

# North American Street Newspaper Association (NASNA)

## Session #1

### Expanding editorial content by including a variety of voices

#### Hand outs

#### Presenters:

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#### Making Some Preliminary Decisions

##### 1. What do you want your paper to be?

Consider your objectives for editorial focus and how to accomplish that. You might review your current focus and decide that's right on target and doesn't need any tweaking, then consider looking at the mix of formats you are using.

However, if you want to take this opportunity to review your editorial focus, consider all aspects of the paper's content using....

#### Content

Politics  
Social services  
Advocacy  
Humor  
Community  
Sports  
Community calendar  
Vendor-driven  
Arts  
Nonprofit business  
National issues  
International news (SNS)

#### Format

Feature stories  
News stories  
Columns  
News briefs  
Puzzles  
Cartoons  
Essays  
Poetry  
Fiction  
Reviews – book, movies, art shows

##### 2. Who is best to provide that information?

You might already have access to a pool of excellent writers with expertise in your areas of focus, but you can also consider new people who could bring fresh expertise and a new perspective to the topic coverage. For example:

Political coverage: Retired politician  
(*Why? No conflict of interest as there might be with a current elected official*)

Humor: Local radio personality, who can also write  
(*Why? Expertise and an opportunity to build a relationship with another media outlet in town*)

Social Service: Board member of a local foundation  
(*Why? Plugged into the community in a diverse and meaningful way*)

### 3. Who do you already know?

The people and organization with whom you already work could become a means for achieving your editorial goals utilizing...

- Writers
- Photographers
- Community partners
- Coalition members
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### **Developing Your New Content**

Once you know what you want the content of your paper to be, Look at every possible resource for content and providers. A key component of this process is making sure the relationship is *mutually beneficial*. You might have to invest more time in guiding a writer, but the trade-off in a steady flow of fresh content can off-set that investment. At the same time, helping an administrator or counselor place students in internships or build a resume of experience makes it possible for them to channel qualified students to you.

### **Creating/Expanding a Pool of Writers and Photographers**

- Referrals – ask existing staff/volunteers to contact others in their field to see if they might be interested in becoming involved
- Contact local community colleges and universities to offer writing/photography experience to students (as part of an internship programs, to fulfill a community service requirement, extra credit, etc.)
- Send out a “call for writers/photographers” to:
  - Local arts groups
  - Art programs (local museums, school for creative and performing arts, etc.)
  - Local chapters of professional associations
  - College job boards
  - Writer’s groups
  - Community bulletin board...to post on their job boards, place in newsletters or send out as an independent communication to members

### **Trolling for Ideas**

Ask readers what they don’t see in the paper but would like to see covered  
Talk to supporters

### **Leveraging Existing Partners**

- Street outreach workers
- Social service agencies
- Homeless coalition members
- Board/committee members
- Un-related program participants
  - Speaker's bureau volunteers
  - Health workers
  - Social workers
  - Trainers
- Social workers
- Programs (e.g. prison re-entry)
- Legal counsel
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What thinking about the people you know, the positions they hold and what content they might be able to provide.

<b>Contact</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Topic Areas</b>
<i>Mary Smith</i>	<i>Battered Women's Shelter</i>	<i>Intimate partner violence</i>
		<i>Women's safety</i>
		<i>Safety plans</i>

### Being an Effective Editor (from the perspective of a writer)

Editors and writers are usually presented as rivals because one (the writer) is fighting for more word count and opposing any changes while the other (the editor) is demanding adherence to word limits and correcting mistakes. While these things DO happen, a positive and effective balance can be struck when the editor is clear with her/his expectations and guidance while being open to suggestions and flexible. It's more common sense and professionalism than anything else, but it does take some thought and follow through, on both sides.

#### **State expectations early and clearly, then be consistent in follow through**

- Put any editorial guidelines in writing (including all policies/procedures – e.g. extension request)
- Provide a style-guide if one is needed
- Share the editorial process/schedule (timeline for story submission, copy editing, layout, etc.)

#### **Manage the writing process fairly**

- No double standards – don't expect a writer to behave according to a standard you don't hold for yourself
  - \*\* Do NOT make any excuses *to* a writer that you will not accept *from* a writer \*\*
  - Two of my fav's: "I was really busy" and "I didn't check my email, did you send it already?"
- Do some planning and put some thought into your scheduling, build in wiggle room, have back-ups in place – this makes it possible to accommodate the unexpected and put less pressure on writers
- Schedule deadlines with a reasonable window for granting extensions, in case they are needed
- Communicate deadlines when an article is assigned; communicate schedule changes as they occur (e.g. Memorial Day holiday affects the print run, so all deadline move up a day)
- Offer any resources you might have that will help the writer (contact, copy of a previous story on a related topic, a heads-up that this politician is an ass before 10 a.m. and four cups of coffee)
- Check in periodically – not pester – a writer to see if you can provide any support/assistance
- Do what you say you are going to do when you say you will do it – if you can't remember it all, write it down, set reminders in your calendar, cover your phone with sticky-notes
- If you tell a writer they need to do something, than make sure you do the work on your end to make it possible (e.g. you want a transcript of all recorded interviews: make sure the writer knows the acceptable document formats, the process and deadline for submission; and you check to make sure you have/not received the transcript before you confirm receipt/ask for it)

#### **Communication Basics**

- Acknowledge the receipt of a document when it arrives – the sender doesn't know if it's lost in cyber space or not (a quick "Got it, thanks" will do)
- If you need a response by a specific time, then clearly state that ("I need your revisions in my in-box by 5 p.m. on Thursday, June 17. If this is a problem, let me know immediately.")
- Don't wait until the last minute to ask for something – especially if you are working with volunteers – they might not be able to drop everything to get what you need: do this too often and they won't bother with you after a while – everything can't be an emergency.
- Pay attention to details: when you find you have questions, go back and see if you were already provided the answers in the copy, e-mail, etc. before you ask the writer. You might have just missed it the first time. Not making the time to attend to the details is disrespectful of the writer's work and time.
- Say thank you: grand gestures aren't necessary, but a thoughtful "thanks" stating what you liked about a piece, how it contributed to the paper and that you appreciate the efforts made (especially when last minute changes are needed) shows the writer you're interested in their work.

#### **Niceties:**

- Get together with your writer when s/he doesn't have a deadline and just "check in;" ask for feedback about how the process is going for them, what would help going forward

- Pull all your writer together for a quarterly lunch so they have a chance to meet, maybe include a topic for discussion (e.g. using non-sexist language in copy) or brainstorming (what topics can we cover next?)
- Create a dollar-value for articles, columns, news-briefs, etc. and send a letter at the end of the year showing the value of the writer's contribution to the paper; include a hand-written thank you note for their work
- Provide periodic updates about circulation and "This is approximately how much money went back into the pockets of low-income individuals as a result of your collective contributions."

## Editorial Partnerships

### Being an Effective Writer (from the perspective of an editor)

1. Communicate with your editor.
2. Treat deadlines as your best friend, your greatest lover, your dream personified, the very fulfillment of your deepest longing. Editors hate writers who miss deadlines.
3. If you must break a date with your best friend, your greatest lover, use step 1 right away.
4. Read the paper you're writing for. That's the first step. Well, no. The first step is: Communicate with your editor. But reading your own paper is very important. Writers who don't read their own papers are like drivers who don't look at road signs. They're like pharmacists who don't understand measurements. They're like Supreme Court justices who don't let allow the votes in a presidential election to be counted. Don't be like that. Read your paper.
5. Ask for a word count.
6. An editor's job is to help writers. Make your editor do her job. Ask for help.
7. Direct quotations, accurately rendered, drive a story.
8. Check the spelling of every single name. Mr. Smith might be Mr. Smyth. Miss Schultz could be Miss Sczl. I've seen it happen. Ewe would be surprised at the spelling of some names. Don't be. If you write the best story of the year but misspell someone's name, he won't show it to his mother. You don't want that. More important, accuracy in little things builds a writer's credibility.
9. Don't use icky words such as "attende," "pro-active," "mentee," "irregardless" or "impactful." Let us defend the English language while there still is time.
10. Remember that all clichés, in every instance, without mercy, should be strangled. As a writer, you are too talented to use them. May all clichés die.
11. ! ought to be implied in your writing – placing an ! at the end of the sentence is the mark of a lazy writer. All ! must die.
12. All I ask as an editor is this: split open you belly and smear your guts all over the page. (Or, for the squeamish: all I ask as an editor is that the writer put her best into everything she writes)

### Pop Quiz

What is wrong with these sentences? If you can figure these out, then you know what not to write next time.

"It is illegal to kill extinct animals." (*Streetvibes* contributor)

"Kids Make Nutritious Snacks"

"The Macon County Humane Society offers a free spay/neutering to senior citizens if they adopt an animal out of the animal shelter."

Queen Mary Having Bottom Scraped (from *The Times*, in the U.K.)