

# MEET THE MEIDA



## INTRODUCTION

This guide is intended to raise your comfort level in dealing with the media, to demystify the process and to give you some tips in securing media coverage and responding to various media inquiries and reporters' interviewing tactics.

Plenty of local news outlets are interested in learning about your non profit and possibly covering an event. First, create a press release and go to the websites of your local TV stations, radio stations and print media. Most have online methods for you to submit your release and email addresses you can send your release to.

Wispact Foundation's public relations is supported by Eric DeGroot. If you have questions, you can reach Eric at [edegroot@wispact.org](mailto:edegroot@wispact.org)

## RULES FOR SUCCESS

Several key points will be emphasized throughout this guide. Remember them, if nothing else.

### Know what the interview is about.

Don't go into an interview cold. Find out why a reporter is calling, give yourself time to prepare, then call back.

### Have a message.

Once you know the subject of the interview, prepare three to five key points you want to make.

### An interview is not a conversation.

The media are your conduit to the public. Speak to the public, not the reporter. Be friendly but remember that interviews are how reporters conduct business.

### There's no such thing as off the record.

An "off the record" comment may not be attributed to you, but that doesn't mean it won't appear in the paper or be used to confirm information.

### Keep it simple.

Nothing ruins an interview faster than long, complex explanations. If you want your message conveyed, be sure to say it simply.

### Be brief.

Practice answering questions in 20 seconds or less. Chances are, the reporter will use the first decent 20-second comment and skip much of the rest.

### Tell the truth.

Don't lie and don't guess.

## **WHEN A REPORTER CALLS**

### First things first.

The first thing you have to do is decide whether you will grant the interview. If the interview is requested due to any negative issue related to your organization, please feel free to get the background information and let the reporter know you will follow up at a later time.

### Outline your main points.

Once you've decided to grant an interview, prepare three to five points to get your message across as briefly as possible -- preferably in 20 seconds or less.

### Relax.

Interviews are your opportunity to tell the public something interesting about our organization. Be personable and confident.

## **DURING THE INTERVIEW**

### Get your messages across.

Have we said that before? Here it is again. Come to an interview prepared with your messages and find opportunities to get them across without ignoring the reporter's questions. Take the initiative. You are the expert. You know what is important to tell the public - so tell them.

### Be informative, not conversational.

News interviews are exchanges of information. You are the source of that information; the reporter represents the public. Do not feel obligated to maintain the social rules of conduct that guide conversations. Beware of the reporter who remains silent, encouraging you to ramble or dilute your original message. It's human nature to want to fill those lulls with conversation. Don't.

### Be brief.

Reporters generally don't want lengthy, drawn-out explanations. They're looking for quotable quotes -- a punchy line that will fill three lines of newsprint or 20 seconds of air-time. Use your 20 seconds to get your message across -- there's much more likelihood it will be used. Knowing what you want to say in advance will go a long way in simplifying your answers. Forty-five seconds is about the maximum response time for television and other media as well, unless the reporter truly wants a complete understanding of, for example, neutrino physics - in which case you may have 90 seconds.

### Don't go off the record.

There is no such thing as off the record. An "off-the-record" comment may not be attributed to you directly, but the reporter often will use the information to confirm a story with other sources. If you don't want something to appear in print, don't say it.

### Your role as spokesperson.

When you are conducting an interview, reporters will not distinguish between personal opinion and the business' position - and neither will the public. Answer questions appropriately. You are a spokesperson for the business - or, in some instances, for a given committee or organization -- not for yourself. If you don't know the company's position on a particular issue, find out; don't speculate.

### Tell the truth.

Give a direct answer when asked a direct question, even if the answer is "No," "I don't know" or "I'm sorry, I can't answer that question." You will come across as an honest, forthright person.

### It's okay to make a mistake.

The tape is rolling and you realize you've made a mistake. Or, more likely, you suddenly find you have no idea what you're saying. Stop. Say, "I'm sorry, I haven't answered your question very well. Let me back up." The reporter usually will prefer your new, crisp response.

### Cite facts.

Reporters love facts and figures that will lend credibility to their stories or make certain points. But don't exaggerate facts by using superlatives that make things sound bigger and better than they are.

### Be prepared to repeat yourself.

Reporters may repeat their question because your answer was too long, too complex, they didn't understand you, or they're simply trying to get a more pithy response. Welcome the question as another opportunity to state your message, perhaps more clearly.

### Be confident.

You are the expert. You have a message to deliver. Recognize that reporters may be somewhat intimidated by your expertise or position. Put them at ease.

### Respect the reporter's deadline.

Find out their deadlines and return calls promptly. Showing respect for deadlines will go a long way toward building positive media relations. If you can't return a reporter's call, please contact an appropriate company representative to assist you.

### Be aware of when you are being taped.

In broadcast situations, such as in the studio or when talking to a radio reporter, it is wise to assume that everything you say is being recorded.

### Use anecdotes, humor.

Use examples to illustrate your points. Use humor or an interesting quote. Television in particular is "show business" so entertain when appropriate.

### Avoid reading from prepared statements.

This is especially true when you are on camera. You are the expert and ought to know what you want to say without a "script."

### Never ask a reporter to preview the story.

Reporters generally never let sources review stories, though they often check back for scientific details. Remember, it's their job to gather the facts and tell the story accurately -- to suggest they can't do so without your input insults their professionalism. It's better to listen carefully during an interview to be aware of when a reporter may not understand something. Remember – the likelihood of being misquoted is reduced substantially if you speak briefly and clearly.

## **DELIVERY**

The following guidelines apply primarily to those television interviews, but they will help you make the right impression for all media. The intent of these guidelines is to minimize distractions, allowing the reporter and the viewers to concentrate on what you're saying.

### Voice Projection.

You would be surprised how much of your voice gets lost when you start talking into a microphone. Speak up. Smile when it's appropriate. Long after you have appeared on a television or radio show, people will remember you and the impression you made. That impression should be of a confident, thoughtful, caring individual.

### Personal space.

Be prepared for a necessary closeness with a television interviewer, for the camera's sake. You may be rubbing shoulders or bumping knees with the interviewer, or talking with a microphone in your face. Don't back away.

### Gestures.

Gestures are a means of using stress energy effectively. Don't be afraid to use them, though don't point at the reporter or camera.

If standing, keep your hands at your sides or bend your elbows slightly at your waist. Don't put your hands in your pockets, don't hold them in front of you and don't cross your arms over your chest. If you are uncomfortable with your hands at your sides, try holding a notebook or other "prop."

### Sitting.

Sit up straight. Don't swivel or rock.

Cross your legs at the knees or sit with your legs at a 45 degree angle in the chair, legs crossed at ankles or feet together, one in front of the other.

In the television studio, don't jump out of your seat too quickly. The show's credits may be rolling over the scene of you sitting on the set. Consider yourself on camera until the show's director says you are finished.

Do not lean on the arm rest of the chair, you may look too casual. Lean forward a little, showing interest, not back, showing fear or indifference.

### Standing.

Stand up straight. Beware of slouching and tilted shoulders. Do not rock forward and back or sway side to side.

### Head.

Hold your head high. Don't tilt it to one side. Beware of being an "active listener" and nodding in apparent agreement to comments with which you may not agree.

### Eyes.

TV cameras get much closer to your face than most people. Your eye movement is critical.

Don't look at the camera. Look at the reporter 100 percent of the time. Focus on the bridge of their nose if you're uncomfortable looking into their eyes continuously. Pay attention to what's happening or you may be embarrassed when the camera catches your eyes wandering. Don't look up at the ceiling ("God help me!") or down at the floor ("Let us pray").

### Wear glasses if needed.

Do not wear photo greys, which turn dark when the lights hit them.

### Voice.

When asked by a sound engineer to give a voice level, use this opportunity to "set the stage" for the interview. The engineer wants to know your voice's normal speaking level so say your name, title and what you'd like to talk about.

Beware of leaning toward and away from a stationary microphone while you're talking. This causes your voice to become louder and softer.

In a radio interview, beware of speaking in a dull monotone. Project, be expressive, and you'll come across better.

Voices sound best if they're from the lower register, yet they often get higher when people are nervous. One can lower your voice through awareness and controlled, deep breathing. Smiling helps animate the voice.

### Clothing.

Wear clothes that are comfortable. Don't wear high contrasts like black and white. Avoid horizontal stripes, hounds-tooth and other distracting patterns.

### Makeup and Hair.

Makeup is appropriate on television for men and women. It helps control shine especially on foreheads.

### Stress.

Most people get butterflies in their stomachs at the idea of an interview, especially one before the camera. Be aware of how you show stress and control it. Don't allow nervous gestures, such as pulling at your hair, swinging your foot or smiling too broadly, to spoil an otherwise successful interview. Nervousness vanishes with frequency. The more interviews you give, the easier they will be.

## **AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

### When will the story appear?

Reporters are reluctant to tell you when an interview will appear, usually because they don't know. Timing is up to their editors or producers.

### Compliments.

When a story is reported well, let the reporter know with a phone call or letter to the editor. But don't overdo it. If you're too complimentary, reporters may worry that their story wasn't balanced enough.

### Criticisms.

Serious errors and misconceptions should be brought to a reporter's attention. Some options: Call the reporter to clear up the inaccuracy. Many reporters either will write a correction or do a follow-up piece that clarifies the information. Avoid going over the reporter's head unless the reporter is completely unresponsive.