

FOR NEWLY
ELECTED
OFFICIALS:

MEDIA RELATIONS 2019

navigate the
maze during
your term in
office



A MUNIMEDIA EBOOK



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CHAPTER ONE

Working With Council

As a city councilmember, you are part of the team and you need your team if you are going to accomplish your agenda. Your power is in the votes you can gather from them and nothing else.

Even if you were elected as a contrary candidate (someone who was against something the city was doing and you are the Calvary the voters sent in to fix it) you still need to get council votes to get anything accomplished.

At the end of your term, you can't tell your constituents that you didn't get anything done because you were outvoted or no one would agree to your agenda. Keep that in mind when you deal with the media because your councilmembers will judge you by what you say to it and in it.

You might want to pick a fight but if you do, be sure it is one that you can win because you only lose once in the new world of media relations. Then, you are out.

A better strategy would be to find areas you can align yourself with and then use the media to help you convey pre-crafted messages through the right channels.

This ebook aims to give you some insights into ways you can work in alignment with your city's media plan to make your term successful.



Goal Alignment

Gone are the days when a reporter came by every single day looking for a story. For decades the city had only one real goal and that was to deal with the media on the council's terms. Today, the city has to be a newsroom. It has to craft a message and then decide on the proper media channel. Maybe a reporter is what the story needs, but it might only need a social post. Never has the city been in more control of its message. As a councilmember, you are part of that newsroom. To operate inside it, you will need some tools.

Know your city's media policy. If you don't have one, talk to your mayor, city manager and communication staff. Don't do something that will get you in trouble with the law or your fellow council.

Align your personal media plan with your city's. This will give you a preset content strategy with items to discuss with the media. You will have other reasons as your term moves forward, but in the beginning, learn what your city's vision is and start talking about it.

Change is good. Chaos is bad. No matter what kind of platform you were elected on, the residents expect you to present a knowledgeable, cohesive front (or brand) to them. Organize your content before you enter or engage the media.



Respect your city staff and use their knowledge. Even if you are a "the council needs to stop listening to the staff" official, you still need to learn how your government works before you start a media campaign to get rid of them.



Your family and friends are part of this journey whether they like it or not. Make it a personal goal to include them in your media plans and consider them when you talk to media or post on it.



CONTENT
IS KING



Content Advice

In all you do with the media, you will need to create content. You are either giving content in an interview, a speech, a post, a tweet or a video. It doesn't matter. In all of it, you are delivering content. It's important that you understand that in today's media, content is king.

You can no longer trust a friendly media reporter to understand what you are saying. You have to say what you mean and control what you say.

The ability to write a strong message then say it, present it and deliver it becomes the core of any media you use or engage with. Think hard about what you need to say and how you will deliver your information. Failure to understand that content is first will cause problems you didn't expect or intend.

You are being judged by the "smell test." If your residents don't trust your content, they won't trust you. When defending a position or a situation, be sure you speak from a reference of honesty. If you can't say it honest, don't say it. Don't think you can wordsmith your way around a topic, especially if you are going onto a television round table.

Don't overuse social media and don't get active on too many platforms.

Think about your campaign promises when you create content. Always speak and write with an organized thought process.

Zingers are great and can ease tensions but use them wisely.

They can be interpreted in ways you didn't intend. Until you are seasoned as a city leader, stay away from them. Save them for the campaign trail. Audiences today will manipulate zingers for their own agenda

Emergency communication should not scare you. if you follow the guidance of the emergency management staff. Studies show that for more than 50 years, people trust their local governments before they trust any other government during an emergency. Release information when its been approved but not before and you'll be fine.



These are reporters

**you are always on
camera.**

any questions?



and these are reporters



CHAPTER TWO



Media: Earned vs Owned

You can own media and you earn it.

Earning is more valuable if you are monitoring dollars spent. In the case of the government, earned media means you have reached more of your residents and your message is gaining reach.

Owning it will become more valuable over the next five years as we continue to change our relationship with social media.

Each media has a place in government communications so let's take a look at how you balance two depending on your goal and the kind of message you are sending.

Owned Media

Owned media does not necessarily means you own the distribution channel. It also doesn't always mean you paid to have it. It always means you control the message and how it is presented. You own the message on that platform or channel.

Examples of what owned media look like are:

Websites

Blog Platforms

Social Media Platforms

Podcasts

YouTube

TV Channels

Print Materials

Paid Advertising digital broadcast and print

Earned Media

Earned media is a take on the phrase "you earned it." You promoted your content to the point that others have agreed to distribute it on their platforms.

It has more worth and clout than paid but in the process, you lose control over it. It becomes harder to stop a mistake but it can go viral or spread much easier which give you more return on your project.

Examples of what earned media look like are:

Television newscasts

Television shows

Guest podcasts | podcast mentions

Newspaper articles | columns

Magazine articles | columns

Shared social media posts | retweets

Guest blogging | blog backlinks | articles

To get earned media, the city must sometimes promote itself. Kris Jenner is an easy example of someone who knows how to balance earned media and owned media. She controls when her family gets their message out and how by balancing the two.

But cities and councils are not Kardashians. They will get earned whether they want it or not. That is the nature of the democratic world and as a leader in that world, you will get earned media whether you want it or not.

All forms of media will discuss you, the city and the council without control. Because of that earned media requires some skill. Information has to be sent right the first time. The, the city needs a plan to monitor the information for manipulation and adaptation. Because it is a democratic government message, it is part of free speech and it can't be stopped or quashed even if it needs to be corrected.

Earned media that is wrong will promote an incorrect message to residents. Wrong earned media will become a leadership matter and city councilmembers can help a great deal by spreading the correct information as part of a team.





Which media do I use?

Digital or print?

This is why the first chapter was so important. You decide which media to use based on the goal you and your city have for your content.

If the message has to be delivered immediately, the city's social media platforms along with the broadcast media might be the best options.

If the message is longer and more nuanced, then the city's website or YouTube channel along with a podcast or the city's television channel might work. Each of these media have time to consider a longer topic. A newspaper article can also work because more space might be able to be delivered to it if the editor agrees. After production and publication, the items could be distributed on social media with links to them.

A good balance of **owned versus earned** media will ensure your content reaches the majority of the residents who need to know it.

Today rarely does a government media professional ask which media to use. Instead the question becomes which media does the content and message need. Usually the answer contains several channels and platforms. Let's look at them each more closely.

Social Media, Broadcast, Print, Web

Social Media

It's immediate. It's fast. It bypasses earned media. It gets picked up by earned media. These are the reasons so many people and organizations use it. Today, a social media post can be the beginning of a trail that leads to print media (which includes distribution on search engines and other platforms) television, bloggers, video and other channels. A good social media post is always one of the best media to control a message and distribute it.

Here's a good way to understand how a social media post gets earned media. If you have an official city page, you have followers. These are mostly your residents or at least those who feel they need to know about your city's official actions. Any item on your official city pages should be created for your residents. Even if earned media is on it or you have influencers are it and by the nature of our government system, they will be.

You want influencers and earned media to amplify your post. By the time a message gets on social media you can assume that your city has either vetted it in some way or has appointed someone to post it through their own professional lens. You can be as much an influencer in this moment by reposting the messages on your city page or repurposing the content in your own words. You could see it as your duty to spread the city's correct, factual and important message to your network.

Broadcast

Television and radio is your mass distribution. It can be immediate but usually you have to time your message to the airtime. Television stations have websites that can be useful for immediate news because they can "break in" but usually the city will work on the station's airtime. Follow your city's media plan to contact them. Your biggest takeaway with broadcast is to be trained before you meet the beast. Don't become a meme and you can become one before you are even off the air.

If you don't understand how television journalists do their job, you can fall apart. Being on air can hurt your credibility as a city councilmember. Also, your city will usually have an appointed spokesperson for city matters. This doesn't preclude you from giving interviews but it can help you to know when you should defer to them. Find out who it is. That person will likely be the mayor in the times of crisis or action. The spokesperson could be the city manager sometimes or the communication head at other times.

If television or radio contacts you for an interview, give it if you feel trained to do so. Whatever you decide, tell the city manager, the mayor and the communication staff. If you gave the interview, what you have said needs an open records review and might need to be recorded. Likewise, if you did a great job, they might want to promote it on the city's social media sites, in e-newsletters and other places.

Print Media

Even as the industry implodes, never count print media out. Plenty of the veteran voters and residents read newspapers and always will.

Newspaper reporters also remain the most likely media representatives you will encounter. If you are a lucky city, you have one sitting on the front row at council meetings. You might not like it, but having a steady reporter means you have someone to work with. Never give up on a real reporter. If one asks a question, answer it. The chances of it being something you aren't knowledgeable about is unlikely.

Don't get crafty though. Never agree to a lengthy interview if you have not gone through media training. While you never give up on a real reporter, never assume he/she is a friend. Even if you have an established relationship, never assume you are in a friendly interview until you know you are. One wrong story with quotes by you can cause damage that will be hard to correct.

QUICK TIP ABOUT PRINT MEDIA

A lot of times your social media posts can turn into news stories for reporters. News reporters will follow your social media posts and glean them for story ideas. When you post, speak to your constituents and residents but use a tone in your content that will make earned media want to spread it.

Websites

If you don't have a website check into it. Websites were dismissed around 2010 with the idea that all your content should be on social media. It was so thoroughly dismissed that for a while Facebook didn't even want you to link to your own website.

As a political candidate, you probably have a website. You can use it but make sure you do so in alignment with the city policies. If your city provides an official city councilmember website, use it separate from your campaign one.

Podcasts

A little gem that is growing in the media world is the humble podcast. It's listed here as something to think about as you continue your journey as a councilmember.

They are hyper-niched and are gaining traction as social media becomes less enchanting as a means to learn about community, culture and society.

If you decide to do one or are asked to speak on one, follow the same protocol as you do for broadcast.

Advertising

The ultimate form of message control is advertising. One of the reasons print media is dying is because of the rise of social media advertising and the metrics it provides for calculating your ROI. Let's look at one aspect of social media advertising.

In Facebook, you can boost posts or you can create an ad. If you do a Facebook ad, you tell Facebook who you want to see it. Let's say however, that you have a really great post that says something you want people to know. You would, in this case, boost the post. You do all the same tasks you would for an ad but you do it for the post. Facebook will "boost" the post into newsfeeds of the segment you tell it to.

Boosting posts is one of the popular conversations in government communications because social media makes it so easy to do.

Email

Email is the forgotten owned media. We dropped it in favor of social media but this trend is coming back because it is permission based and it is still a highly read platform. People will open emails they requested. Email also gains favor as social media feeds become less embraced. Email is not like your parent's anymore and your email list can be golden.

Think in terms of using email as a great form to get messages to your residents. Also think of it as an option for information that needs longer reads.

Newsletters and alerts are among those publications that can be used in email. Think of ways to use email more often because our relationship with social media will be drastically different in three years but email will always be with us.

Texting & DM

Direct Messaging and texting is another tool people will be using more. They circumvent the social algorithms and privacy issues. More and more people are using DM (direct messaging) instead of social media news feeds.

It is such a hot trend that Facebook is trying to capitalize on it. Watch for more features to pop up in Messenger as a result of it.

Texting also is on the rise as a way to circumvent the privacy and algorithms of social media and the web. While this method gained favor with major political candidates, cities and councils can consider it for alerts, emergency communication and other important urgent messages.





**the newspaper is
just one option.**

**you control the
message.**





CHAPTER THREE



What is Monitoring?

The algorithms that run social media have monetary value for those who own the algorithm and those who buy/use its metrics.

For your purposes as a city official, you are not interested in the monetary value of the algorithm, you are interested in how it can be used to make sure your residents and supporters are getting the message.

Monitoring means you can analysis and track the vast amount of information that the internet collects. You cannot monitor the results of a Facebook profile but you can monitor them on a Facebook page. You cannot monitor the results on a personal Instagram but you can a “business” one.

You can monitor any Twitter profile you have. One of the reasons that Facebook is the Godfather of social media is because it delivers a lot of these metrics. It makes it easy for you to monitor how well your content performs on it. Others, like Snapchat, are not as good to do that on.

Some of the popular metrics are:

Mentions

Followers

Engagement

Impressions

Reach

For digital media many of these are also applicable but you also have backlinks. They refer to the amount of times a person clicked on your website from an article that mentioned it.

What Are Metrics?

Monitoring and metrics needs to align with your goals and objectives. But not all social media metrics are the same. Here is a review of some of the most used but misunderstood terms:

Impressions vs Reach.

These two can be easily confused. Reach means the total number of people who had that post come up in their feed. Think of reach as the number of unique people who see your content. In traditional media, this would be similar to handing out flyers at school. You know how many you handed out.

Impression means that content was delivered to someone's feed. A person doesn't have to engage with the post in order for it to count as an impression. Also, one person could have multiple impressions for a single piece of content. In traditional media, this would be when you handed a flyer to the same person every time he walked by you at school. If he walked by you six times, you handed him six flyers.

Reach is the number of people who may have seen your content, while **impressions** are the total number of times your content was displayed to people.

Reach vs. Engagement

Don't confuse the terms. They are distinct. Just because you reached someone doesn't mean they engaged with you. In traditional media, think of it as handing a person a flyer and he speaks to you. You reached him and he engaged. If he walked away without speaking, you did not. You only reached him. In social media, a like, comment or share is engagement.

Views vs. Engagement

The same concept applies here as it does with reach vs. engagement. Views means the number of people who watched a video at least 3 seconds. By the way, in Facebook, these statistics are not calculated in your post engagement. They are calculated separately. That is because at its core, reach vs views is the same difference as reading a book about Star Trek as opposed to seeing the movie. Post engagement is different than video engagement.

Views vs Impressions

Views are for video. Impressions are for posts.

Engagement Rate is the Holy Grail

Social media rewards you for high engagement rates by pushing your posts to the top of feeds. Not all engagement is ranked the same:

Likes/Reactions are ranked lowest in the algorithm

Shares are in the middle

Comments/Replies are ranked higher



Which Metrics Do I Use?

That depends on what you are trying to do. This list may help you determine what you want to do and then give you guidance on what metrics you need to focus on:

If you are growing your audience you want: **Followers**

If you want to interact and learn about your current audience you want: **Engagement**

If you want to expand the number of people who see your posts you want: **Reach**

If you want to repeat the number of times your audience sees your post you want: **Impressions** and maybe **Clicks**

If you want to determine how many media are publishing your post you want: **Mentions, Shares and Backlinks**

These metrics are a lot better than what you get in traditional media where you have to do a lot of guesswork to know your ROI. Still these media have uses. In certain situations, such as an emergency, you cannot ignore broadcast. Broadcast raises awareness and is still excellent reach. It can also deliver trusted news before anyone else. Also, remember it is earned media so its worth the effort in some cases.

For routine daily items you might consider using social media and some newspaper coverage.

Let's remember, however, the goal of government communications is pretty straightforward. In most cases, you want to reach all the people all the time so do not look at digital or print media as an either/or choice. Remember they are a balance. Use them based on the way your community consumes media.

In five years, we may be suggesting a different approach but the goal will not change for government communications. You just need to be aware that the media maze morphs and evolves into a new path every few years.

Your Personal Media Plan

In the midst of all these metrics discussions, you may have sensed that you could be very helpful to your city's media plan. You are right. You can be incredibly useful in gaining followers, boosting engagement, increasing mentions and so forth.

You also may have noticed that you can increase your own profiles using this knowledge. So here are eight questions to consider as you create your own media plan.

1. Where do my constituents consume their media?
2. What message am I sending? It is immediate, current or evergreen?
3. What hat will I wear? Campaign or Governance?
4. Have I considered how this message will affect the image of the city, the people, the council, my supporters?
5. How will my message support the city's strategic plan?
6. Have I notified the right staff and councilmembers about my message?
7. Have I sifted this message through the lens of my ethics and government requirements?
8. If this goes viral or goes bad, can I survive it? Can my family and loved ones?





CHAPTER FOUR



During your time as an elected municipal leader you will encounter some common situations that will require you to think about media and how you interact with them.

Four of them are listed here with the hope that if you think about them early in your journey so you can optimize the way you use media to talk to your residents and constituents.

Emergency Communications

Your city will have a process when disaster strikes.

It might be a good one or it might be a bad one but a process will exist. Know it and follow it. Change it at the council table later if you think something was done wrong. Right now, be part of the team. Lives depend on your maturity as a government leader.

There will be a designed spokesperson. Find out who it is and support that person by keeping your mouth shut to the media.

You don't have a media role unless you are told you have one. If an official message needs to get out, then offer to use your network to help do that. If approved, you absolutely should repeat, share and use any official message that has been given.

In times of emergencies, your first responders and your emergency staff will be very careful not to give out wrong information. Let's repeat: support them by keeping your mouth shut to the media.

Your communication staff will have their hands full with overwhelming questions from all kinds of social media sites. They will be getting emails, phone calls and texts. You can offer to help them answer resident concerns. If they agree to let you, send out the information they tell you to send out.

More than any other time in your position as a city councilmember, you need to drop all agendas and be part of the team. Tell them your what your skill sets are and tell them to inform you where to go sit down and start working.

Your emergency staff will be in constant communication to the state and other jurisdictions. They have a very clear communication channel to acquire equipment and resources for the city. If they tell you they need you, do whatever they ask. If they tell you they don't, find another way to make yourself useful. You'll find one.

Council Actions

So at every city council meeting, you will take action on policies and variances or any host of issues.

You should tell people you did. They have every right to know that you did. This is what democracy is. A council has been elected to cast votes on actions they want to take or have staff take.

Before you begin talking or posting about the action you took, make sure you understand it. It might be hard to comprehend, but sometimes, you won't. Other times, you will be sure that you do understand but you really don't.

Here are some tips as you create content about council actions:

Make sure your the right person to be publishing the information or giving the interviews. As a new official, you might not be. If you aren't, offer to share and reiterate the information when it is released.

Use the background information in your packet. These are part of the official record.

Know the vote. If it is unanimous, say so. If it is not, think before you publicize the name of the person who didn't vote for it. In some cities this is like throwing someone under the bus. In others, it is like shedding light on the truth.

Know what the citizens really want to know. Don't overload them will housekeeping issues or routine matters, such as those on a consent agenda.



Have a working relationship with your communication staff. Regularly discuss what items you think citizens should know and see how much the staff can help you.

Feel free to be interviewed. Council actions are the bread and butter of what you do. Just make sure you remember to think about your message before you say it and then make sure the right people know you spoke to the media.

Economic Development

If you are in a city that loves economic development, it's a hot topic. If you are in one that doesn't love economic development, it is a hot topic. That means, you will be asked questions about it. Keep these tips in mind:

Just because a company came to your city to ask a few questions doesn't mean the development will come. The media covers plenty of failed economic development projects and someone in the city and council always gets blamed for its failure. Don't be the guy that gets quoted after the fact because he blabbed it to his friends and told them to never tell anyone - yet. Your friends tell people and they tell people you said it. You look like an idiot if nothing happens.

[So that you don't look like "that guy:"](#)

Vet all projects through your city manager and your economic development manger. They know whether it will happen or not.

Your economic development committee/corporation members may or may not be sharp enough to know what's going on. If your chair is on the ball, have conversations with him/her about the status of projects.

Once council or economic development committee/corporation takes action, you have something to talk about.

Once you've done all the above tips, feel free to tell people and the media where you stand on EDC projects. That is part of what you were elected to do.

Once more, always know the facts and the actual votes that were taken on a project before you start engaging the media on it.



Campaign Trail vs Governance Leadership

In the end, you wear two hats. You are a governance leader and you are political campaigner. The two will always meet even when the two should never meet.

For your ensuing term, you are a governance leader first and your messages should focus on how you are fulfilling campaign promises and supporting your city's vision for the future.

If you do that job well, your next campaign trail will be whole lot easier. It will be easier to defend an opponent and it will be easier to stop an opponent too.

More important, a good communication strategy ensures your legacy as a statesman or stateswoman. Your ability to communicate to your residents and supporters what you did as a city councilmember will become your legacy.

Your relationship with the media and your media choices will become your tools for that effort. So it is important that you learn all you can about media relations and how they support you, your city and your community.

The residents depend on your content and now you've become better prepared to deliver it.



Thank you for reading Media Relations 2019.

Contact MuniMedia for your council's
communication governance training.

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