

WESTERN REGIONAL SNCC CONFERENCE

November 13 15

Saturday Workshop

PRESS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Panelists: ANN ALANSON, Publicity Committee, Demo State Cent. Comm.  
RALPH GLEASON, Columnist, SF Chronicle

Moderator: NORMA WHITTAKER

Notes from Gleason's remarks: It is necessary to understand certain things about newspapers and newspapermen in order to discuss how to deal with them. A daily newspaper is a profit-making organization. They like to see themselves as "public servants". In fact, they are public servants only as much as they can afford to be.

Newspapers, in general, are owned by Republican conservatives. They are staffed by "clerks", i.e., reporters and editors. This staff averages out as "Kennedy Democrats". There is a silent struggle - the staff tries to get into print what the management wouldn't want to be there.

If you want to get your stories printed, it is necessary to establish a personal relationship with a member of the newspaper staff. You must impress the reporter with your trustworthiness and sense of responsibility. He needs to have faith in the truthfulness of the material you give him, based on experience with material from you. The news must be given to him on time and any changes must be immediately reported to him.

Most of the people who decide what stories get printed spend their un-busy hours in the newspaper building. Their view of reality is composed of material handed to them by other people. This is one reason why personal contact is so important. As an example of this, he recalled, about a year ago it became clear that a lot of available SNCC material was not being used by the CHRONICLE. The decision makers thought that SNCC was composed of a bunch of "far-out", "unreliable" kids. Mike Miller and some other SNCC people visited the CHRONICLE offices and established personal contact. This led to the use of the Watt line by the CHRONICLE. Now the information got printed. SNCC's image became one of reliability and trustworthiness.

If you want to get your material into a column, find out what the columnist is interested in and how he works. Send him the kind of material which will fit into his column. If he works at home, don't send the material to the office and expect it to get to him in time. Getting things in on time is extremely important. Also, remember that "all just causes are morally just". Any columnist receives dozens of announcements for good causes. He prints those which have some intrinsic news value in relation to the kind of material he handles.

The following remarks were made in an informal manner; discussion and questions from the floor:

In sending out stories to papers and Radio and TV, planning is important. Don't give all of your information in story #1. Long term planning is extremely important if you want radio and TV to be on hand. They are limited in equipment and need sufficient time to make sure they have it.

QUESTION: What about rapid-fire news to a newspaper:

ANSWER: It is hard to get in (unless, of course, so dramatic it is over the wire-services and can't be ignored.) It is good to have prior

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contact with a P.R. man or a columnist for last minute items. You also need very good intra-organizational communication, e.g. Atlanta To SF.

QUESTION: Is it advisable to send photos with a story?

ANSWER: Ask for a photographer if a reporter is coming out. If they don't send one, ask if they will use one of your pictures if you send it. If yes, get a photographer who knows how to take and prepare photos for newspapers. If you send a photo, bear in mind that newspapers are printed on cheap paper. Heavy contrast is necessary, e.g. dark man against a light background. Think of your photo as being reduced to a single column. Don't try to photograph a group of five people. Send glossy print, 8 x 10 if possible. This gives the newspaper room to work with the picture.

QUESTION: What about giving exclusives:

ANSWER: Play by ear. Sometimes to your advantage, sometimes not. If you do, exploit the paper which is sympathetic to you., e.g. during the Senate investigation of KPFA, the station gave its stories to the CHRONICLE, which was sympathetic. The EXAMINER, which was not sympathetic, had to follow the CHRONICLE stories. This was very effective.

QUESTION: Wire Service:

ANSWER: It is a good policy to call your local newspaper to find out if a particular story is on the teletype. Lots of wire service news is passed over. You call attention to it by your telephone call, and supply it if it is not there. Establish rapport with AP and UPI representatives in your area. The wire service has a tremendous effect on what news appears in print. When sending stories to a wire service, be very selective. They like stories of national or regional interest. Don't send them stories which are too local to interest them.

QUESTION: Features:

ANSWER: One of the hardest things to do is to create a story. Doing publicity for SNCC is a fulltime job. You don't only wait for a beating in the South. For example, if Bob Moses comes to town, even if it is only to speak before three people, take advantage of his appearance to get SNCC into the newspaper. Do a background in depth. However, such a story takes careful planning. Warning: Don't overexploit a visitor. Don't get three stories about him in the same paper. It upsets the editor. Select. If you use Hoppe, don't use Gleason too. Hold press conferences with the consciousness of newspaper deadlines.

INDEPENDENT CITIZENS:

- 1) Letters to the editor
- 2) Telephone calls to radio shows
- 3) Correspondence with legislators.

When writing letters to a newspaper, keep them short. Also write thank you notes if a good editorial appears, or if a reporter or columnist prints something on your special project.

PUBLIC RELATIONS: Relations with media people fall under this category, as well as relations with the community. Both take a long time to build up. In addition, it is important to level with the people you're trying to get to print your news. They have their reputations to uphold. Don't say anything you don't want printed. After establishing a relationship, you can ask a reporter not to print something you have told him in confidence. It is to his advantage not to print it if he wants further confidence.

TRANSPORTING PRESS RELEASES:

You can send material from, for example, Davis to SF by Greyhound if you have talked to the paper in advance. If it is important to them, they will pick it up.

Releases are often hand carried; this is especially possible in small communities.

Send releases to small, local papers so they can be used verbatim in good form, no misspellings, etc. Try to put everything in the first paragraph.