

MEDIA INTERVIEWS: HELPFUL TIPS

- **Prepare.** Write down no more than three key messages that you want to convey and see in print or on the airwaves. As you interview, bridge back to those messages.
- **Start with the most important messages.** Don't expect the reporter to be a mind reader. Don't wait for the right question—it is rarely ever asked.
- **Bridge to the message.** Reporters may steer the conversation in an off-topic direction. Remember that the spokesperson's role is to serve as an advocate for the organization's goals. Bridging or flagging language can help you get back on track:
 - ┌ "The important thing to remember is..."
 - ┌ "The point I want to stress is..."
 - ┌ "I can't speak to that, but I do know this..."
 - ┌ "These are the key things that matter most here..."
- **Set the ground rules at the beginning.** Consider everything to be on-the-record. Keep the length of the interview brief. Fifteen minutes are usually enough.
- **Give the interview your undivided attention.** Distractions can cause you to lose focus and not leave the right impression with reporters.
- **Listen carefully.** Don't hesitate to ask questions about context.
- **The spokesperson can also tape record the interview.** Notify the reporter beforehand that the conversation will be taped for the organization's records. This is good for accountability.
- **Don't respond to third-hand information or unseen documentation.** A thoughtful reporter understands the wisdom of this rule. Just say, "It wouldn't be appropriate for me to comment on something I haven't read or seen."
- **It's okay to say, "I don't know."** No one is expected to have all of the answers all of the time. It is sometimes necessary to say, "I don't know, but let me find out and get back to you."
- **When representing an organization, never give a personal opinion.** Stick to the issue, the message, and the goals. It's also important to remember to represent your organization.
- **Do not respond to hypothetical questions.** Deal only with the facts. It works for Supreme Court nominees, and it will work for you.
- **Keep answers short and simple.** Use words and phrases that are easy to understand and jargon-free.
- **Stay calm, cool, and collected.** Losing your temper is a surefire recipe for disaster and wastes time.