

## TITLE VI PUBLIC AND MEDIA RELATIONS

### CHAPTERS:

- 6.04 Public Relations
  - 6.08 Newspapers
  - 6.12 Electronic Media
  - 6.14 Volunteers
  - 6.18 Lobbying through Association of Washington Cities
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### Chapter 6.04 Public Relations

#### Sections:

- 6.04.010 Philosophy
- 6.04.020 Helpful hints

6.04.010 PHILOSOPHY. Establishing and maintaining sound relationships with your target constituencies is the essence of working public relations. Identifying the groups you influence is very relevant. Besides the media, you have other government agencies and offices; civic leaders; chambers of commerce; educators; consumers/voters/churchgoers; and many more groups of citizens who belong to many groups themselves.

Having a cohesive and productive relationship with these entities can be ensured if you are genuine in your commitment to present yourself and your municipality professionally at all times. In terms of the media, this means being responsive to their needs, without losing sight of the fact you are a governmental agent. Your first allegiance is to your municipality.

A good way of staying out of trouble is to understand in advance, what may happen when any message you supply is publicly communicated. What message are you conveying? Is it unambiguous? Should it be sent?

Any clerk attempting to practice sound public relations has to be a psychologist - know what's going on in people's minds; a financial expert - be able to translate figures to others; a sociologist - attuned to changing trends; a paralegal - aware of potential lawsuits; and, most of all, a dedicated service professional who wants to present the best possible impression of their municipality to all affected by it.

6.04.020 HELPFUL HINTS. REMEMBER TO BE ORGANIZED - BE IN CHARGE!

1. Always convey the impression to reporters that you are trying to help them.
2. Do not assume the interview is over until the TV reporter drives away.
3. Never give reporters your personal opinion.
4. Assume all calls from reporters are being "on the record."
5. Be aware of newspaper deadlines.

6. Avoid the appearance of a cover up.
  7. Dribbling out information keeps an embarrassing story alive!
  8. Always be 100% right.
  9. Be alert to the waiting tactic!
  10. Do not be misled by the phrase, "off the record."
  11. Never use crude or rude language.
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## **Chapter 6.08 Newspapers**

### **Sections:**

- 6.08.010 Establish relationships
- 6.08.020 Credibility
- 6.08.030 Spokesperson
- 6.08.040 News releases - content
- 6.08.050 News releases - format

6.08.010 ESTABLISH RELATIONSHIPS. Establishing a good working relationship with local media is essential. Regardless of your community size, the local newspaper is one of the most useful communication tools available for informing citizenry on community issues. A local newspaper column may carry general information from all departments, along with keeping readers apprised of the next week's elections, special ballot issues, and more.

6.08.020 CREDIBILITY. It is important to establish credibility, not only with the public, but also with reporters and other newspaper personnel who must be communicated with regularly. Contacting these people for their advice helps establish the rapport required for a good relationship. They can let you know what is considered "newsworthy," the deadlines they have, and what kinds of information they print.

6.08.030 SPOKESPERSON. A media spokesperson from your organization must be available to the press, especially in times of crisis. Timely reporting enhances the public image of government. Being the most reliable source of information assures accessibility to the press, as the common goal is to keep the public informed on what is going on in the organization.

6.08.040 NEWS RELEASES - CONTENT. Informational news releases provide such information as: when dog licenses are applied for, when election day is to be held, and so forth. Clerks, as the record keepers of the municipality or township, are responsible for the maintenance of documents and information. These records should be readily available to the public. In that regard, clerks are generally expected to provide details on issues and topics to the media, upon request. For obvious reasons, the media will generally contact the Clerk's Office for copies of documents and answers to questions about local councils, commissions, or boards, and to clarify or confirm information received from another source.

Preparing news releases is a basic skill necessary for good press relations. Some principles to remember are:

1. The six journalistic questions, (who, what, when, why, where, and how) should be answered as completely and accurately as possible, preferably in the first paragraph. Check for any misleading or inaccurate information.
2. Contact newspapers for their preferences as to layout. Usually, release copy should run only one page. If there is carry-over, try to end with a paragraph on page one so the second page starts fresh. Brief articles with full details stated concisely have a better chance of appearing as written versus being edited beyond recognition or simply disregarded.

6.08.050 NEWS RELEASES - FORMAT. Newspaper deadlines must be met. As soon as the information has been confirmed, let newspapers know promptly. Remember newspapers need "lead time" for printing even the smallest articles.

A news release should follow these guidelines:

1. Upper left hand corner of page should identify the municipality and the source of the release ("the contact") with telephone and address.
2. "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" or date for release should be placed opposite, on the right hand side of the page. A suggested heading/title should be used, one line and underlined.
3. Start at least one-third of the way down the page and double-space (most important) the body of a release. Paragraphs should be indented five spaces and frequent paragraphing is preferred. Short sentences with active verbs are best.
4. End a release by dropping down a few lines from the body copy and center "-30-" or "###." If the release runs over one page, the word "more" should be typed at the bottom right of the page. Copies of news releases should be provided to the council and management.

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## **Chapter 6.12 Electronic Media**

### **Sections:**

- 6.12.010 Generally
- 6.12.020 Interviews
- 6.12.030 Council meeting coverage
- 6.12.040 Using cable television

6.12.010 GENERALLY. Electronic media - television, radio, cable television (CATV) and the internet - have become increasingly popular with municipal clerks. Whether participating in a weekly panel discussion on a local public CATV channel, televising meetings, being interviewed before an election or providing public service announcements (PSA's) on local government events, more clerks are familiarizing themselves with this avenue of communicating with the public. The following offers basic information on how to deal with electronic media.

6.12.020 INTERVIEWS. Interviews by TV or radio media can be an unnerving experience even for those comfortable with public speaking. Fear of being unable to answer a question, of being tripped up or caught in a contradiction, or just the idea of speaking into a microphone in front of a camera - all these can be intimidating to even the most experienced public officials - including municipal clerks, who are becoming increasingly involved in the public relations aspect of local government.

The general principle for being successful in an interview situation is - BE PREPARED Some suggestions include:

#### Pre-Interview: Establish ground rules

- Find out whether the interview will be taped, as well as when and where it will be held.
- Specify topics that are off limits or off the record. However, beware, few ever are. When in doubt, do not volunteer remarks gratuitously.
- If possible, ask for questions in advance.
- Brush up on the topic beforehand; collect pertinent data.
- Role-play the interview with a well-informed partner who acts as "devil's advocate." Prepare for controversial questions or being interrupted by the interviewer even rudeness.
- Control the situation, rather than letting the media control the situation. Have your "agenda" ready beforehand (i.e., those items you want to discuss).
- Participate in the interview. Resist interruption and work to get your message across.

The most basic piece of advice is to RELAX. Do not panic. Realize most of the time you know more about the subject than the interviewer does. Television and radio exposure help any clerk reach a maximum amount of people in a short amount of time.

#### During Interview

1. Listen carefully to all questions and note the questioner's "body language."
  - Pay attention to what is being said and what is implied. There may be times when a question can be rephrased and then answered or not at all.
  - Do not try to second-guess your interviewer. Answer the question as posed and ask for clarification if you do not understand. (e.g., "I don't understand your question. Would you please rephrase it?")
  - Take the time to think through your answers; then present them.
2. Present the image of a knowledgeable interviewee.
  - Try to "keep your cool;" do not allow hostile or leading questions to frustrate you into responding in kind.
  - Keep your answers brief and simple. This helps to keep both the interviewer's attention and the audience's.
  - Keep a conversational attitude. The interview should seem as natural as talking to a citizen on a street corner.

6.12.030 COUNCIL MEETING COVERAGE. Some municipalities will schedule regular media meetings to cover every meeting. Therefore, a staff person should be assigned to report on issues of interest to the public. In these cases, it is appropriate to prepare a news/press kit prior to the conference. This provides background information and cuts down on the time needed to review what happened. Ensure you follow-up with the newspaper after the meeting to reinforce facts and clarify any actions taken.

Preparation of media mailing lists expedites dissemination of information from your organization.

Ensure the "final word" is accurate. In spite of news "press packets" and other tools used to keep a reporter informed, inaccurate data or details may be used in a printed article. Recognize there are times when a slight error should be best left alone - correcting a minor point may over-emphasize an unimportant fact. Accuracy is always the final goal for both the reporter and local governmental representatives.

6.12.040 USING CABLE TELEVISION. Cable television is an excellent way to better inform residents, minimize complaints, and publicize special events. Timely information via public service messages, televising meetings, regularly scheduled "talk shows" featuring members from all departments, help to improve communication between government and citizenry.

Ensure your municipality's events are included on a television station's scheduling channel. Usually, there is a separate channel on your cable television programming listing the weekly schedule. If you have upcoming events, confirm the station knows about them.

At the same time, the key to making television work for you is to develop a good working relationship with your cable company's liaison.

Many times the cable television franchising ordinance requires a studio to be located in the community and the studio's facilities be available to residents, the municipality, and local schools. Some communities require the franchising agency to provide equipment as part of granting the agreement.

Moreover, a myriad of ways have been adopted by various communities in putting cable TV to use. For instance:

- Des Moines, Iowa, broadcasts council meetings live and then replays them during the week of the meeting. They also provide messages that are automatically rotated on the screen giving information on scheduled events, services provided through City Hall, crime, and fire prevention tips, agendas, developments on emergency situations, etc. Time is also included for a weekly "City Updates" programs from several city departments, agencies and some community partners."
- Downers Grove, Illinois, provides a half-hour program of each week's council meeting, edited to provide visuals such as exterior shots of annexations, rezoning and subdivisions. This show runs twice weekly. Fifteen to thirty minute programs profile village departments and are aired weekly. Special events are publicized along with special interest programs.

- South Portland, Maine, Parks and Recreation Director does a monthly video clip called "Green Scene." You can find them on the city's webpage <http://www.southportland.org/departments/parks-recreation-aquaticspool/green-scene-videos-2014/>

You can schedule a monthly special program about a department, a person, a program, a human-interest story or anything of genuine interest for local residents. Make every attempt to have this program appear at the same time, whether it is weekly or monthly.

Finally, use cable television as a way to publicize special events and programs. Issue press/news releases to your cable television contact before an event. This ensures receiving valuable television publicity.

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## **Chapter 6.14 Volunteers**

### **Sections:**

- 6.14.010 Usage
- 6.14.020 Applications
- 6.14.030 Interviews
- 6.14.040 Unpaid employees
- 6.14.050 Liability issues
- 6.14.060 Budgetary impacts
- 6.14.070 Recognition

**6.14.010 USAGE.** As budgets tighten, municipalities and other public agencies often use volunteers to achieve delivery of certain services as cost-effectively as possible. Volunteers can provide a citizen's perspective and bring a wealth of experience to their tasks. It is important to have established procedures for managing volunteers, regardless of the assigned task(s).

**6.14.020 APPLICATIONS.** A volunteer service application should be developed and required of each volunteer. This ensures accurate records and a contact in the event of an emergency.

**6.14.030 INTERVIEWS.** A personal interview should precede placement in any long-term position to ensure the volunteer is in a position that matches his/her knowledge and skills.

**6.14.040 UNPAID EMPLOYEES.** Volunteers should be considered employees who are not paid a salary for their contributions. They should receive the same treatment as other employees, including orientation and ongoing training conducted as needed. For recognition and reporting, it is important to track the number of volunteer hours provided to the organization. There should also be a vehicle for evaluation, to ensure the match of the volunteer to the position is a good one for both parties.

6.14.050 LIABILITY ISSUES. The organization may assume some liability for volunteers while they are on the job. This is why it is important to report hours to assure insurance coverage if it exists while performing volunteer duties. The insurance carrier will probably require that to be eligible for coverage, the names of all volunteers must be on record with the municipality. An organization may not only assume some liability for the volunteer, but a volunteer may create liability for the organization. This is why it is important to treat volunteers like employees, monitor, and evaluate performance of duties. It is important to check with Human Resources and/or payroll personnel for requirements on reporting volunteer working hours to Labor and Industries.

6.14.060 BUDGETARY IMPACTS. Volunteers can save a municipality a great deal of money, use of volunteers is not entirely without budgetary impacts. It is important to recognize the contributions of volunteers, both informally and on an on-going basis and formally, through various types of recognition events. Funding should be set aside in the budgets of volunteer programs to pay for such recognition. It is also important to note that volunteer programs require staff time to perform the necessary activities outlined in this chapter.

6.14.070 RECOGNITION. Recognition comes in all sizes, from a simple thank you to a letter or award. Familiarize yourself with the organizations policies and procedures for recognition such as longevity, departmental recognition given by department directors and co-worker recognition.

Some principles of recognition are:

- Give it frequently.
- Use a variety of recognition techniques.
- Be honest; credibility is important.
- Recognize the individual, not the work.
- Make it appropriate to the achievement.
- Be consistent. If one person receives recognition for an action, another who does something similar should receive similar recognition.
- Be timely. If recognition is not given until much after the event, the person will feel unappreciated in the meantime.

An example of volunteer recognition criteria may be based on the time (i.e. hours or years) contributed. With a variety of volunteer programs, it is appropriate to look for other methods of recognition as well.

## Chapter 6.18 Lobbying Through Association of Washington Cities

### Sections:

- 6.18.010 Background
- 6.18.020 Effectiveness
- 6.18.030 AWC Legislative Bulletin
- 6.18.040 Receiving copies of bills
- 6.18.050 Monitoring legislative activity
- 6.18.060 Participation in legislative process
- 6.18.070 Reporting lobbying

#### 6.18.010 BACKGROUND.

The Association of Washington Cities (AWC) is a private, non-profit, non-partisan corporation that represents Washington's cities and towns before the state legislature, the state executive branch and with regulatory agencies. Membership is voluntary. However, AWC consistently maintains 100% participation from Washington's 281 cities and towns. A 25-member Board of Directors oversees the association's activities.

AWC is the leader in providing valuable services and continuing education for our membership. AWC is the catalyst for promoting communication between cities and towns and for developing a broad public understanding of the important roles of cities and towns across the state.

6.18.020 EFFECTIVENESS. AWC's staff focuses its work in five service areas:

- **Legislative representation**
- **Educational training**
- **Publications and resources**
- **Technical assistance** in personnel and labor relations, energy, transportation, budgeting, planning, risk management and employee wellness
- **Member programs**, such as municipal liability and property insurance, employee drug and alcohol testing, workers comp retro pooling and employee benefits

#### 6.18.030 AWC LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

AWC does not take positions for or against any candidate or ballot initiative. AWC's role is to provide its members with educational materials that can be shared with elected officials, staff, and the community. The *Legislative Bulletin* is one mode of communicating between AWC and its members. Each Friday during the legislative session, the *Bulletin* is mailed/emailed to elected and appointed officials. It highlights AWC priority bills as they move through the legislative process. Following the Legislative Session, the *Bulletin* is emailed monthly to update member readers. Other publications are available such as *CityVision*, a bi-monthly magazine exploring key issues facing Washington cities, with ideas to share from communities that are making a positive difference; and *CityVoice*, a weekly publication for the latest AWC news and services.

#### 6.18.040 RECEIVING COPIES OF BILLS.

*AWC BillTracker* is the online tool that easily tracks and informs about bills of significant interest to cities and towns. BillTracker provides AWC's position on a bill, including the potential positive or harmful impacts. All bill summaries and comments, hearing times, AWC contacts for bills and links to supplemental AWC information are available using *BillTracker*.

#### 6.18.050 MONITORING LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY.

Information on the legislative process, proposed legislation, the legislative directory, search for bill information, and links to the House and Senate can be found at the AWC website, [www.awcnet.org](http://www.awcnet.org).

The Washington Municipal Clerk's Association (WMCA) Legislative Committee Chair monitors Legislative Activity and communicates with committee members when input is needed or responses to specific issues are in order.

#### 6.18.060 PARTICIPATION IN THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS.

AWC establishes a Legislative Committee each year. The Washington Association of Municipal Clerks (WMCA) has been actively included in that committee since 2005 when a clerk representative from a member city was invited by the AWC President to join and provide input to production of the AWC Legislative Priorities. In 2013, that was expanded to include a clerk representative from both Western and Eastern Washington. The clerk selections to the AWC Legislative Committee should have the concurrence of their cities and the WMCA Board.

The two clerk representatives to the AWC Legislative Committee are included in participation in teleconference and on-site meetings of the whole. Topics of interest that WMCA representatives take to the AWC level include those topics of great interest to clerks in performing their jobs. Views of the cities may often be included in ideas presented to the AWC Committee. Representatives participate in the final vote in selecting a Legislative Priority List for the next Legislative Session.

#### 6.18.070 REPORTING, LOBBYING.

It is often helpful for clerks to attend committee meetings in Olympia during the Legislative Session to comment on bills being discussed. When a bill is introduced, it follows a process prior to reaching the Legislative floor for a vote. Part of that early process involves vetting topics at the committee level. It is at this point that WMCA member participation is often impactful in decisions made by Legislators. No invitation is needed to testify in committee. Clerks are citizens, too, and the only requirement is to appear and sign in with intent to speak; however, AWC may include clerk comments on a particular topic and issue a specific invitation to testify in committee.

Written communication with legislators is appropriate, especially in electronic format, which will more directly be delivered to the intended audience. When commenting in writing, by letter or email, the following guidelines should be considered:

- Letters are accepted by representatives; also accepted are appropriate and respectful emails.

- Use any special clout your city may have.
- Meet regularly with your legislators, if possible; ***know your legislator's staff***.
- Collaborate with WMCA Board, officers and groups, as necessary.
- Comments should say only what you would like to see on a newspaper's front page.
- Focus on issues.
- Approach your legislators the way you, as a city official, want to be approached by your constituents - with courtesy and respect.
- Remember to say "thank you."
- Keep AWC staff informed.
- Take part in AWC policy development.