

U.S. Army TARDEC Public Affairs  
Communications Plan: Fuel Cell Electric Vehicle Demonstrator

**1. Opportunity**

a. Issue statement

The U.S. Army Tank Automotive Research, Development and Engineering Center is the Army's research center for ground vehicle technology, and TARDEC's position as the technical authority within the military for these technologies is critical. TARDEC's initiation of a cooperative research and development agreement (CRADA) and subsequent contract to build a Fuel Cell Electric Vehicle Demonstrator (FCEV) with General Motors (GM) provided a natural opportunity to establish TARDEC as the technical authority in FCEV development and deployment.

b. Opportunity statement

The formal agreements with GM to develop Fuel Cell technologies and a FCEV provides TARDEC the opportunity to show the relevance of this technology, TARDEC's technical acumen in evaluating and integrating it and the need for further resources to continue the technology's development.

c. Research conducted

Background and foundational research for this plan was conducted both formally and informally. Formal research came from secondary sources, while informal research came from primary sources.

The formal research investigated our key publics in order to best leverage this opportunity. We interviewed subject matter experts in Army R&D processes and found how these processes tie into the acquisition and appropriations environment. Our formal research sought to answer the question, "Who needs to know about the Fuel Cell work TARDEC is doing in order for the resources to continue and expand so that work can continue?" Some expected publics included the leadership in the U.S. Army acquisition process: Maneuver Center of Excellence leadership, Army Capabilities Integration Center (ARCI) leadership, and leadership from the Department of the Army Assistant Chief of Staff for G3/5/7 and G8. Some non-traditional publics were suggested, including automotive industry senior executives, whose support of cooperative research is important for future research iterations, and executive leadership from the State of Michigan, who generally support automotive research in the state through indirect means.

Informal research came through media analysis. Specifically, we analyzed what media outlet categories were most interested in Fuel Cell research, Army automotive research, and cooperative research conducted in southeast Michigan. Additionally, we expanded this research to include those media outlets most frequently sampled by our identified publics. We sought with this research to answer the questions, "What media channels should we try to leverage the most? And what will be seen by our publics?"

**2. Media Campaign Plan**

a. Strategies considered

We considered and implemented two sequential strategies to reach our public with the appropriate messaging relative to the FCEV. The first led up to the vehicle's introduction during the 2016 Association of the United States Army (AUSA) annual meeting. Our team decided it was absolutely necessary to present the vehicle with the right messaging from the start. Informal analysis of the responses in our public to other, similar R&D project rollouts highlighted the need to very clearly articulate the FCEV program's goals and limitations in order to encourage our publics to be receptive to this new idea. Specifically, in introducing the vehicle, we sought to make clear that this FCEV demonstrator was not intended to be presented as a replacement vehicle, for the HMMWV or any other platform.

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The second strategy supported the FCEV post-rollout activities. TARDEC was scheduled to bring the FCEV to a series of Army installations throughout FY17 in order to collect data from Soldiers who would use the FCEV during training missions. Each appearance during this period provided an opportunity to reinforce our messaging while laying out the need for future work.

b. Objectives

Our objectives for this communications plan are separated into measures of performance (objectives for our team to meet that we think will yield the result we seek) and measures of effectiveness (end-state measures to which Communications contributes, but may not be solely responsible).

i. Measures of Performance

Our measures of performance were benchmarked against our previous communications plans for the volume of outreach necessary to sustain our publics' attention. We identified a cumulative media exposure number of greater than 500 articles throughout the communication plan's life as a reasonable target. Additionally, using a "potential reach" algorithm proprietary to Meltwater (our primary media monitoring service), we targeted a cumulative potential reach of greater than 4 billion during this period.

ii. Measures of Effectiveness

Our measures of effectiveness are tied directly into our top-level goals for this plan. Our first objective was to be met if, during the span of this plan, either of the U.S. Government or General Motors initiated formal support for follow-on Fuel Cell research. Additionally, we measured our effectiveness by the placement of at least three positive articles in defense trade publications highlighting the General Motors/TARDEC Fuel Cell CRADA, specifically its purpose as a "win-win" for both parties.

c. Tactics

Our tactics for this plan were timed to phases for each strategy in order to achieve the greatest reach possible with earned media, while integrating resourcing, messages and other considerations from our collaborative partners throughout the process, GM Communications in particular.

i. In support of the FCEV rollout strategy

The primary goal of this strategy was to earn the attendance at the unveiling of the FCEV by as many of the primary public members as we possibly could. In the months leading up to the unveiling of the FCEV at AUSA's winter meeting in October 2016, we released a series of products to our identified critical media, and with the release of each bit of information came the date and time of the unveiling of the vehicle. In this manner, for months before the unveiling a multitude of articles were published with not only the additional bit of information that was released, but reinforcing information on where and when people could see the FCEV firsthand.

These pre-event releases were a mix of Army and General Motors press releases. As the FCEV itself is proprietary to General Motors, we were bound to adhere to its scheduling for release of information, particularly photos and images of the vehicle. As a general guideline, our targeted media in the defense trade publications published TARDEC's releases more often, while the automotive trade publications and national outlets most often published GM's.

In the few weeks immediately prior to the FCEV unveiling, GM and TARDEC sent information cards with photos and critical talking points to the publics in whose attendance we were most interested.

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Our final set of tactics supporting this strategy was at the unveiling itself. The unveiling was scheduled to purposely coincide with a natural break in AUSA high-profile speakers, allowing key publics to attend in person. Our leadership's comments were specifically chosen to address our messaging priorities with adequate time after the unveiling for senior leader engagements with our key publics.

ii. In support of the FCEV Soldier evaluation visits

We scheduled with each excursion of the FCEV to a new installation a day for engagement with distinguished visitors and with interested local media. Engaging local media was not a primary outcome for this plan, but the products those local media members produced resulted in two effects: 1) it reinforced to the senior installation commander and other local distinguished visitors the relevance of the FCEV and its evaluation, and 2) it provided a foundation of B-roll and key interview footage from which national outlets were able to reach out to TARDEC for further engagements.

These tactics, in addition to some direct outreach from General Motors Communications, led to the FCEV's appearance on numerous national television programs.

**3. Content Created**

Most of the content created in support of this communications plan were results of coordinated efforts with GM Communications. Press releases, photos, video products, media advisories and press kits all accompanied our scheduled media engagements. Additionally, we developed video products to support specific, senior leader engagements.

i. Press Releases

Because of Army restrictions on dual-logo-bearing products, most releases were sent under the GM banner. Two of the three pertinent press releases before the reveal were directly sent to media (Accessible [HERE](#) and [HERE](#)), while the third release (published concurrently with the reveal) is [HERE](#).

ii. Media Advisories

Three media advisories were produced for this communications plan. One advisory preempted each of the three shows at which the FCEV was present: AUSA's annual meeting in 2016, the North American International Auto Show in Detroit, January 2017, and the Washington Auto Show in Washington D.C., January 2017. These advisories were sent directly to our critical media outlets and distributed through Meltwater's "News Room."

iii. Video products

Both TARDEC and GM created supporting video products for this communications plan. GM's products were used primarily to support the roll-out strategy, while TARDEC's products supported the strategy supporting the vehicle evaluation. Samples of these products are available [HERE](#), [HERE](#) and [HERE](#). The third of these products demonstrates how we leveraged our video production assets to support our messaging to one of our primary publics, ARCIC senior leadership.

iv. Social Media

TARDEC coordinated Social Media activity to coincide with press releases and significant events. Although some of this activity was pushed well in advance of the FCEV reveal, we made a very strong push in the week leading up to the event and during the reveal event itself. In particular, Facebook posts (three in total, including a Facebook Live) day-of-reveal, but prior-to, teasing the reveal and reminding Facebook fans to tune-in. This was followed by a Facebook Live of the FCEV reveal event. This post reached almost 20,000 viewers and the video was viewed 6,800 times.

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October 5: Facebook post following-up from the reveal, including a link to the Trucks.com article highlighting the vehicle.

Additional social media sequences were made for subsequent auto shows and FCEV engagements at the various Army installations.

#### 4. Results

##### a. Objectives and Evaluation Methods

##### i. Measures of Performance

Both of our Measures of Performance were met and greatly exceeded, evaluated through Meltwater's media monitoring service. By September 30, 2017, 1,022 articles were written about the FCEV itself. With regards to "Potential Reach," in January 2017, Meltwater redefined its assessment of this metric and greatly reduced each publication's numbers nearly tenfold. Despite this, within the first quarter of the FCEV's rollout, our outreach efforts had earned a potential reach exceeding 1 billion.

##### ii. Measures of Effectiveness

By our articulated Measures of Effectiveness, our communications plan was effective. TARDEC and GM initiated a follow-up Fuel Cell project ([the SURUS project](#)), energized in part due to the energy and momentum the FCEV project created. Additionally, outreach to our publics led to such a positive impression of TARDEC's fuel cell work that a significant appropriation was included in the [2018 NDAA](#) for continuing the Fuel Cell activities.

As to earning at least three positive mentions of the GM/TARDEC fuel cell relationship in defense trades, this was met within one week of the FCEV unveiling. In particular, one Defense publication led with, "[Holy Smoke! GM, Army Turn Out New Hydrogen Car In 9 Months...](#)"

##### b. Outputs and performance

TARDEC's outputs through this plan, the performance of which can be directly evaluated, can be categorized into facilitating media interviews and Social Media outreach. Between the three appearances at the trade shows and follow-on efforts, more than 30 media interview were conducted in total. Of these, some yielded high-profile results:

[CNN: GM's super-quiet, super-cool military 4x4](#)

[USA Today: Meet the extreme off-road Chevrolet Colorado fuel cell electric truck made for U.S. Army](#)

[Fox News: AUSA 2017: Stealthy Chevy trucks for soldiers?](#)

An appearance on *Jay Leno's Garage* (Scheduled to air in January 2018)

A live, studio appearance with SME Lt. Col. David Centeno on *Maria in the Mornings* (Fox Business Channel)

#### 5. Outcomes Achieved

By any measure, the stated goal for this communications plan, to establish TARDEC as the technical authority in Fuel Cell Electric Vehicle development and deployment, was met. Nothing conveys this better than the follow-on project enthusiasm from GM and the appropriations bill funding further research. Additionally, on a qualitative level, the feedback from the ARCIC commander and Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, two individuals who are heavily represented in our targeted public, cements the point. (As evidenced by [this article highlighting ARCIC commander](#), [this RSS feed](#) by the VCSA, and [this article highlighting the Fuel Cell vehicle as one of the top 10 Army modernization efforts of 2016](#)).