



# How to Prepare for Media Interviews

## **Before a Reporter Calls**

Media interviews are a great way to get your message out to your audience. Some of us are ready to jump in front of the TV cameras, while others have anxiety attacks if a reporter calls to ask questions. Either way, it's important for your organization to be prepared for incoming media inquiries.

It is recommended that your organization have a policy on how to deal with incoming media inquiries.

The policy can simply state that all press inquiries are to be handled only by your designated spokesperson or an alternative spokesperson. Their contact information should be readily available.

## **When a Reporter Calls**

Your staff or volunteers should be aware that if a reporter calls, they should try to get as much information as possible before connecting the call or before scheduling a time with the spokesperson. This information will be helpful in preparing for the interview.

Questions to ask:

- What is the name of your outlet? (newspaper, television, radio station)
- What is your contact information?
- What is your deadline?
- Have you covered our organization or fire prevention issues before?
- What is the angle for your story?
- When do you plan to run the story?

## **Take Time to Prepare for Media Interviews**

Reporters are always on deadline. However, this does not mean that you do not have time to call them back after you have had a moment to collect your thoughts. To handle this more professionally, simply ask them about their deadline and schedule a time that meets their needs.

Even with a few minutes, you can have time to determine what key messages you want to convey to the reporter.

You will have a better idea of your message if you know the reporter's knowledge of the subject as well as their target audience. Take a few minutes to research the media outlet and any past coverage on the subject. The Internet makes this type of research fairly easy.

You'll want to find out if the reporter has covered similar stories. If not, you'll probably need to start with some basic information before getting into more specific details. This information will help you fine-tune your message.

### **Your Message**

To ensure a clear, concise and consistent voice in the media, your local organization should determine your key messages or talking points. Your message should include information about your organization and your mission.

In addition, your organization should also take the time to determine what you want your target audience to take away from your message. Key messages usually include a call to action, such as volunteering for your local organization or creating defensible space around your home.

Since most of the time your interviews may be conducted over the phone, it doesn't hurt to have those messages written down and in front of you. It doesn't mean to read from it directly, but use it as a guide to ensure that you are remembering the key points you need to convey.

### **Create a Sound Bite**

Once your key messages are in place, determine how you can make it both brief and memorable. For example, a sound bite for a defensible space message could be:

***"It only takes 100 feet to save your home from a wildfire."***

***"Our organization is taming the wildfire even before it gets here."***

***It's time to trim the trees and clear the brush,  
before a wildfire does it for us."***

## **What is your Personal Story?**

Reporters are always looking to add color to their stories by including personal information that their readers can relate to. Ideally, your spokesperson should have a personal connection to the issue that is being discussed.

Are they involved in your local organization because they have personally experienced the devastation of a fire? Is your spokesperson one of several volunteer fire fighters in your community? This information will not only build additional credibility, it will also help to humanize the story.

## **Practice Interviewing**

**Comment [RM1]:** Needs a wrap – up  
. A little motivational send off.

Practicing for interviews will only make you a better spokesperson. The best way to practice is to start with a list of questions that may come up during an interview.

Ask yourself “How are you going to answer the questions as well as communicate your key messages?”

Now, try answering the questions with only one or two sentences. Are you still hitting your key messages? Remember, reporters will only use a portion of what you say. This is why it is essential for you to always interweave your messages into answers.

If you are inviting local TV camera crews to your organization or an event, practice your interviewing skills in front of a video camera. Watch it and find out what works and what may need improvement.

With a little preparation and some practice, the better your chances are that you will more effectively communicate your messages in the media.