

Meeting the Media

(or anyone asking questions)

Three basics of meeting the media

- The mic is always hot
 - Always
- Nothing is ever “off the record”
 - Only use with trusted reporters
 - Get details in writing
- “No comment” is ever a good idea
 - Using bridging language
 - Have discussions with lawyers in advance about legal parameters

Types of reporters

Different categories of reporters require different types of responses

- TV/radio/podcast – short sound bite
- Print – longer, yet concise, details
- Multi-media – combination of both

Tactical considerations

News release

- Make sure it’s really news
- Write like a news story not a fluff piece

Media Advisory

- Announces newsworthy event
- Includes logistical details like staging, parking, interview opportunities, visuals, photo availability, etc

Social media

- Align message with platform
- Have a plan for engagement and responses
- Promote handles on all communications
- Keep in mind it’s covered by FOIA

Streaming video

- Keep it simple, yet professional
- Watch file sizes

Opinion-editorials (op-eds)

- Make 2 – 3 points
- Avoid jargon and abbreviations/acronyms
- Target one publication at a time
- Be aware of the publication's policies on length, timeliness, photos, etc.

Letters to the editor

- Make fact-based arguments
- Relay new information, new ideas or a new perspective
- Employ engaging writing
- Provide expertise on the topic

Getting an A in media relations

Ability to recognize a good story

- Find local angles to national stories
- Establish a third party endorsement from someone not in your organization

Acquaintance with area media

- Contact reporters when you don't need something
- Get familiar reporters and their interests – follow on social, read publications

Avoid industry jargon

- Don't use acronyms, abbreviations or initialisms
- Figure out how to simplify "insider baseball" terms and examples
 - EX: a "clean agent" fire suppression system is a "water-free" sprinkler system

Answer the question

- Listen closely
- Acknowledge the question
- Choose what YOU want to answer
- Understand the context of the issue – know the opponent's case
- Use bridging/mirroring/verbal white space

Attention to detail

- Keep style simple
- Write like a reporter

Anticipate needs

- Understand deadlines
- Consider visual appeal of events
- Don't worry so much about press release boilerplates, fluffy quotes, PR-speak

• Accuracy counts

- Double check spelling, phone #s, email addresses, websites

• Appearance counts

- Consistent style
- Easy to read font

• Availability

- Ensure correct contact name, cell #, email address
- Update voice mail

• Attribution source

- Identify a single spokesperson in advance

• Assume nothing

- Nothing is “off the record”
- Competition for news stories
- Remember the mic is always hot

Responding to questions

Bridging

- “Thank you for bringing that up, however, it’s also important to emphasize...”
- “That is an important point, and it also speaks to a bigger issue which is...”
- “That is one way to think about it. Another way is...”
- “That is not my area of expertise, but I can tell you...”
- “What’s most important here is that” Or “The key issue is...”
- “It’s our policy not to discuss XYZ, but what I can tell you is...”

Mirroring

- What color is the sky?
 - It is blue.
- VS
- The sky is blue.

Verbal white space

- Diffuses aggressive questions
- Clears a speaker's head
- Slows down a conversation
- Creates a “pregnant pause”

Lawyers and journalists

- Both have a job to do - so do you
 - Understand FOIA and comply
- Lawyers
 - Err on the side of “no comment”
- Journalists
 - Have a right to public information