An ideal public relations program includes the essential elements of healthy staff relations, a commitment to serving the public, marketing, publicity and creativity. Yet, successful public relations is involved even more in the somewhat intangible realm of having a genuinely positive attitude toward the public and in the domain of having an innovative concept of management. All libraries literally have some sort of “relations” with the public. Public relations in the context of this discussion though, means having a deliberate, systematic and planned approach to maintaining or improving the relationship between the library and specifically identified groups.

The UC Irvine Library serves as a noteworthy example of how well academic libraries can do in this contest with the creative management of a seemingly commonplace library activity like publishing brochures, guides and newsletters. Only a small number of the estimated 5,443 academic libraries in the U.S. and Canada have entered the contest since 1980. As the accompanying tables indicate, however, academic libraries entering the contest perform far better than the typical contest entry in other categories. Although the contest employs no quota systems for different categories of entrants, academic libraries experience an above-average chance of winning awards in this PR award contest.