

## **Covering Meetings Tipsheet**

By Doug Cospers

- **WATCH FOR THE NEWS:** Meeting stories don't have to be dull. Remember to report the NEWS that comes out of the meeting. Don't just tell the readers that someone had a meeting. Who met where, when and why belongs in the second paragraph.
- **SIT UP FRONT:** on the front row if possible. If you can't hear and see, you can't write.
- **MAKE A PARTICIPANT SEATING CHART:** Outline the seating arrangement and assign each player a number for quick attribution to quotes in your notes. Be sure you get names and titles down accurately.
- **GOOD WRITING BEGINS WITH GOOD REPORTING:** Keep in mind that reporting is really just an extension of writing. It's all one process. You already are sculpting your written report as you listen and observe, as you decide what to write in your notes, and as you think of the right follow-up questions. If you gather solid, exciting information and observations, you will write a solid, exciting story.
- **LISTEN BETWEEN THE LINES:** Listen for hints of developing trends or anticipated announcements hidden or accidentally dropped by speakers. Then ask them to elaborate after the meeting.
- **ASK QUESTIONS:** Merely recording what is said at a meeting is not reporting. Ask participants to elaborate or follow new angles during breaks and after the meeting is over. Don't ask questions during the public portion of a meeting. Let the audience do that.
- **ASK MORE QUESTIONS:** Watch for the authoritative and colorful speakers from the audience. Find them after the meeting for follow up questions and their phone number for more questions later.
- **WRITE FOR YOUR READERS:** Keep in mind who will be reading what you write, and write directly to them, to their interests, to their needs, maybe to their passions.
- **5 Ws AND H:** Ask yourself before you leave the meeting if you have the Who, What, Where, When, Why and How. Chances are, the speaker didn't give you everything you need in the public portion of the meeting. Be sure you understand the issues before you leave the building. Remember, the only stupid question is the one you were afraid to ask.
- **USE THE GOOD QUOTES:** When you fail to use quotations in a story, especially a meeting story, you rob it of its humanity, of color. But use only the best quotes -- the ones that made an impression on you. Dull words are best paraphrased.
- **STORY ORGANIZATION:** Most meeting stories are complex stories. Lead with the main news story, then, in the second paragraph, give the reader a hint of the other main elements you will flesh out after the main story is told. Put the least important paragraphs at the end of the story.
- **IF YOU ARE WRITING A STORY OF RECORD:** get every official action that occurs during the meeting. Most of it will play at the end of your story, as explained below.