

.NEW in town



It's tough enough to adjust to a new newsroom, but if you've moved to a new community, you also have to learn your way around outside the building. Put on your reporter hat and try these suggestions from news directors who've done it many times.

Explore

Buy a good map and spend a few hours each weekend exploring the area. Don't be afraid to get lost—you never know what you'll discover. Ask people you meet to show you the high points and hidden places they like. Ride along with your reporters and crews. Ride public transit.

Enlist the staff

Have your most experienced reporters introduce you to the mayor, police chief, school superintendent, and other key community leaders. Ask long-time employees for some history and perspective. Says one news director, "I have done that, and it not only has helped me better understand my new hometown, it has also shown them I have an interest in this area, and I am not just passing through."

Find a tour guide

Ask around at the station if there are "good people" to get to know. Take those people to lunch and learn about local history and what makes the community tick. One news director suggests taking photographers to lunch at "the smoky diner they share with the local deputies, and you'll get your fingers on the pulse of your town real fast."

Read and listen

Subscribe to the local paper and be sure to read the letters to the editor. "That will give you some sense of the values in your new community," says one veteran news director. Listen to local radio DJs and talk show hosts to see what they're talking about. If you have live shots scheduled at public or civic events, go along and talk to the people who stop by.

“Drive or walk around the community, talk to your audience; that keeps you connected.”

Esteban Creste, News Director • WSNS-TV • Chicago

Talk to everyone

Get to know your neighbors. Talk to people when you're running errands or at the health club. Chat with parents at PTA meetings. If you have kids who are into sports, be sure to go along. "You'd be amazed how much you learn on the sidelines of a 6-year-old's soccer match," says one news director.

Get involved

Recreation leagues, nonprofit groups, the local Rotary or Kiwanis Club, houses of worship—getting involved at lots of different levels can help you get to know the community better. When you first arrive, accept all invitations to "rubber chicken" events. Go to Chamber of Commerce mixers and meet the "movers and shakers." Make sure the GM knows you are interested in joining him or her at events the station sponsors.

Attend a meeting

Once you know what the biggest issues and power centers are in the community, attend a few public meetings. Give people your business card, and ask them to suggest two more people you should meet.

Reach out

Hold community feedback meetings in different cities or towns in the DMA to hear what people have to say about the issues important to them. Says one news director, "It's a great opportunity to get feedback about your news operation and how it's doing, not to mention excellent story ideas."