

## **Tips for talking to the media**

Prior to giving interviews, it is a good idea to practice. For instance, you can videotape yourself and then critique your public speaking skills or you can practice by giving a mock interview with your staff. Once you start practicing, each interview will become easier, and you will be able to state key messages in a variety of situations.

Basically, an interview is a presentation tailored to an issue and/or audience. It is also an excellent opportunity to tell/sell your story. An interview is not a debate, an intellectual discussion, a friendly chat or an educational exchange.

When talking to print-based or broadcast media, consider these tips:

- Speak naturally
- Avoid lengthy technical explanations
- Focus on your talking points
- Know the reporter, publication/program, interview format, audience
- Know the goal for the interview (what information will be gathered or shared)
- Gather any visual materials
- Write down any questions that may be asked and prepare answers
- Prepare for a multitude of questions to be asked
- Television is a visual media format and it is important to wear appropriate clothing

## **When you receive an inquiry from the media**

- 1) Return a reporter's call immediately and gather key information from the reporter
  - What is your deadline?
  - What is the story about?
  - How do I fit into the story?
  - Who else have you talked to?
- 2) Consider as you prepare for your interview.
  - What is my message?
  - How can I prove/justify this message?
  - How might someone disagree with me?
  - How can I rebut this criticism?
  - Anticipate questions (particularly the tough ones).
  - Rehearse your answers.
  - Gather background facts and statistics for support.
- 3) Stay on message during the interview
  - Bridge from reporter's question to your talking point (e.g. "Yes, that seems to be happening; however, we are really trying to emphasize ..." or "Certainly that's an important piece of this conversation, but the thing that is most vital to our community is...").
  - Use flagging to emphasize important points (e.g. "the most important thing to remember is..." or "Everybody should be most concerned about ...").
- 4) After the interview
  - Thank reporters for their time and offer to be an ongoing resource on the issue or related stories.
  - Make sure to give reporters a business card or brochure, and let them know about upcoming events or stories that may be of interest.
  - Be prepared for a reporter to call after the interview to double check quotes.
- 5) Some final tips
  - Do not wait for the right question
  - Never repeat negative language
  - Turn negatives into positives
  - Avoid jargon and acronyms
  - Do not speak "off-the-record"
  - Do not guess, speculate or lie