Rolling breaking story scenario training: Mosque Proposal
Workshop 1: The Mosque Proposal (breaking, rolling story scenario)

**Designed for:** Regional / community journalists (daily newspapers) and journalism students

**Length:** 2 hours

**Aims:**

At the end of this two-hour workshop, participants will be able to demonstrate:

- The ability to list at least three ways to improve the fairness and accuracy of a story involving Islam and/or Muslim people;

- A basic understanding of the laws and ethical principles involved in the coverage of stories involving Islam and/or Muslim people;

- The ability to access a range of sources reflecting expertise and the diversity of Islamic beliefs and cultures;

- The ability to list several ways to make the news agenda more inclusive of Muslims and other cultural groups.
Ten Islam tips for journalists covering Mosque proposals

1. Keep safe
Protest situations can be dangerous. Follow directions from police and avoid being caught in a conflict zone.

2. Find the middle way
Be sensitive to cultural and religious touchpoints without sanitizing the genuine news points.

3. Find several voices
While there might be two key groups in opposition, there are actually many perspectives on such issues – even from within Muslim communities. Seek them out and give them a voice.

4. Keep local
An event like a mosque protest might be the first-time participants have ever set foot in your town or suburb. Identify the local facts and issues and report them accurately. Sometimes the story might even be the fact that outsiders have hijacked the community issue.

5. Verify source assertions
People sprout all sorts of falsities and urban myths in the heat of a protest debate. Check the accuracy of what they are asserting before quoting them – or at least follow their quote or actuality with a researched clarification.

6. Keep perspective
Use verified facts and figures to add structure and credibility to your story. How many protesters did you count? What was the substance of their key messages? Which elements are central to the story and what is peripheral?

7. Watch your language
Ensure your terminology is used correctly. Is the proposal for a mosque or a prayer room? Is the source an imam or a mufti? Is she wearing a niqab or a burqa (burka)?

8. Talk to a neutral expert
Seek out those with authority who might not be partisan for a balanced perspective. This might be a former mayor, a professor, or the Chamber of Commerce president.

9. Every picture tells a story
Think carefully about the images you are taking or using to portray the occasion. What do the protest signs say? How closely is the image framed or cropped? How well does it represent the event?

10. If in doubt, check it out. If still in doubt, leave it out
It is an old adage but holds true in these situations. Speculation in the midst of an event – on the part of the reporter or quoted participants – can look embarrassing or even troublesome in hindsight.
Live newsroom Scenario: Proposal for a mosque in Yourtown

Outline

You are a reporter for a local news outlet in Yourtown (radio with breaking news bulletins and updates and print with a strong online presence).

- This training is run as a breaking, rolling story and you will receive information in the same way as you would in a live newsroom situation.
- You will be required to work with your group members to provide real time updates for your newspaper’s website or file regular radio bulletins with teasers for your station’s online site.
- These updates will include writing headlines and lead pars, selecting photos and deciding what quotes to use from various sources.
- Use the storyboard materials provided to plan your story as you are directed to the emerging tasks by the trainers.

Task 1

- You have been investigating a story about a proposal for a mosque in Yourtown and you have a series of background documents about the proposal including planning documents submitted to Council regarding the proposal.
- However, you are interrupted in the process of writing the first part of your story about the mosque proposal by your editor / producer / news director who tells you that there is a protest at the proposed site of the mosque where about 20 people have gathered, carrying placards and yelling.

Background you have collected:

Yourtown has a population of 32,000 of whom 942 identified as Muslim at the last Census. You were already aware of a development application to the Yourtown Council for the establishment of the town’s first mosque with two 22m high minarets (below)

Yourtown Council agenda item

Amendment to Planning Permit
PlnC00717/13 (Use and Development of a Place of Assembly - Mosque)
27Central Street, Yourtown
Lot 6 XZ 737623W

Summary

Existing Land Use Vacant
Surrounding Land Use Industrial with residential to the north.
Applicant Yourtown Islamic Centre, c/- Syeid Mustaefa
Zone Industrial 1 Zone
Objections 11 and 2 anonymous submissions
Key Issues

· Impact on adjoining residential and business operations
· Impact of the mosque being so visible

Site and Surrounding Area
The subject site is made up of three lots with a total area of 12,270m2. The site is located on the eastern side of Central Street and is rectangular in shape with a 120m frontage to Central Street; a 90m eastern boundary and a 90m western boundary. The site is vacant and is slightly undulating. The surrounding area to the east, west and south is industrial. To the rear of the site are residential properties with most containing examples of multi dwelling developments, and single dwellings. The approval for this mosque does not allow for external broadcast (call to prayer). Therefore, the primary function of the minarets is to make the mosque more visible. The minarets are symbolic. In combining the applicants’ cultural and religious needs for two 22m high minarets with the planning requirements, the question for council becomes the following. At what height, and how many minarets does a mosque need in order to fulfill its objective as a visual focal point, without adversely impacting on neighbourhood character? At 22m height, the proposed minarets will be visible in the surrounding area.

Advertising
The advertising requirement was satisfactorily completed. Eleven objections, plus 2 anonymous submissions were received. (The Locality Plan shows location of objectors’ properties). The grounds of objection are summarised as follows:
1. The minarets will detract from the bush skyline of Yourtown.
2. The minarets will be unsightly in relation to neighborhood character.
3. The proposal will attract greater car and foot traffic to the area.
4. The proposal will generate more noise and disruption in the area.
5. The minarets will be too large in relation to the rest of the mosque
6. The minarets will overpower the local streetscape, and businesses, and appear threatening to passers-by.

Conditions of use
• Not more than 150 persons may be present on the subject land at any one time except:
  1. During Friday afternoon prayer sessions not more than 500 persons may be present.
  2. During Eid Festival celebrations for a maximum of 2 days per year, not more than 700 persons may be present.
  3. During Ramadan for 30 nights per annum, not more than 400 persons may be present.
  4. During condolence services on weekends, no more than 300 persons may be present on the subject land.
• No loud speakers are to be used, and noise levels from the subject’s land must not exceed those required under State Environment Protection.
• External lighting must prevent any adverse effect on neighbours.
**Task 1 continued**

- You go to the site at 27 Central Street and take/record these photographs/footage/actuality of the protest below.
- You take a head count of protestors and note that there are 21 people in attendance. You approached the organizer of the protest for comment but she asked you to call her later in the day.
- As you leave the site you notice an elderly woman watering her garden next door to the proposed mosque site and stop to grab some quotes from her.
- You return to the newsroom where your Editor asks you to write a headline for online news site and select an image or images to illustrate the teaser for the full story.
- If your medium is radio you need to write a breaking news bulletin headline for the air and the same for your online radio site.
- Be prepared to explain why you chose this headline and images.
- You submit your headline and image and your Editor reminds you to call the protest organiser for comment.

**Available images:**

Architect’s sketch of the proposed mosque. Source: Yourtown Council papers
Rolling, breaking mosque training scenario

Photo: Cory Wright
Photo: Daniel Herrick (Flickr Creative Commons licence, https://www.flickr.com/photos/psyketrooper/8988838183/ no changes made)

Chairman of the Yourtown Islamic Centre Mr Syeid Mustaefa

[Photo: Cory Wright]
Task 2

- Following your first story task (headline and image selection about the protest), you call the protest organizer Ms Mishele Wattzes.
- You also make a note to call the Chairman of the Islamic Centre. Your editor wants an updated story in a short time.
- Using the supplied transcriptions from the protest organizer Ms Mishele Wattzes and the Chairman of the Islamic Centre Mr Syeid Mustaeefa you need to select quotes to add to your running story about the proposed mosque.
- You also look through your notes from your interviews with Dorothee Parker who lives next door to the site of the proposed mosque to consider including some of her quotes in this story update.
- Identify which quotes you would chose and be prepared to explain why you chose these quotes.

Interview Transcripts

Rally organizer Ms Mishele Wattzes:

“We don’t want 22 metre high minarets in our neighbourhood. It’s just un-Australian to have these kinds of mosques in the suburbs.

“If they want to build ugly noisy monstrosities like this they should go back to where they came from and build as many as they like there.

"Just watch, these people are establishing a beach-head, and soon they’ll be pushing for more. More mosques, bigger mosques.

"Do you want Islamic calls to prayer ringing out over town five times a day from sunrise to sunset? They say they won't now, but they sure will in future.

“Denying there won’t be calls to prayer on loud speakers is just a clever strategy. Because as their population grows and grows in future, they will say it’s just common sense. The little man won’t have a say.

“As a mother and a grandmother I worry about the world my children and grandchildren will live in. With their rate of birth we will be overtaken by Islam. Their aim is to get people into Parliament and the courts to get Sharia introduced.

“They all mutilate the genitals of their children and every Muslim secretly supports creating an Islamic state here. And they are willing to kill us to get one.

“Everybody has a right to freedom of religion, but Islam is not religion – it’s political and not compatible with our Constitution.”
Chairman of the Yourtown Islamic Centre Mr Syeid Mustaefa

“Just like the churches and synagogues in Yourtown, Muslim services are conducted almost completely in silence. The mosque won’t cause noise problems.

“We understand the adverse and negative attitude of the community to our Mosque proposal, but the problem is lack of understanding. When you hear Islam and Muslims in news media, all you hear about terror and bloodshed. So public are left with negative feelings about Muslims in this country.

“We need a decent place to worship. The roof leaks in the old place, and the floorboards are rotted. If we are going to amount to anything in Australia, we need a decent place to worship.

Neighbouring home owner Dorothee Parker
(she is 78, and has lived at 29 Central Street for 37 years)

“Oh, I have no problem with the mosque. I actually feel safer next door to a place of worship than I did before they bulldozed that hotel that used to be there.

“I’d rather have Muslim people coming here to pray than drunks yahooring and fighting every night and using my garden for a toilet.

“I really don’t know what all this fuss is about. The Muslim people who have been coming out to look at the property have all been friendly and polite.”
**Task 3**

- You approach your Editor and suggest there are some follow up stories that could be done about the mosque proposal. You wonder what community leaders have to say about the mosque proposal, and suggest interviews with:
  - The Mayor Donald del Llitzor;
  - The Chamber of Commerce President Dot Chenley.
- Your editor agrees that this is a good follow on the emerging story.
- Select quotes from these two interviews to add to your running story.
- Explain why you chose these quotes.

**Mayor Donald del Llitzor:**
"The proposed site of the mosque, together with a number of other sites in Yourtown, were evaluated as suitable for places of worship.

"A mosque is a place of worship. It was quite correct that it was handled by our officers, not the council leadership, otherwise it would have become a political football.
"Local government is not responsible for border control, nor immigration or foreign policy.

"Local government is the authority responsible for local planning and development. We are committed to a process that is honest and genuine.

"Yourtown has a very small Muslim community, and this will serve their minimal needs well.

"The only real issue up for debate is the height of the minarets and its opening hours.”

**Yourtown Chamber of Commerce president Dot Chenley:**

“There are extremists on both sides of the debate, and that’s a problem for the quiet majority.

"On one side we have bigotry and hatred, and on the other, some in the Muslim community been almost goading the bigots with their comments.

“The Muslim people have promised there will be no loud calls to prayer. But big minarets will be an eyesore on the landscape and turn away our much-needed tourists.

“I am concerned about parking during their big festivals causing traffic chaos.”
Task 4

• As you finish filing the updates to your ongoing story your phone rings. It is the Australian Patriots and Soldiers for the Southern Cross spokesman Dale Evermore who has seen your breaking news stories and wants to add his two cents worth to the public discussion about the proposed mosque.
• You interview him and just as you complete the call your phone rings again.
• This time it is University of Yourtown professor of religion Dr Ahmed Saeed who wants to bring some perspective to the rolling coverage of the proposed mosque.
• Select quotes to add to your rolling story/stories from the interviews with Dale Evermore and Dr Saeed.
• Be prepared to explain why you chose these quotes.

Australian Patriots and Soldiers for the Southern Cross spokesman Dale Evermore:
“We are ordinary Aussies defending our way of life from the likes of people who just come here and don’t want to live like us.

“Australia is a Christian country, not a Muslim one. Our Anzac forebears died for their families and those who came after them, not for descendants of the enemy they were fighting to come here and build whopping noisy mosques in our backyards.

“Our troops are fighting these same Muslims in the Middle East because they are beheading people and forcing little girls into sexual slavery. We need to kick these towel heads out of Your Town now or we’ll never get rid of them – and I mean that literally – kick them until they are out.

“Muslims like their jihads – well, we’re on a jihad against this mosque.”

University of Yourtown professor of religion Dr Ahmed Saeed:
“The barbaric acts committed by Islamic State, or Daesh if you want to call it that, have influenced the way many Australians view Islam and Muslims.

“Most Australians don’t know a Muslim. All they know is Isis, al-Qaida and Charlie Hebdo.”

“There are considerable financial benefits to Yourtown from a mosque. It will boost the local population, attract students from nearby Muslim countries like Indonesia to its tertiary institutions, and fuel the economy.

“Yourtown already has a Catholic cathedral that dominates the city’s skyline and rings loud bells every hour, and it has a huge Buddhist stupa.

“But I understand it will be challenging for all members of a majority Anglo-Australian city to be embracing of the practices of another faith.”
Task 5

• Your Editor now tells you there are social media posts awaiting moderation/selection on your newspaper’s online site/Facebook page.
• Select which of the following social media posts you will use and be prepared to explain why you chose these.

Social Media Posts

- Australia for the Australians – No Mosque for Yourtown - @AussiePatriot

- Please go easy on Muslims – we need a place to pray - @AbdulMohammed

- Why should we sing your national anthem when you don’t want us in your country? @MohamedMarbouh

- Be at the rally Saturday at 10 to knock out a few Mussies - @BazzaBoy

- I don’t mind a mosque, but a 22 metre minaret is over the top. Next the Hindus will be building a Taj Mahal here. - @RobynSSmith

- Go home racists - @AdvanceAustraliaFair

- Give them their own place to worship @InclusiveAustralian

- Good on the protesters for standing up for what they believe in, its YOURTOWN NOT MECCA! - @JaneeCitizen

- People have every right to be worried about this religion, they walk around with scarves over their faces and don't mix in. - @DinahLee

- If people want to come to this country, they have to become a part of it. - @SleepyTom

- Give the mosque a go, there are Christian churches here and nobody complains about them. - @givepeaceachance