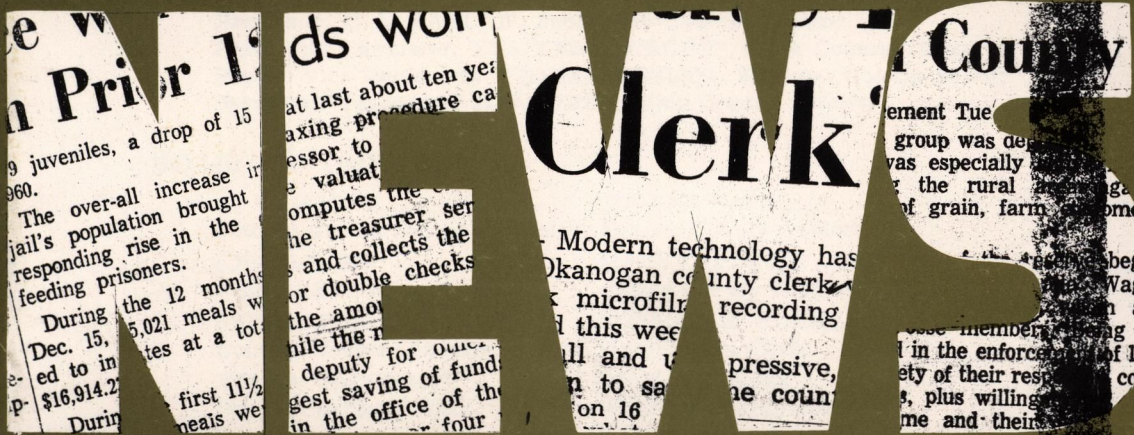


PUBLIC RELATIONS HANDBOOK

FOR COUNTY OFFICIALS



WASHINGTON STATE ASSOCIATION
OF ELECTED COUNTY OFFICIALS

PUBLIC RELATIONS HANDBOOK

*A guide to a better county program of public information
through the press, radio, and television*

PUBLISHED BY

THE WASHINGTON STATE ASSOCIATION OF ELECTED COUNTY OFFICIALS

1063 CAPITOL WAY

OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON

ASSOCIATION OFFICERS FOR 1962:

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SECOND VICE PRESIDENT: WILLIAM BREUER, *Whatcom County Sheriff*

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STAFF:

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MABEL J. JETER, *Executive Treasurer*

RESPECT

TRUST

ACCESS

BUILDING AN ORGANIZED PRESS PROGRAM

Relationships between the press and county offices vary greatly from county to county. In some counties the officials take the first step in establishing friendly relations with the press. In other counties reporters and editors find it necessary to search for news in each office. In still other counties there is a continuous ongoing system of communication in which the officials and the press keep each other informed about newsworthy events. For county officials who desire to create an organized program of press relations, the following suggestions will aid in developing such a program.

MEET THE PRESS

Relationships with the press must be built on mutual respect, trust and accessibility.

Each county official should make a point to become personally acquainted with the reporter covering his office. Invite him in to discuss with you the type of news in which he is interested. Make him feel that your office and its records are available to him. If possible, visit the managing editor or city editor by appointment at his office. No reporter or editor should be made to feel on the defensive when gathering news.

County officials should assume a leadership role in establishing contact with local reporters and the local radio and TV station. If they don't come to see you, you should take pains to get acquainted with them. You should take the responsibility for continuity in your press relations if you hope to get the programs sponsored by your office before the public.

Newspapers, radio stations and TV stations are strong competitors for news. Be sure you know the *day and the hour* of publication for every newspaper in your area — especially in those areas having both daily and weekly newspapers. Acquaint yourselves with deadlines and then release news so that it will appear in each outlet at the same time.

Each office should decide upon a policy, particularly in areas served by local weeklies and metropolitan dailies, as to which outlet gets first choice. Most offices favor the local papers. Remember that some weeklies prefer advance stories and some dailies will take immediate follow-ups and in other areas the reverse is true. By following the local preference you will achieve better news coverage.



TYPES OF NEWS

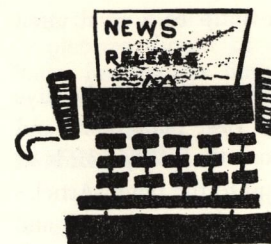
Each newspaper has its own personality, its own likes and dislikes, its own editorial policy. Study the newspaper in your area to find what kind of news it emphasizes, what type of pictures it uses, what type of feature story it will use, who reads it, and anything else you can about it. You will then be able to fit stories about your office to the policy of the paper to which you submit them.

In many counties — particularly the so-called “cow-counties” — the weekly newspaper is the chief source of news. Most of them will carry any news of local interest such as resignations, new personnel, local statistics, etc. They are usually published on Thursday or Friday and in some cases advance stories are of more interest than follow-ups. News should go to them on the preceding Monday or Tuesday. They have smaller staffs than the dailies and stories written in newsworthy fashion which can go immediately to the printer without rewriting will stand a good chance of being printed. Weeklies, because they are local, often avoid controversial issues. Like dailies, each one should be studied for its own particular idiosyncrasies.

Always be on the lookout for feature stories which can be illustrated with pictures. We received many of these in answer to our questionnaire and we noticed that they had appeared in all types of newspapers from the largest metropolitan dailies to small county weeklies. Such features as the county employees pictured addressing ration card applications, the county sheriff with the junior sheriff's posse, and a county superintendent honored in a feature article in *This Woman's World*.

Opposite of the feature story is the “scoop”. There is nothing a reporter likes better than a scoop and he will be your friend for life, if you can get one to him occasionally. A scoop is an exclusive bit of news which is of immediate interest. The trick is to recognize it when you see it and get it to the reporter while it is hot.

The run-of-the-mill news is that of informative nature — news of meetings to be held or new programs to be initiated. If written in good newspaper fashion, they are interesting and make good copy. Here again a trick is involved — this time how to make it well written.



HOW TO PREPARE YOUR NEWS

It takes time to prepare a newspaper story properly and yet it is a necessary chore to be performed. Here are some of the practices and techniques you must use, if you want your stories used:

Copy should be on regulation paper, white or buff — just ordinary composition paper, 8½ x 11.

All releases should be typewritten or mimeographed, making them easy to read. Avoid use of thin onion skin paper or poor carbon copies. Some papers want a release date and others don't. In the upper left-hand corner put the date, who it is from and what it is about like this:

September 17, 1962

FROM: John Doe, County Superintendent of Schools

RE: CONSERVATION CLASSES AT FISH LAKE

If releasing to a metropolitan daily, put your telephone number after your name. This permits the editor to call you quickly without having to look up your number.

Double or triple space copy. Although you may save space, it is bad form to single space your copy. Newspapers prefer double, sometimes triple spacing. It permits the editors to make notations or make inter-linear corrections.

Type on one side of paper only. This is important. Releases are much easier to read this way and to handle as copy. Number your pages. If the copy becomes separated, it can be re-assembled.

Start your copy about one-third down the first page. Put a continuation mark “more” at the end of each page till the story is ended.

Then at the end of the story put a mark such as ooOoo or —30—.

ONE STORY TO THE PAGE ONLY — If you have three stories out on one day, put each on a separate page.

Normally there are three ways to send stories. The first is the routine release made to all media in the area. The second is the special story to an individual paper and released as such with a release line as follows: SPECIAL TO THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW. The third is the exclusive and it is a good idea to give exclusives occasionally — especially if an editor or a reporter asks

you about a particular story. Don't spoil it by giving a tip to a rival news medium.

Be sure that the opening paragraph of your story answers the five W's: WHO? WHAT? WHY? WHEN? WHERE? Keep your paragraphs and sentences short. The lead paragraph should not be more than fifty words at most, preferably thirty-five. Sentences should be short and to the point. Articles should be easily understood by the average reader avoiding technical and legal terms. Use variety in your writing. Your paragraphs may start with such leads as these: a phrase; a clause; direct quotation; descriptive leads.

(Sample of a good release:)

December 27, 1961

For Immediate Release

FROM: Jane Doe, County Auditor

RE: Sale of Auto Licenses

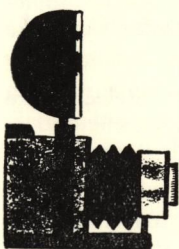
Vehicle licenses for 1962 go on sale here Tuesday, January 3, at the office of Jane Doe, County Auditor.

Mrs. Mary Moe, license clerk, said the state has advised there will be no extension period this year. Owners of vehicles not having licenses after January 31 will be subject to penalty.

Small tabs for affixing to the old plates are again in use for 1962.

Most vehicle owners have already received pre-run license application forms. While the license cost total is correct on the pre-run forms, the breakdowns are not complete and should include a 50c filing fee for all vehicles and an additional \$6.50 basic fee on trucks.

ooOoo



PICTURES

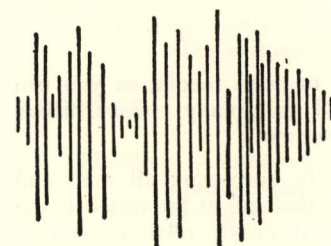
Newspapers usually will take their own pictures, but you can always suggest pictures which might make news. Study your newspaper outlets to determine what kind of pictures they like — action, interview, etc. Sometimes you can find an amateur shutter-bug in the courthouse, and if you do, make use of him. Newspapers prefer glossy prints, and the larger dailies with zinc plants will find the 8" x 10" or 5" x 7" very satisfactory since they are able to reduce them to fit their needs. The smaller dailies and weeklies use an electronic engraving process limiting the use to the actual print size. Therefore, their pictures must be of columnar width or suitable for cropping to that size. Since the standard column is just under two inches, pictures of two,

four, or six inches in width can be trimmed slightly to column width. People in pictures should be doing something — not just looking into the camera. Some newspapers limit the number of persons in a picture to four or less except in those instances where their presence is incidental to the picture.

TIMELINESS

Be alert to current trends, situations and movement of strong contemporary interest. We are sure that all county officials watch their calendars for coming events such as the opening and closing of schools, motor vehicle licensing deadlines, tax statements and tax payment dates, to mention a few. If a county official specializes in rose culture, aim a story about him at a spring issue of the Sunday magazine section. Is there one who shoots a mean game of golf? Try a feature story about him in the sports section during the summer.

Many county offices keep a yearly calendar with things to be done each month of the year. These calendars can be guides for those news articles that are due.



RADIO - T.V.

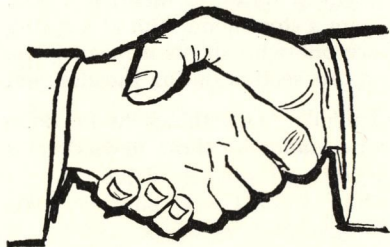
Releases to radio stations can be in two or three different forms. The daily news spot story should be thirty to sixty seconds in length. It should tell briefly and concisely the "who, what, why, when and where" with perhaps a brief comment. It may be in the form of an interview and your station operator should be consulted in advance regarding the length he prefers. It may be in the form of a comment by an official who wants to get a certain program before the public. This should be not longer than six to eight minutes.

The interview and the comment or "speech" type should be taped and submitted to the station. Tapes should begin with "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, this is John Doe speaking to you by tape recording for Station NEWS," and should sign off with the name of the speaker, his subject and the name of the radio station. The tape when submitted to the station should have on the outside of the container, and scotch taped to it, the subject, speaker, speed (7½ preferred), the exact time of running (minute and second), and the date of release.

TV releases may be in the form of spot news items as on radio or in the form of interviews. TV editors want to be informed well in advance of a meeting where it will be held, what time, and who will be there. In notifying them, tell them why you think the item is newsworthy.

COURTHOUSE PUBLICATIONS

Brochures and booklets should not be overlooked as a public relations outlet. Several counties have published excellent brochures in booklet form, delineating the duties of each county office as well as pictures of each official. Many county officers print the reports of their offices in attractive booklets. These booklets contain statistics, announcements and other valuable information pertaining to the issuing office.



MEET THE PUBLIC

Most of this handbook has been devoted to news media, as you can see, but the returns to the questionnaire showed that many county offices were doing fine things in the field of public relations.

One county assessor reports "Promptness in answering all mail and telephone calls — Willingness to help all customers that call at the office (even the grippers)." Another assessor says, "We work at public relations continuously." An auditor stresses courtesy and service. A great many officials reported civic and community activities. All stressed service every day in the year and one suggested that there was no other substitute for courtesy and service in promoting good public relations.

Opinions on the success of "Know Your County Government Week" varied from a very successful open house in some counties to an open house in another county which was a complete failure. Tours by school children of the courthouses seemed to be popular.

Open house was celebrated by a number of counties. Cookies and coffee were served in the downstairs halls with officials taking turns welcoming guests. In one courthouse a number of old record books drew a lot of attention. Brochures and booklets describing the powers and duties of county officials were distributed in many cases. One county had interviews on the radio by each official and another had daily interviews in the papers. With ample advance publicity we think this event could be successful in any county.

NEWS ITEMS BY COUNTY OFFICE

The committee desires to thank the county officials who answered the questionnaire so generously and completely in outlining the events that made news in the respective offices. Eighty-nine county offices replied and supplied

us with a wealth of material — clippings, comments, etc. The following is a resume of the information which we received.

ASSESSOR

Revaluation program for residential, farmland, or other classes of property.
Report of assessed valuations in the various taxing districts.
Breakdown on how the tax dollar is distributed.
Statistical information from annual reports to State Tax Commission and the State Auditor.
Court actions on appraisals.
Explanation of property appraisal techniques.
Report of the total assessed value of locally assessed property in the county as fixed by the assessor.
Announcement of the meeting of the County Board of Equalization.
Reports on actions of the County Board of Equalization.
Appeals to the State Tax Commission and their decision thereon.
Announcement of the assessed valuation of the public utilities as fixed by the State Tax Commission each September.
The millage levies certified by the Board of County Commissioners for the various taxing districts in October.

AUDITOR

Elections — announcement of election registrars and deadlines for voter registration — listing of candidates filing for public offices — complete election returns — use of voting machines — summary of election costs — cooperation of auditor in making voting machines available for city election — announcement of polling places — creation of new precincts — swearing in of county officials — training sessions held for election officials.
Motor Vehicle Licensing — listing of outside license agencies — special hours on Friday evenings or Saturdays — number of licenses sold or expected to be sold — article on manner of licensing by mail — licensing deadlines — explanation of car licensing fees and allocation of moneys received.
Issuance of marriage licenses.
Filings on new businesses or businesses sold.
Unusual or large property transactions.
Boat registration procedures if required.
Filing of new plats.

CLERK

Newsworthy new cases filed and court actions.
Jury selection and term.
Naturalization proceedings.
Civil suits.
Trials — jury and non-jury.
Passport applications.

Estate probates, particularly where the estate is large.
Highway right of way condemnation suits.

CORONER

Identification of victims of accidents, homicides, suicides, or other violent deaths.
Determination of cause of death as a result of violence.
Inquests by coroner's jury.
Court testimony by coroner.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

Filing of criminal charges.
Trial of criminal cases.
Controversy concerning enforcement of Sunday Blue Laws.
Trends in juvenile drinking and delinquency.
Administration of the errant father law.
Legal opinions provided other local government officials.
Defense of state or county in civil actions.
Grand jury investigations.

SHERIFF

Arrests, and search for wanted fugitives.
Mountain and water rescue — recovery of victims.
Juvenile work — junior sheriff's posse and junior deputies.
Activities of sheriff's posse.
Criminal investigations.
Warning of bad check artists or other criminals.
Improvement of jail facilities, rehabilitation program.
Public information about criminal activity.
Traffic accidents on county roads.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Appointment of school directors where vacancies occur.
Announcement of school district budgets as approved by the County Board of Education.
Report of mileage and costs approved for state reimbursement of transportation.
Teacher workshops conducted by county office.
Instructional materials library — number of films, records, filmstrips, etc. and savings made to districts through their use.
Report on screening of students' hearing made by county office.
Report on elementary testing for mental ability and achievement.
Conservation tours.
Special educational services of county office.
Meetings of county board of education and county committee on school district organization.
School district consolidation election procedures.
Spelling, speech, and other judging contests.

TREASURER

Announcement of the mailing of annual property tax statements.
Tax payment deadlines.
Reports on tax collections by percentages and in dollar amounts.
Amount collected under 1% real estate excise tax.
Investment of funds and interest gained thereon.
Foreclosure sales, irrigation sales, sales of tax title property.
"Pie" distribution article on property tax receipts.

GENERAL — Pertaining to All Offices

Outline of duties presentation to various organizations.
Question and answer program on radio.
Report of professional meetings.
Personnel changes, retirement of veteran employees.
Human interest stories related to the office.
Installation of new equipment providing better service at lower costs.
Fair exhibits.
Employee in-service training programs.
Office operational costs.
Civic affairs and activities.
Special appointment or election of county officer to other state positions in line with duties of the office.
Interesting statistics from annual report.

ACTIVITIES OTHER THAN NEWS ITEMS WHICH PROMOTE GOOD PUBLIC RELATIONS

Courtesy and service in meeting the public has no substitute. A friendly greeting and a welcoming smile promotes good public relations as no other method can. All officers are called upon at one time or another to make speeches, sometimes to describe the duties of the office, sometimes to promote a special program of the offices, and sometimes just as a speaker for some organization which needs a filler for a program. All such talks should be carefully and thoughtfully prepared.

Membership and active participation in civic organizations is advised both for officials and staff members.

Special attention should be given to classes of school children who tour the courthouse. They are the future citizens and as such should be treated with proper respect.

The availability of the county officer after hours and on Saturday in cases of emergency promotes a feeling of good will and dedicated public service.

A quick response to mail aids good public relations. Nothing makes a constituent so irritated as failing to receive a reply to a letter — no matter how trivial his correspondence may seem to be.

The ability to listen to complaints is important. There may be nothing a county officer can do about a problem except listen, but he should be willing to hear the problem out. Whenever the complaint is valid and the official is in a position to correct the matter, steps should promptly be taken to remedy the situation.

THE WASHINGTON STATE ASSOCIATION OF ELECTED COUNTY OFFICIALS

County officials by Chapter 130, Laws of 1959, were authorized by the Legislature to designate the WSAECO as the coordinating agency for the administrative programs of the various county offices. In its program the Association has sought to accomplish the duties established by the Legislature by following the purposes set out in the organization's constitution and by-laws which provide:

The objectives of this Association shall be to coordinate the administrative programs of the members Elected County Officials' offices by:

- (a) *Submitting a biennial joint report, or joint reports, to the Governor and the State Legislature recommending procedural changes which would increase the efficiency of the respective departments headed by such Elected County Officials;*
- (b) *Collecting, compiling, and distributing information about government and administration of County affairs to Elected County Officials, and studying standardization in an effort to reduce costs and increase the efficiency of operation;*
- (c) *Providing a forum for the discussion of subjects vital to the conduct of County offices;*
- (d) *Establishing good lines of communication with the Washington State Legislature so that said body shall have the benefit of the knowledge and experience of the Elected County Officials when studying proposed legislation directly affecting their offices and Counties; presenting and promoting legislation believed to be beneficial to County offices, the State, and the citizens thereof; and opposing legislation which the Elected County Officials believe to be detrimental thereto;*
- (e) *Working toward the prevention of loss of fundamental county rights and removal of such rights as are inherent to the County government for investiture in other branches of government;*
- (f) *Instituting litigation in the name of the Association, or any member group, for the determination of rights or liabilities of County officers under any constitutional provision or statute, and to appear as a Friend of the Court (Amicus Curiae) in any court proceedings wherein such rights or liabilities are to be determined;*
- (g) *Building a closer fellowship among the Elected County Officials of Washington;*
- (h) *Doing any and all things necessary, including the appointment and employment of counsel, to effect the objects set forth herein.*