

# North American Street Newspaper Association (NASNA)

## Session #5

### Editorial Partnerships

#### Notes

**Presenters:** Greg Flannery, Margo Pierce, Streetvibes

**Paraphrased notes by:** Cydney Gillis, Real Change

Greg: This was a collaborative NASNA project. We created two articles -- "Hate Crimes Against the Homeless?" and "The Criminalization of the Homeless"? Which of your papers ran them?

Ben: We heard a lot of good feedback about the hate crimes article.

Andrew: The criminalization one was good for Nashville – it's a big issue there.

Margo: Is this something you would like to see done again?

Bruce Gimbel: I think as a new paper beginning, what we're looking for is an opportunity to have one of these stories as the feature article, allowing us time to pull in other articles until we're able to develop a writer's group – for me, it's a critical resource. It's a great way to get content.

Margo: We're looking at how it's useful. The original piece on criminalization was rather long, about 2,500 words. The feedback was that was too long. Can we do something shorter? The next piece was longer, 4,000, but we created an 1,800-word version.

The topics were pretty complicated. I was the writer and Greg was the editor. We pulled these two articles together. Streetvibes was the host, if you will. We utilized our resources as Streetvibes to make it happen. How people have used it tells us whether it was effective.

It started with a conference call. But we struggled because we never defined what collaboration was. We didn't get a whole lot of feedback from papers. We didn't get a whole lot of material.

As far as editorial collaboration, what would be your vision? If you could have anything you want, what would it be?

Bruce G: Being close to the oil spill in New Orleans and Pensacola being affected, we thought it would be nice to get a college writer to cover the effect on homeless shelters in the Tampa Bay area. What are the local government agencies doing to prepare for an influx of the homeless if people have lost their jobs?

I'm thinking of issues that could be addressed on a regional basis or a national basis.

Margo: Everybody's dealing with criminalization. ... Andy was doing a repository of the stories on the website. You can download and use them.

Bruce G: Yes. I could take it and localize it.

Margo: We did provide photos with the articles. The first article was published in 8 different papers. The second is in 8 and I believe will be in 2 more. [She refers to a handout of different papers' layouts of the articles.]

Megaphone's approach was interesting. They put an obit next to the story on hate crimes. It really pulled together how this was relevant locally. One page is  $\frac{3}{4}$  photo. All we're providing is the text, which can be text-heavy. This is an example of how you can break up the text with images and connect it locally.

Ben: With the photos, can it be in color? It's easier to take the color off than add it.

Greg: It was a surprise how the stories were presented. But we saw some pretty great photos that we didn't receive. We wanted to create stories that were relevant and useful in the U.S. and Canada with contributions from street papers all over. We asked for interviews and examples of local laws. We didn't get a lot of photos.

The second time we didn't get a lot of anything, really. The collaboration seems to have worked in that street papers used them. My concern going forward is participation by the street newspapers.

On criminalization article, editors said their observations and that was pretty much what we had to rely on to go with the story – quotations of editors. What we hoping to get was interviews from people on the ground in the localities to put in the story.

On the hate crimes piece, it was even less participatory, with the result that the writer had to do a lot of the interviews. I don't think it detracted from the quality of the articles, but I don't know how effective it is as collaboration.

If we're going to keep doing this, we need to know how it can be more participatory.

Delegate: We had two attacks, then I was away. When I got back, I don't remember seeing any emails about the project.

Margo: By June we were well under way. One thing we're heard is that "We're too busy." [Everyone is, so] we're taking that off the table [as a reason not to participate]. We're trying to figure out how to make it easier for you to slide this into your busy schedule.

Delegate: I didn't know any of this was happening.

Cyd: I'm connected to NASNA and didn't know, either, but I'd want a person to communicate with about what exactly I should write up from my interviews to fit in with the rest of the article.

Margo: That's a good point. We did get two interviews, but it was for another piece that was related. Trying to shoehorn it in was a real challenge.

In another situation, I got an email with a local contact to call and interview and I got the interview. That's a way to contribute.

Greg is the point person. It was set up that way. He agreed to be the editor of the article. We had that in place but clearly that wasn't communicated.

Suzanne: What helped me with that story was the hate crimes report from the National Coalition for the Homeless. I pulled all the stats from that and it was very useful to the structure of the story because it had statistics from every different city. It enabled me to have a format for the story.

I realized that we as NASNA should be taking a stronger position on homeless hate crimes in Congress. We've realized that readers don't read all our copy – we have to hit them over the head with graphics. That's what I wound up doing.

The other thing we could do is brainstorm the issues we're interested in and set an editorial calendar.

Margo: We looked at some of those stats. The problem was finding data for Canada – the tracking is different.

Melissa: In Rhode Island, we passed a law to track hate crimes against the homeless.

Margo: This is the kind of stuff happening on the ground locally that I might find on Google, but if I'm not hearing it from people on the ground, I'm missing it.

One incident resulted in hate crime charge, but I just got butt-lucky and stumbled across it. The people in that state didn't tell me about it, but maybe that's because you've written about it a dozen times.

Suzanne: [I sent information that I was surprised didn't make it into the piece.] Do we need to set up an informal listserv?

Margo: On the second piece, it took so long to get people to respond, the article was delayed. A process that was supposed to take 3 months took 4 or 5. It sits in your in-box a while. In order to make these things happen, we have to have the content to begin the writing.

Rose: I like this idea of topics to write about for the next year. In Victoria, some of the homeless are organizing their own committees to talk to the city council and the police. We've been recording a lot of the violent acts that have happened to the homeless, particularly people pissing and shitting on the homeless coming out of bars. That stuff was never reported until the homeless organized themselves. When the police are called, it's always the homeless that go first. That's a classism by the police and the media.

Margo: What needs to be written about next? We've had two conference calls that have resulted in two articles. The original intent was an article a quarter. Now we're planning to do 3 a year. The next will be written by Tim Covi of the Denver Voice. He will work with his editor to look at city's 10-Year Plans – are they doing anything?

Another topic are tent cities. They aren't getting as much attention. It's fallen off the radar; now it's coming back. Other topics?

Cydney: Civility laws. We just beat back an anti-panhandling law and we believe it's going to come back.

Andrew: At The Contributor, we've thought of a sex offense issue and the need to reform the way we deal with sex offenders in the homeless population.

Suzanne: Sex trafficking is huge. So many abused kids run away and turn to that for income.

Margo: So few people are aware of it. Sex trafficking of young people gets a lot of attention. More shelters are happening for that population. I've been writing about human trafficking for about 6 years now.

Deb: I talked to someone who turned to prostitution after foster care.

Ben: Aging-out of foster care. The age varies by state.

Margo: The consequences of aging out of the foster care system.

Andrew: People are shocked to find out there's over 1,000 children homeless in Nashville. We've actually had children born on the sidewalk in Nashville.

Kevin: Our readers like content that's more positive. What about new approaches to end homelessness? What are cities or private individuals doing? In Vancouver there was a push to turn shipping crates into housing.

Bruce G: Our next issue, we'll have article [on educating homeless children]. Also, our food banks are running out of food. We're looking to do another story on that.

[Others agree on that.]

Bruce G: Hydroponics.

Cydney: Urban agriculture.

Rose: I've been thinking about two issues – the amount of people dying on the streets from exposure between Canada and the U.S. Close to 10,000 people have died in the last 18 months. Why aren't people up in arms?

Also, the “Great Wall” between the U.S. and Canada between aboriginal people. I had to become a Canadian citizen and get a passport before I could come to this conference.

Margo: The U.S. and Canada used to share one of the most open borders in the world.

Ben: It’s a great way to cover immigration.

Rose: I was looking at the ID thing. A lot of homeless people don’t have a lot of ID. It’s because police are confiscating their belongings.

Delegate: Remember the team being denied the ability to go to the Homeless World Cup because they had a tribal identity and the British did not recognize that? It was the Iroquois.

Rose: They straddle both sides of the border. I was born on this side of the border and had to get citizenship to get a passport to come here. That’s another issue that affects thousands of the nation.

Greg: This has been a good illustration of what we can do with these partnerships.

Delegate: But we really don’t have room for a 4,000-word story.

Bruce: Can those stories, if they get to be that long, can you make them a series?

Greg: [Refers to the handout on editorial partnerships.] The problem we encountered was if we have contributions from three dozen street newspapers, we want to make it relevant to all of them. That’s hard to do in a short format. One thing to do is cut it into a series.

You have the option of localizing it. You can take an example of Chicago and make that your lead. You can also shorten it. But send it back to the writer as a professional courtesy to OK it because the writer’s name is going to be on it.

Look at the processes here [on the handout] and see what works for you. Everyone needs to take a turn to develop and edit a story.

Margo: Both stories were written in sections. You can take out a section. Just make sure that your first references to sources (such as spelling out NASNA) are there if you do. And we’ll catch that if you send it to us.

Melissa: [Another suggested topic] is crowding in shelters. The women’s shelters are overflowing.

Margo: [Refers to a checklist of what editors and writers need from each other.] Greg and I can argue over word count and headlines and remain friends. You’ve got to be able to work those things out. At the same time, I’ve got to get stuff to him on deadline to tinker with it and make

changes. There's a certain amount of common sense in here, but also be aware of the process of collaboration and how you work.

On the writer's side, providing information to the editor [is key]. What can you send that will be acceptable material for this process? Not a Wikipedia article. But you can send a relevant court document (please read it first) and we can pull material from that.

Greg: My understanding is the board will have a member coordinate the next collaborative article. That board member will have to be aware of the conference call and what the implications are for writing and editing the pieces.

Margo: For the next collaboration, maybe we should send out an email asking what kind of education people might need to work on this project. Maybe it's a conference call brainstorming who's a good interview in your area? Or explaining the difference between a first-person and second-person story and what's useable in terms of material.

[Margo circulates a sheet to put down email addresses for people to communicate.]