Preparing for the Interview
Step by step details to help you get ready for the interview.

When a reporter reaches out...
Taking the initial call
Responding to the email request
Determining whether an email reply is best
Handling an impromptu interview in a public forum
Determining the best spokesperson
When a reporter reaches out...

- Developing key messages
- Anticipatory questions & avoiding pitfalls
- Speaking with one voice
- It's what we know, not what we think

Taking the Call

- Do NOT take a reporter's call cold, on the fly or while trying to multitask!
- If needed, beg off.
- Get the initial details (who, what, when, where), thank them for calling, and tell the reporter you’ll need to do some research and get back to them or that you’ll need to connect them to the right staff person.

Responding by Email

- Sometimes email responses are beneficial.
- Make sure the subject matter expert(s) review your written response.
- Proof read!
- Keep it short and concise.
- Stay on message.
- Don't respond while emotional. (But don’t miss the deadline.)
Reacting to Impromptu Interview

Answer only those questions that are asked...and then be quiet.
Don't speculate, hypothesize, guess, or offer opinion...stick to the facts.
Never use “no comment,” “I'm not allowed to talk to the media,” or “You have to talk to my (boss).”

Reacting to Impromptu Interview

Instead validate the reporter's question, reassure them you want to help, and offer to connect them to the appropriate staff person.
If you can tell the reporter isn't getting it, use self-deprecation and offer to send helpful documents or make time for an appointment to discuss further.
Alert others of non-routine interviews

Determining Best Spokesperson

Determining Best Spokesperson

- Authority
- Designated communications staff (Communications Dept., PIOs, & departmental designees)
- Subject matter experts (may or may not be one of those designated staff members above)
- Situational needs

Preparing for the Interview

Ask questions of the reporter before the actual interview.

Prepare for the interview by developing key messages.

Simplify your message into no more than three key points.

Developing the Message

- Clarity
- Consistency
- Main Points
- Tone & Appeal
- Credibility
- Public Need
Developing the Message

- Brainstorm messages that answer key questions (who, what, where, when)
- Ask “what do I want to know?”
- Consider “what’s interesting to the reporter?”
- Account for “what’s most important to the audience/citizens?”

Crafting the Key Messages

- No more than 3 key messages (5 max).
- Work to keep each message no more than 10-14 words.
- Each one short, concise with a subject, verb & object.
- Don’t think in whole paragraphs; think in snippets.
- If you could write the story, what would the first three sentences be?
Did I get the key points right?

- Dependent upon order?
- Concise; stand alone?
- Easily understood?
- Memorable?
- Relevant?
- Passive voice?
- Tailored?

Small Group Activity
Developing key messages using a local government case study

Activity Instructions
- Goal is no more than 10-14 words
- Consider overlapping messages
- Make sure each point stands alone
ABCs of Interviewing

**Answer**
Respond in a way that you are comfortable

**Bridge**
Look for a way to bridge the question from what’s asked to the message you want to share.

**Communicate**
End every answer by communicating one of your key messages.

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What is bridging?

While __ is important, it’s also important that...
I think it would be more accurate to say that...
We believe the more important issue is...
What matters most in this situation is...
Let me emphasize again...
What it really boils down to is this...

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Bridging Examples
Be Prepared to Deflect

“I don’t want to speculate...”
“We can talk about what we know...”
“This matter is still under investigation...”
“That’s a great question and I want to give you accurate information, let me research it and get back to you.”
“We leave policy making to the elected officials, as public servants we...”

Other Interview Tips

- Speak in short sentences.
- Think before you respond.
- Look at the interviewer.
- Answer and then be quiet.
- Relax. Be yourself.
- Follow the ABCs and you’ll do fine.
- What you wear & where you interview matter.

Don’t forget!

- Stay on message after the interview.
- Speak with one voice across the organization.
- Stick to the facts. It’s not what we THINK, it’s what we KNOW!
- Just because the camera is off that doesn’t mean it’s safe.
- Beware of a hot mic!
Last but not least...

- Appearances matter! Remember, perception is reality!
- Are you dressed appropriately?
- Where do you plan to do the interview?
- What does your office condition say about you, your department, and the local government?

Applying What We’ve Learned
Dissecting an on-camera interviews

Techniques in Action (or not)

View Video Examples
Community & Media Relations
102 – Content Test
10-question exam

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