsement of the scheme, the Chilean system was introduced to a range of economics writers in the national and trade media. More than £1 million worth of business facing media coverage was generated, and the House of Commons Select Committee on Social Security invited José Piñera, architect of the Chilean system, to give evidence.

In April 1997, the Conservative Party formally adopted a pensions system based on the Chilean model as part of its manifesto.

Proof Positive



Evaluation is essential to any properly-run communications work. *PR Week's* current Proof Campaign is making a case for all organisations to allocate at least 10% of the overall budget to this work.

Time spent researching objectives, targets and overall strategy will now pay off. *Science Alliance* has a clear idea of what it was trying to achieve – progress can now be assessed against the agreed targets.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods are recommended. Techniques include:

- ❖ **monthly coverage measurement**, benchmarked against a similar organisation in a different field
- ❖ **annual media audit** – to see how attitudes develop year-on-year
- ❖ **message measurement** – scoring appearance of key messages
- ❖ **focus groups** – to look more closely at new and developing issues

10% may seem a lot to spend. It is – if an evaluation exercise is purely retrospective. A balanced exercise, however, allows lessons to be learnt as work progresses. It reveals what is, and what isn't, working – and allows ongoing fine-tuning of the campaign's direction.

Science Alliance has ambitious goals. Proper planning and evaluation will help achieve them.

Larkspur Communications

Larkspur was founded in 1993, and is a broadly based public relations agency based in central London. With a flat structure of twelve full time consultants, the agency provides specialists across a range of fields, working on consumer, high tech, media, corporate and public sector campaigns, and is a member of the Public Relations Consultants Association. Winner of PR Week's Best New Consultancy Award in 1994, Larkspur was subsequently named as Best Small Consultancy in 1996, and won Best Business Campaign for its work on promoting Chile's economy to business and investment audiences.

Victoria Collis is an issues based public relations specialist. She has worked across a wide range of campaigns since joining Larkspur two years ago, including Chile, the Countryside Movement and the Civic Trust. At present, clients include AZTEC, the Training and Enterprise Council for South West London, human resources specialists ECA International and The Dever Society. She also manages One 2 One's business to business campaign.

Larkspur's **current clients** include:

AZTEC	Music Choice Europe
The Dever Society	Redstone Network Services
ECA International	One 2 One
Whitbread	Lee Cooper
The Slug and Lettuce Group	Football 365
Jubilee 2000	Excite
Lambie-Nairn	UMTS Forum

River Path Associates

River Path Associates was founded in February 1997, in response to emerging changes in British organisational culture. With the new Government, that process has accelerated, and River Path is closely involved. Our remit is straightforward: to facilitate communication, particularly about complex issues, between organisations and their audiences. Four elements – policy analysis, research, creative development and strategic delivery – are necessary to effective communication. We undertake them all.

David Steven is co-founder of River Path and co-ordinates all the company's projects, in addition to undertaking policy analysis, research and editorial work.

In the last year, River Path generated

- ❖ a **communication audit** for **One 2 One**, offering a rigorous but readable analysis of the company's communications priorities
- ❖ ongoing **strategic communications analysis** for **Polar**, a world leader in health and fitness products based in Finland
- ❖ a **briefing pack** for a (then) **Shadow Cabinet Team** during the 1997 General Election campaign
- ❖ a **communications strategy** to enable the UK arm of the **World Bank** to influence government and key policy-makers in the changing political climate
- ❖ **now for the science bit – concentrate!**, a research report for the **British Association**, based on interviews with 40 senior figures about changes in the public understanding of science, followed by a bylined article in the **New Scientist**
- ❖ **uk@earth.people**, a publication for the **Department for International Development (DFID)** described by Clare Short at its launch as “possibly the funkiest publication ever produced by the UK Government” and selected for pick of the month in Creative Review
- ❖ a policy paper, **Breaking Out**, reported in our lead article in the **New Statesman**
- ❖ **forests MATTER**, a strategy paper, outlining **DFID** policy on tropical forestry for the next 5 years
- ❖ **communications advice** for **McGee Ltd.** into how to sell reclaimed chairs from the West Stand of Chelsea FC, leading to full page coverage in the Evening Standard, and articles in The Sun, The Star and The People
- ❖ **Taking Stock**, a ground-breaking, dual-language analysis of British efforts to save the Central American rain forest, for **DFID**

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