

MEDIA

Interview Guide



Before the interview:

- **Ask what the story is about**, who else the reporter is talking to, and what information the reporter wants from you.
- Gather the information, simplify it and think of positive ways to relate it. Anticipate questions your answers may generate. **Prepare answers for the toughest questions the reporter might ask.**
- **Develop one or two key points you want to make** – short, positive statements which define or describe your program or issue. Avoid defensive statements and arguments.

During the interview:

- **Your gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice say more about you than your words.** Maintain steady eye contact with the reporter.
- **Say the most important thing you have to say first**, and say it best. Don't build to your conclusion.
- **Listen** carefully to each question and pause before beginning your answer.
- **Avoid jargon**, acronyms and technical terms. Simplify complex numbers. Show relationships and use analogy.
- **Never say “no comment.”** If you don't know the answer, say so and promise to get it.
- **Don't speculate**, guess or respond to “phantom authority.” Don't offer personal opinions and don't speak for others.
- Avoid “off the record” statements.
- If you don't know the answer, say so and promise to get the answer.
- **Always tell the truth.** If there's a problem, say you're looking into it and shift to what you're doing now to correct the situation.
- When you've answered the question, **stop talking.**

THE SOUND BITE:

- Start with the **conclusion** or a key point.
- Add an **example** or supporting information.
- End by explaining what it **means** to the viewer or reader.

CRISIS COMMUNICATION CHECKLIST:

- Go to the scene and establish one source of information for the media.
- Gather information (what happened, when, where, who was involved.)
- Get information to reporters as quickly as possible. If there have been injuries or deaths, you must express compassion at the beginning of your statement. Then tell what you don't know, what you're doing to get information, where people can go to get more information in the meantime (your website) and when you'll update.
- Do not speculate or assign blame. Say that the cause is under investigation. Focus on what you're doing to assure public safety, fix the problem, restore service. Let people know you are in control.



BRIDGING PHRASES:

"It's important to remember..."

*"Let's talk about what **is** happening..."*

*"What I **can** tell you is..."*

"The key point here is..."

"I think your (viewers/readers) need to know..."

Remember, interviews are not conversations or intellectual discussions, and reporters are not looking for an education. They want basic information and a good quote or sound bite. Keep your answers simple and succinct and bridge to your message or objective often. When you give short answers, you keep editorial control in your hands.