

Communicating with the Media

Whether your organization is offering a new program, developing a new service, or responding to information related to funding, be prepared in advance to tell an accurate story. Effective communication occurs when the viewer, reader or listener understands the information you wish to present in a manner that you intend. The following suggestions will help you tell your story in a manner that results in effective communication.

Write Your Own News Release

Writing your news release helps you to get the accurate facts and information to a reporter in a written format. It can be emailed, faxed, or handed to a reporter. **Use the basics: Who, What, Where, When, Why, & How.** Contact information on the news release should include office and cell phone numbers as well as email and Web addresses. Expect to be contacted at any time of the day. Never "snail mail" a press release.

Be Prepared to Tell the Same Story Many Times.

Each time you tell your story it is to a new audience. **It is not the reporter you are communicating to, it is their audience. Find out who their audience is (teens, professionals, retired, etc.)** Reporters usually know very little about your field of expertise. Respond to a reporter's level of knowledge. Be patient and help the reporter to learn.

Communicate to the Average Person on the Street

- Tell stories and give examples. Tell how your program or service may benefit the average person. (Example - \$445 million in federal support for public broadcasting equals about \$1.40 per person)
- Practice your answers with your staff.
- Most of your interviews will be conducted on the telephone.

Aggressive Reporters

- Aggression sometimes equals insecurity. Be professional as a reporter's aggression is one form of hiding lack of knowledge.
- Aggression creates a tense atmosphere resulting in mistakes.
- Remember, controversy makes for "better" news, so be aware of ways the reporter could create controversy based on your comments.
- If you feel you've been mistreated contact the news director, editor, or other person in charge.
- If you think the published story or broadcast is misleading or incorrect, write a letter to the editor for publication.
- Never say "this is off the record"
- Do not get emotional.
- Do not expect to review a story before it's published or broadcast.

Newspaper

- You are more likely to have a face-to-face interview with the reporter taking notes.
- The interview will be more detailed and will take longer.
- The Reporter probably will use a recorder.
Student Reporter - Greatest chance for error with them because they usually have few interviewing skills, so speak slowly, repeat responses, hand them "your" news release, and let them have time to take notes.

Radio

- Most likely a phone interview. Remember your telephone is a microphone.
- Speak clearly & slowly
- Be prepared to be called at anytime
- Your comments may be edited in :05 to :10 second voice "sound bites"
- Don't say "Well John" this is not a TV talk show
- Don't say "Uhhhhh" to fill dead air
- Reporter will most likely be responding to a news wire story and will have little information
- Your comments will be electronically edited
- Face-to-face - Be prepared to have a microphone in your face
- Do not try to hold microphone
- In studio - table and two microphones

Television

- Appearance - Consider yourself and your surroundings. What do you want seen and what do you not want seen?
- Television is looking for action.
- You need more room for lights, camera, microphone and additional people moving around.
- Look at reporter, not the camera. The reporter will be standing where he/she wants you to look.

Website

- Copy of your Press Release
- What is your product or organization?
- Mission &/or Vision Statement
- Other facts about your organization that are helpful
- Chronology of Significant Achievements
- Blog

Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, Listserv, etc.

- The character count for text messages should remain low with a maximum count of 140 characters or less, including spacing. Smart phones can handle text messages up to 160 characters, but keeping the count below 140 will help ensure the message remains intact.
- Include URL address for more details, photos, and/or video.