

RTDNA engages in advocacy to create an environment where journalists can safely and responsibly do their jobs. We do this by serving as a unified voice for the profession, educating and informing policymakers and influencers, and supporting policy and legal efforts that will ensure responsible journalists are able to seek and report the truth on behalf of the public.

## RTDNA's Five-Point Voice of the First Amendment Policy Framework

RTDNA's five-point policy framework is designed to strengthen the role journalism plays in a healthy democracy. The following framework helps the association to determine where action is needed to support journalists and journalism in cities and states across the U.S.

- 1. Open government.** One of the greatest ways to fuel transparency and accountability in government is by making public proceedings, documents and data broadly accessible to journalists who are trained to present information to the public that informs their opinions and helps them make decisions. Elements of good open government policy include:
  - ⇒ Information available in its original form, not modified or aggregated.
  - ⇒ Information made available in a timely fashion, so it is useful;. RTDNA defines timely as instant or as soon as possible within the regular course of business.
  - ⇒ Information is accessible to the broadest range of users and doesn't require a membership, access approval or have multiple steps to register that may present barriers to access.
  - ⇒ Most information is license-free and not subject to copyright, patent, trademark or trade secret regulations.
- 2. Open records.** The First Amendment guarantees the public's right to receive information. Journalists act as a conduit to an informed public by using their professional training to access, distill and communicate information provided by

government to the public. The ease with which journalists can obtain records from state and local government agencies impacts their ability to question leaders, seek and report the truth, inform the public about essential public health and safety issues, reduce fraud, expose wasteful spending and many other important actions that help the public hold leaders accountable. It is RTDNA's stance that public records are already the domain of the public and government agencies should go to great lengths to make them easily accessible to the public. Elements of good open records policy include:

- ⇒ Fee waivers when records are obtained on behalf of public interest or public good; we believe records should be free as they are paid for by public tax dollars and the public should not be required to pay for them again.
- ⇒ Journalists are permitted to photograph or record public proceedings and photograph public records with mobile phones or other devices as a way to gather information that does not require taxpayer funds.
- ⇒ Records are quickly and regularly posted and updated on publicly accessible websites.
- ⇒ Ease of access to the person responsible for making records available
- ⇒ Timely response policies to requests; RTDNA defines timely as within five working days.

**3. Access to public officials and government employees.** Journalists are a key link in the relationship between government and the public. Public officials who restrict reasonable access to journalists, limit access to news conferences and briefings or restrict public employees from speaking with the media, stand in obstruction of the public's right and need to know. Best practices for access include:

- ⇒ No selective access for journalists to briefings and news conferences; if access must be restricted (i.e. for limited space due to public health concerns), pool coverage arrangements administered by journalists must be made.
- ⇒ Protections for public employees who act as whistleblowers, reporting improper government actions on behalf of taxpayers.
- ⇒ Willingness to share information that will help the public stay informed and understand how decisions are made.
- ⇒ All levels of government staff and all public employees are educated on reasonable open records policies and access, and public leaders hold employees and staff accountable to ensure a policy of openness.

**4. Credible public officials.** Democracy cannot function without transparent reporting to the public. Journalists help facilitate this process by independently gathering information, researching issues, speaking with sources and verifying facts.



However, when public officials conceal information or obstruct the public's right and need to know, they cause confusion and mistrust and fuel a disengaged public. Credible public officials reflect the following:

- ⇒ They understand the public's right and need to receive information in an accurate, reliable and timely fashion.
- ⇒ They strive to follow open meeting and records laws and advocate for changes when existing laws don't go far enough to make information reasonably accessible to the public.
- ⇒ They are lawfully transparent, withholding information only when it is obvious details need to remain confidential (criminal investigations that are actually ongoing, safety, to protect minors and victims of sex crimes, etc.).
- ⇒ Journalists can verify the information an official provides to ensure accuracy and it can be corroborated by multiple sources.

## **5. Overall climate between government and journalists.** Journalists

perform a public service. As members of our communities, journalists who are following professional standards should be respected and protected for doing their jobs just like any other members of the community. In recent years, the number of arrests, threats, hostility, improper charges and other forms of harassment of journalists have been on the rise. Even more disheartening is the number of these abuses of power that come from public officials and government employees. RTDNA advocates for a healthy relationship between government and journalists that must reflect:

- ⇒ Few, if any arrests, of legitimately working and law-abiding journalists.
- ⇒ Lack of retaliatory or punitive actions against legitimately working journalists.
- ⇒ Both maintain a trusted but professional working relationship with reasonable boundaries.
- ⇒ Adhere to well-established journalistic and government codes of ethics and professional standards.
- ⇒ It is in the public's best interest to encourage the disclosure of newsworthy information from any member of the public. As such, journalists' notes, sources, unaired audio/video are never confiscated or subpoenaed to protect the right of the public to share information without fear of retaliation or punishment.

