

Elm Tips: Covering Meetings

Before:

1. **Know the meeting schedule.** Find out when regular meetings are held for the organization you're covering. Mark them on your calendar.
2. **Get the agenda.** Try to get a copy of the agenda, including supplementary documents that it references. Read through it and identify topics that are most likely to be of interest to readers.
3. **Write a story in advance.** If you can, write a story telling readers about an important upcoming meeting. Promote it with a box telling them details about how to attend themselves.

During:

1. **Mingle.** This means you need to be there on time, early if possible. Use the time before a meeting, during breaks, and after the meeting to talk with sources and anyone else there. Introduce yourself. Initiate conversation. People might tell you why they're really there and all the juicy behind-the-scenes information.
2. **Take good notes.** Get lots of quotes. Basic facts don't have to be in quotes, so just jot them down. Be sure to attribute all your facts to the correct sources. Throughout the meeting, think about what you're going to focus the story on. Don't take notes on everything; be selective.
3. **Look for different stories.** Listen to what is being said and note potential stories. A half-dozen things will be mentioned but not embellished. Check up on them later.
4. **Zero in on your story.** Figure out what you want to write your story about. It shouldn't be a play-by-play of what was discussed. Take notes accordingly.
5. **Snag people.** After the meeting, snag people and ask them questions to complete the information needed to write a solid story. If someone spoke and you didn't get their name, track them down.
6. **Take pictures.** A photographer may have fallen through on the assignment, so take back-ups just in case. They don't have to be award-winning shots on a fancy, hundred dollar camera. A pic on your smart phone is better than no image at all.

After:

1. **Copy those notes.** Write down everything you remember as soon as possible.
2. **Write. Fast.** Deadline coming up? Formulate your lede during the meeting, maybe even your beginning paragraph. Write the story with an angle. Don't just list a chronology of what happened. The news isn't the fact that a meeting happened.
3. **Follow up.** Make sure to follow up on those other stories that came out of the meeting and talk to your editor about them.