

## Starting Out: Advice for beginners

**Develop sources.** Meet people. Everywhere. Make it a point to go to meetings and banquets and departments. Make phone calls. Hand out your business card. And don't always "talk shop." Get to know people. Ask about their kids, their families, their favorite sports teams.

**Seek non-traditional and non-governmental sources, too.** Don't forget about the people you cover. And the people who work with them on a daily basis. Service and non-profit groups that work within the community often provide a wealth of knowledge and insight into the dynamics of the places you cover. "[Members of the Chicago nonprofit group CeaseFire] and the people that they work for can be very good sources about what's really going on in these neighborhoods," the Chicago Tribune's David Heinzmann said.

**Be visible.** Go to meetings. Go to banquets. Hang out with police officers. Go on ride-alongs. Ask lots of questions. Ask for clarification. Meet people. "Go to those meetings and those events that look like they might not produce stories," Heinzmann said. "You have to spend time OUT: in the neighborhoods, at the meetings. Try to work the building, whether it's a courthouse or police department, and know those people, and know them well enough that they'll take your call when you need them."

**Dive right in.** Be willing to experience everything, cover everything, talk to everyone and explore. "I think a lot of it is just baptism by fire," said Lisa Rosetta, justice reporter at The Salt Lake Tribune. "You learn the process as you talk to police officers, as you talk to prosecutors, as you talk to judges... You just have to put your time in on the job, and pay attention to what's happening."

**Use good news judgment – and communicate with your editor.** "Nowadays, I think that because of the reduction in force, doing a police beat in a city like this one is almost like working in an emergency room," said Sergio Bustos, assistant city editor at The Miami Herald. "You kind of take a look at the patient as it comes in, and if it's worthy of a story, you do it. If not, you leave it to television."

**Know the community.** Get a map. Explore. Meet people. "Know the community physically, know the community culturally. Have contacts in the community outside of officialdom," said Miami Herald police reporter David Ovalle.