



What's black, white, and read all over?

During the 2016 AWC Annual Conference, a panel of reporters sat down to have a frank conversation about working with the media in the 21st century. Here are a few pointers they gave to city officials in attendance. Special thanks to Josh Feit from *PubliCola*, Chris Winters from the *Everett Herald*, and Teresa Wippel from *My Edmonds News*, for their participation on the panel.

Nothing beats good ol' fashioned relationship building

The best thing elected officials can do to get accurate information in the news is to cultivate a relationship with local reporters. This includes knowing which reporters cover which issues and who might be interested in a certain story. Give your cell phone number to your local beat reporter so they can clear up information after a council meeting or interview. Once trust is developed, it will be easier to have candid conversations and discuss difficult issues.

Maybe it's not all "sizzle," but you can help identify a good story

Reporters are looking for stories that people want to read. When you want the media to cover something, make it is easy to understand. Are you trying to make sure people know about your comp plan update process? Scour the data to find trends that might be interesting. Help the media slice and dice a change that's coming down the pike. Are you addressing a certain policy issue to help people? Attach a real person to the story.

Be responsive and aware of deadlines

Deadlines are not necessarily driven by the printing press anymore. Even if you don't know the answer to a question, at least get back to the reporter and ask about the deadline. This may provide the needed time for you to research the answer to a question.

Don't assume a reporter is out to get you

If you are talking with a reporter about an important issue...slow down! Let the reporter know when you have made an important point and tell them you would like to include a particular detail in the story.

Social media is a good way to share, but don't assume your message will be picked up by reporters

Social media can be a good way to reach reporters and occasionally they may use a quote. But understand that it can also be a time suck for reporters and they are not necessarily combing through social media posts/tweets to get facts or opinions.

Reach out when there is an error

There is a difference between a factual mistake and a difference of interpretation. If you believe a reporter truly misunderstood a situation or there is an error, contact the reporter and respectfully let him or her know. Correcting errors and explaining a point of view is always easier if there is an established relationship with the reporter.

Tap into your editorial boards

It is highly encouraged that you regularly reach out to your editorial board to sit down and walk through a city policy under development!