



Renewing the PIO Profession

How It All Began

By Carol Brown Spencer
Paul Clark Award winner and former city PIO

Murray Brown, CAPIO's first executive director, was a man with a need for story leads. In the early '70s Brown was serving as editor of *Western City* magazine and always on the lookout for stories. "More people helped me get more articles," Brown told us in a recent phone conversation. So he began looking around for public information specialists.

It wasn't long before the man with a need met Tom Robinson, a man with a list. Today, Robinson is Director of Communication and Information Technology in La Mirada. But in the early '70s, he had just taken his first job as an Administrative Intern at the City of Commerce. One of Robinson's first tasks was to survey the L.A. area for public information programs. The people on Robinson's survey became the invitation list for Murray Brown's first CAPIO meetings.

"We started with brown bag discussions and soon built a network where people with public information duties could help each other solve the everyday challenges of the PI business," said Robinson. "Anyone within an hour's drive was considered a good prospect for the group."

Meanwhile, Murray Brown was working a deal for office space with Don McIntyre, then City Manager in Pasadena. "Don gave us three or four rooms in the Civic Auditorium in return for bringing the occasional seminar or conference to Pasadena," Brown said. Later, Brown would take CAPIO with him to Cal State University at Los Angeles.

According to Tom Robinson, the earliest CAPIO members had public relations duties and held keys to the city. Dick Taylor, a CAPIO founder and one of its early presidents, was a stand-out among CAPIO'S big idea men of the time. Taylor came from Arizona, where development was booming and ground breakings were a daily occurrence, Robinson recalled. "One time Taylor tied the Mayor

to the hood of a car and whisked him to three ribbon cuttings within an hour." Taylor's flamboyance always helped him get the job done and make the dailies at the same time.

Over time, PIO assignments grew more sophisticated with the addition of newsletter writing and film work. But then came the disasters and emergencies. Robinson still remembers the time the City of Carson discovered carcinogens in its air. Carson's PIO was Paul Clark, and CAPIO's sudden assignment was to help Clark bring the story public. "Clark's response had to be fast," said Robinson. "And it had to be right."

"That day crystallized the job for our group," Robinson recalls. "We'd never dealt with health issues before. Now we recognized that public information wasn't going to be about ground breakings anymore."

In 1982, CAPIO added cable technology to its communication tool kit. The opening event was a full-day CAPIO seminar hosted by Mike Stover in the City of Lakewood.

Larry Bender, Hawthorne's Cable TV Administrator, was there from the beginning. "The early '80s were blue sky days for the city cable industry," Bender said. "Cable companies were so anxious to get franchises with Southern California cities that they were willing to give away millions of dollars worth of equipment." Cities like Hawthorne and Lakewood, where administrators were ready to step up to this unique opportunity, came away as leaders in cable technology. And CAPIO had a new area of study to add to its program.

CAPIO members were mostly writing people in the '70s, Bender recalls. Then came the cable people in the '80s. Yet the CAPIO mission stayed the same—to trade information. "I remember CAPIO as a terrific bunch," said Bender. "Everyone was really dedicated to public service and helping the other guy. We were like family."

The California
Association of Public
Information Officials

CAPIO History Project 1971 - 2001

30 years of
leadership, support,
and change

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CAPIO

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From Rub-On Letter to Digital Paintboxes: Public Information Issues and Tools

By Mike Stover
Assistant City Manager, Lakewood
CAPIO President 1981-84

Public policy issues and changes in communication technologies mark the 30-year history of CAPIO.

During the early years (the 1970s), the need, role and appropriate products and services of the PIO were debated among elected officials, city/county managers, turf-conscious department heads and newspaper editorial writers. In some local governments, the debate continues to this day. The public information pioneers who formed CAPIO (first as SCAPIO) in 1971 were present at the beginning of this debate and helped shape how this debate would proceed.

The appropriateness of proactive public information activities, whether the PIO function was proposed by the local government's chief administrative officer or directly by the City Council and the talents of the agency's first PIOs, often proved more pivotal to the PIO function's creation and survival than even its cost or perceived cost-effectiveness.

An often-stated objection was that the position would become a du jour political aide to the agency's elected officials—a misuse of taxpayer funds. Newspapers editors also cast a skeptical eye, concerned that THEIR access to local government news sources would be restricted. Some agencies mistakenly tried to limit media access—an inevitable failure in an open society. A few PIOs, in fact, became politicized—usually at the insistence of those they served. PIOs who were ethically challenged eventually found themselves out of a job. Unfortunately, the PIO function also was summarily ended.

The first products produced for local governments by CAPIO's pioneers often were:

- News releases
- Media relations
- Community and employee newsletters
- Newsletter advertisements and inserts
- News photography
- Broadcast radio and television public service ads (PSAs)
- Special event support
- Printed materials, including folders, brochures and flyers

Bad times then hit the profession. Many PIOs lost their jobs in the last years of the 1970s through budget cuts imposed after voters approved Proposition 13 (the Jarvis-Gann property tax limitation initiative). Local government managers and elected officials instituted massive restructuring efforts, preferring "back-to-basics" and public safety positions over "support" or "staff" positions such as the PIO.

1980s

CAPIO membership rebounded in the 1980s for a simple reason—effective communication IS a basic function of local government. Still, PIOs learned valuable lessons because of Proposition 13. The two most important lessons are avoiding de facto electioneering and the importance of being perceived by managers and elected officials as a "value added" role. Even the PIO needed to work on their reality-based "image."

In the tough times of the early 1980s, local government leaders learned the importance of service fees for funding both traditional and new programs. Marketing of economic development opportunities and fee-based community facilities and leisure time programs was introduced or enhanced in most agencies. Many local governments cautiously began to request voters to approve revenue-enhancing measures, including new assessments and taxes.

The federal government also mandated public participation programs to inform and involve residents in such areas as housing, community development and transportation planning and grant use.

Yet, one of the most far-reaching developments in the 1980s was the franchising of cable television in urban areas (banned by the FCC till the 1980s). These "franchising wars" were often accompanied by cable company-provided equipment grants and ongoing funding for local government (and public and educational) access programming.

Water agency public information officials battled initial complacency during the great California drought, which started in 1987 and continued until 1992. By the end of the drought, water conservation education programs enjoyed widespread success and proved the "value added" of the professionals who mounted conservation public information campaigns.

A byproduct of the devastating recession in California was the recognition by local agencies that they indeed had rivalry—businesses could decide where to expand or relocate. Fierce competition broke out to distinguish the "product" of quality of life, a business-friendly attitude and climate. PIOs were tapped to head up municipal marketing efforts and a new set of abilities and services emerged.



Great Moments in CAPIO's History

1971

- The Southern California Association of Public Information Officers was formed, office located at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium

1977

- First Bylaws for SCAPIO considered
- SCAPIO hosts informational table at League of California Cities City Manager's Spring Meeting in Pasadena

1978

- Dropped the "Southern" from SCAPIO to form CAPIO – reflecting a statewide association
- Dues set at \$15 per year
- First (and maybe only!) CAPIO Holiday Party

The 1980s brought forth several new PIO services and products for their agencies:

- Public participation programs
- Public opinion surveys
- Balanced public information about proposed revenue measures and tax referenda
- Video production and programming for municipal access channels
- Public access television support
- Multi-media conservation educational campaigns
- Economic development marketing programs

Voters were again heard from. They rebelled against newsletters produced by some agencies that highlighted the achievements of elected officials more than informing their readers about local government programs, public participation opportunities and decision-making options. In 1988, California voters enacted Propositions 68 and 73 restricting "incumbent newsletters" as one of many restrictions approved in these omnibus political reform measures. While elected officials were virtually banned from the pages of newsletters because of these voter initiatives, local government newsletters actually improved in many communities. No longer were there an exact number of references and quotations by each member of the governing body. PIOs received a welcome "rule of the road" from the California electorate.

1990s

Conservation's importance spanned more than water. In 1989, the Legislature approved AB 939 (the California Integrated Waste Management Act), mandating each local government to reduce, reuse and recycle fifty percent of its 1990 waste by the year 2000. New demands on public information officials resulted from this law. But, the results from the resulting communication campaigns and new recycling programs and facilities proved impressive. Once

again, the value added of public information campaigns was demonstrated in community after community.

Voters weighed in once more in approving Proposition 218 in 1996. The statewide initiative mandated elections on most

The 1990s are best known for the explosion of digital technologies.

property-related tax measures. While closely supervised by taxpayer groups and the courts, PIOs were soon tasked in many agencies to ensure that taxpayers knew the significance of revenue measures that they now would be deciding.

Yet, the 1990s are best known for the explosion of digital technologies. These robust media channels supplemented—but didn't supplant—existing PIO products. PIOs began preparing or using such new tools as:

- Electronic (desktop) publishing
- Websites
- Intranets for employee communications
- E-letters and e-mags to mass e-mail lists (vetted of recipients who preferred not to be "spammed" by local governments)
- Digital photography and presentations

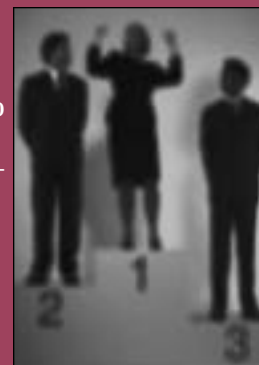
21st Century Public Information...

The Y2K (non)crisis greeted the PIO at the turn of the decade and new century. New communication technologies and challenges also awaited them.

Energy conservation claimed strategic importance. And, digital communication had become untethered from the wired world for both laptops, personal digital assistants and web-enabled telephones.

New technologies, new communication challenges and (always) new laws to govern the practice of California local government public information... it's truly a wonderful world for the public information practitioner.

Who We've Honored... Paul Clark Award Winners



CAPIO's Paul B. Clark Award was created in 1985 to recognize outstanding contributions of one of its members to the field of public information. Paul B. Clark was the City of Carson's public information officer, and a founder of the Southern California Association of Public Information Officers (SCAPIO). Mr. Clark died in 1985 and was presented the first award posthumously.

Paul Clark	1985
Carol Brown Spencer	1986
Frank Blaszack	1987
Fred Cunningham	1988
Murray Brown	1989
Michael Stover	1990
William Reed	1991
Shirley Cobb	1993
Sheri Erlewine (Benninghoven)	1994
Judy Rambeau	1995
Scott Summerfield	1996
J. Lindsey Wolf	1998
Donald Waldie	1999
Sue Schlerf	2000

1979

- Office moved to California State University, Los Angeles campus

1980

- CAPIO regroups following passage of Prop. 13; membership dwindled to about 12 in previous few years

1982

- First annual conference held
- First CAPPY Awards program; (featuring a "Bloopers of the Year" award)
- CAPIO invited to edit ICMA book on public information and education

1983

- First time a sponsor/exhibitor at League of California Cities annual conference
- "Officers" changed to "Officials" in CAPIO name to reflect array of organizations involved
- Dues still \$15; clip art makes it debut in CAPIO newsletter

As Government Evolves, So Do PIOs

By Mike Maxfield

Community Information Officer City of Claremont CAPIO President 1997-98

Communicating with the public has been a concern of government agencies in this country for the better part of the past 100 years. Yet it wasn't until the mid-1960s that cities and other local government entities began instituting formal public information programs staffed by communication specialists.

Back when government's primary communications goal was only to inform citizens of available services and how to access them, there wasn't much need for sophisticated communications programs. Likewise, the task of disseminating information to the public was not seen as a high priority. As a result, the responsibility more often than not fell to a low-level staff member, usually as an adjunct to his or her primary duties – if it was assigned to anyone at all. And then, the effort amounted to little more than sending out press releases.

Over the years, the role of government in society grew more complex and citizens began demanding greater participation in public sector

decisions. Mistrust of government was also increasing following the Vietnam War and Watergate. Public officials began to recognize that creating a climate of trust and support among their constituents would require a more concerted communication effort on their part.

This increase in communication activity understandably led to an increase in the amount of staff time allocated to the task. But more importantly, it led to the creation of specific staff positions filled by people with the requisite skills – the public information officer.

Since most of the early government communication programs were primarily aimed at the news media, many of the first public information officers were former journalists. Over time, these

programs evolved, embracing a wider variety of communication tools, techniques, and technologies. So, too, did the responsibilities of the public information officer.

Today, the government information function encompasses

the entire spectrum of communication tasks: strategic planning, dissemination of information to many different audiences using a variety of methods, providing communication skills training, news media relations, feedback monitoring, audience surveying, and program evaluation. The most effective PIO, therefore, has the knowledge and skills to operate in all these areas. A strong and vibrant CAPIO helps provide today's PIO with the training and networking necessary to keep up with their ever-changing role.

Over time, government communication programs evolved, embracing a wider variety of communication tools, techniques, and technologies. So, too, did the... public information officer .

Who's Led Us... (S)CAPIO's Past Presidents

- 1971-76 No formal structure
- 1977 Richard Taylor
- 1978. Thom Foreman
- 1979-80 Thom Foreman
- 1980-81. Tom Robinson
- 1981-82. Mike Stover
- 1982-83. Mike Stover
- 1983-84. Mike Stover
- 1984-85 Maria Aguirre
- 1985-86 Maria Aguirre
- 1986-87 Michael Guerin
- 1987-88 Sylvia A. Garcia
- 1988-89 Judith Feuer
- 1989-90 Shirley Cobb
- 1990-91. Karen George
- 1991-92 Patricia Montemayor
- 1992-93. Carol Green
- 1993-94. Scott Summerfield
- 1994-95 Sue Schlerf
- 1995-96 Judy Rambeau
- 1996-97 Tom Manheim
- 1997-98 Mike Maxfield
- 1998-99 Kathy Wolff
- 1999-2000 Randi Joseph
- 2002-2001 Frank Cowan

Where We've Met... CAPIO Annual Conference Locations

1982 Commerce	1990 Monterey	1997 Monterey
1983 Downey	1991 La Jolla	1998 Palm Springs
1985 Ventura	1992 Sacramento	1999 Monterey
1986 San Diego	1993 Brea	2000 Palm Springs
1987 San Luis Obispo	1994. South Lake Tahoe	2001 Sacramento
1988 Palm Springs	1995. San Jose	
1989. Santa Barbara	1996 San Diego	

1984

- 82 members: doubled from previous year
- First League of California Cities partnership: CAPIO members spoke on League panel and assisted the media at Anaheim conference

1985

- Paul Clark Award initiated honoring the Carson PIO upon his death

1987

- Workshop on "Desktop Publishing"

1988

- League of California Cities establishes its first "Director of Communications" position; filled by a city PIO

A Match Made in Heaven (or at least Sacramento)

By Judy Rambeau,
Assistant to the City Manager, Community
Relations City of Santa Monica/CAPIO
president 1995-96

How far back does the CAPIO-League of California Cities relationship go? To the beginning, it is written. A CAPIO founder and the group's first executive director was a League staffer. When Murray Brown, then *Western City* magazine editor for the League, joined with several city PIOs to start the Southern California Association of Public Information Officers 30 years ago, he helped establish an inter-organizational connection that remains strong to this day.

CAPIO has contracted for secretarial service from the League since 1991 and maintains its headquarters in the League's Sacramento office, contracting for administrative services provided ably by League communications staff who also have become great friends of CAPIO. Beginning with then Communications Director Sheri (Erlewine) Benninghoven (a former city PIO) and continued by Deborah (Thornton) Micciche, Angela Glasgow and, most recently, Erin Maurie under the direction of Communications Director Megan Taylor and supported by other League offices, our relationship is one of mutual benefit. The League maintains CAPIO's financial records, coordinates conferences, maintains the roster, handles the annual membership drive, answers dozens of daily calls and responds to written inquires, hosts and updates our web site, and works closely with a succession of CAPIO boards to keep the organization responsive to the needs of its 200-plus members.

Through the years, CAPIO members have assisted the League whenever asked in

carrying out its communications objectives, from the Proposition 13 days of the '70s, through the motor vehicle in-lieu fees and property tax grabs of the '80s and early '90s, Proposition 218 and redevelopment reform of the mid-'90s, to the current issues of binding arbitration, threatened utility tax cuts, and the failure of energy deregulation. Whether presenting at conferences, strategizing with League staff, creating campaign materials or coordinating local implementation of statewide efforts, CAPIO members have been there for the League—and the League has been there for CAPIO.

Perhaps the most visible example of CAPIO's volunteer work for the League has been in the Media Room at the annual League

CAPIO has opened wide its door to public information professionals from state agencies, counties, school districts, special districts and the private sector...

conference for the past 17 years. Begun as ad hoc assistance in 1984, by 1989 CAPIO volunteers were coordinating all the work in the Media Room, including reporter relations and assistance, setting up interviews, sending out "hometown news releases," providing public relations counseling to elected officials—all while covering sessions and writing articles for *Western City* magazine. Some years, including the last two, CAPIO members produced the daily conference newsletter for the League.

As a benefit of our League affiliation, CAPIO members serve on League policy committees, providing a communications perspective that might otherwise be missing; CAPIO members produced the "Reconnecting with Local Government" toolkit distributed to every city in the state in 1996; CAPIO members helped develop the "Heart of the City" awareness campaign in 1994; CAPIO members are presenters at the annual League conference and at division events; CAPIO members even carried picket signs



outside the Anaheim convention center in 1990 as part of the "Operation Budget Freedom" demonstration!

CAPIO has opened wide its doors to public information professionals from state agencies, counties, school districts, special districts and the private sector and is energized and strengthened by the present diversity in the organization. After three decades, however, CAPIO and the League of California Cities can rightfully celebrate a long-lasting relationship kept new by change and challenge. Still together after all these years!

Who Had The Vision... SCAPIO Founding Members

Dick Powell

Thom Foreman – Montebello

Tom Robinson – Cerritos

Bill Reed – Huntington Beach

Don Fleming – Lakewood

Frank Blaszack

Clair Harmony – Commerce

Paul Clark – Carson

Richard Taylor – Inglewood

Tom Bandy – Downey

Murray Brown – Executive Director

1984

- Office moved to League of California Cities Southern California office in Los Angeles upon the retirement of founding executive director Murray Brown

1989

- First staffing of League media room operations

1991

- First full-time staff support; provided by League of California Cities as part of their affiliates staffing program – office moved to League headquarters in Sacramento

1992

- "Let's Communicate" PIO handbook published

The CAPIO History Project

Over the past couple of years, various long-time members have chatted about the need to document CAPIO's past. How did CAPIO get started? What was SCAPIO? Who were the early leaders? Why did we form and what were the important milestones along the way? These questions and more kept coming up at our annual meetings. What we really needed was a History Project.

It came to fruition in March 2001 when a team of veteran CAPIO members met for two days to relive many of the great CAPIO moments, capture who did what and when, and generally map out how the organization came about. This newsletter is the product of those recollections, interviews and research of CAPIO's files housed at the League of California Cities offices.

Most of the documentation of the very early years is gone. Much of the information from the 1970s is from remembrances from those early days. We're sure that not all of what is contained in this newsletter is precisely correct; however, it's the beginning of what we hope will be an ongoing effort to remember our past in order to build for the future.



*Sheri Benninghoven
and Scott Summerfield,
project co-chairs*

Sheri Benninghoven, APR - SAE Communications (former PIO for the city of Anaheim; former Communications Director for the League of California Cities; 1994 Paul Clark Award recipient)

Karen A. George - Public Information Coordinator Anoka-Hennepin School District, Anoka, Minnesota (former PIO for the cities of Claremont and Fremont; CAPIO president in 1990-91)

Mike Maxfield - Community Information Officer City of Claremont (formerly community relations manager in Brea; CAPIO president in 1997-98)

Debbie (Thornton) Micciche - (former Communications Director for the League of California Cities and CAPIO staff coordinator)

Judy Rambeau - Assistant to the City Manager, Community Relations City of Santa Monica (former PIO for the city of Commerce; CAPIO president in 1995-96; 1995 Paul Clark Award recipient)

Carol Brown Spencer - (former PIO for the cities of Pasadena and Mountain View; 1986 Paul Clark Award recipient)

Mike Stover - Assistant City Administrator City of Lakewood (CAPIO president in 1981-84; 1990 Paul Clark Award recipient)

Scott Summerfield - SAE Communications (former PIO for the city of Newark; CAPIO president in 1993-94; 1996 Paul Clark Award recipient)

Who's Supported Us... (S)CAPIO's Staff and Locations

1971 - 1979

Murray Brown, CAPIO founding Executive Director
*Center for Public Resources
Pasadena Center
300 Green Street
Pasadena*

1979 - 1988

Murray Brown
*Center for Public Resources
University Library, then JFK Library
California State University, Los Angeles
5151 State University Drive
Los Angeles*

1988 - 1991

Evelyn Herrera 1988-89
Laura Upham 1989-91
*League of California Cities,
Los Angeles Office
800 Wilshire Blvd., #404
Los Angeles*

1991 - 2001

Debbie (Thornton) Micciche 1991-1995
Karen Durham 1995-1996
Angela Glasgow 1996-1999
Erin Maurie 1999-present
*League of California Cities Headquarters
1400 K Street, #400
Sacramento*



1994

- Added regional representatives to Board of Directors

1997

- Website launched
- Liability insurance added for Board members

1999

- Officially recognized as IRS non-profit organization

2000

- Code of Ethics adopted
- "Delivering the Message" handbook updated

2001

- First history project initiated