

THE BOUNDARIES: DEALING WITH THE MEDIA



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Why Should We Talk to the Media?

- Public agencies are obligated to.
- Transparent state government.
- We are stewards of public funds and have a public trust as a result.
- We are public servants.
- Media is a fundamental part of democracy.
- Not communicating does not stop the communication.
- Help curb rumor, relay accurate information.

What Drives The Media?

- The media does not cover stories about planes that land. It covers stories about planes that crash.
- Being first – “exclusively on tonight’s evening news.”
- Don’t expect a reporter to necessarily “care” about the issue. Remember, they were assigned this story by their boss.
- A good story reports anything that grabs the viewer’s attention.

Points to Remember

- Never act alone. Gain support for your response.
- This is not a friendly conversation.
- Prepare – have message points and repeat them.
- You control what you say.
- Be truthful.
- Keep it simple – no jargon, no acronyms.
- Expect the worst thing you say to get reported.

The Reporter Phone Call

- Don't ignore it. Call back ASAP even just to learn what the reporter needs, and what their deadline is.
- Stay calm, be professional. The reporter is doing their job as they see it.
- Determine the reporters needs, and their questions. see if you can determine their angle.
- Don't be pressured, but try to be as prompt as possible.
- Tell them you will call/email back, but don't over-promise.
- Don't ad lib.

Before You Share With A Reporter

- Consider intention and context of story.
- Is this your agency's issue?
- Check with other likely interviewees.
- Should you be the one talking?
- Notify Chain of Command, PIO, agency's leadership, Mayor/Selectman's Office, Governor's Office, etc.

Always...

- Consider the consequences of the story, and the reporter.
- Politely refer to a more appropriate person/agency.
- Direct to written policy.
- Offer a written/e-mailed statement.
- “No comment” is often taken to mean “yes”
- “No comment allows the press to fill in the blanks, diverts the focus of the publicity, and sacrifices an opportunity to communicate key messages.”

Be Prepared ...

- Get the facts before speaking.
- Prepare key points and be ready to repeat them until the reporter.
- Get approval on your statement, if required.
- As you prepare, think about what questions will be asked.
- Be prepared to have documents available, or the ability to retrieve documents.
- Consider additional information/interviews.
- Be the best source of information you can, but stick to your message.

Say What Isn't Happening

- It's just as important to say what ISN'T happening as it is to say what IS happening.
- Not communicating does not stop the communication.
- Help curb rumor, relay accurate information.
- Calm fears. Avoid panic.

I'm Ready For My Close-up...

- How, when, where and how long is up to you.
- Set a time limit.
- Conduct the interview where you are comfortable.
- Keep your points close by.
- Be mindful of live interviews.
- The live on-camera interview may end, but Facebook Live and Periscope (Twitter) may still be live-streaming.

Things To Remember

- You are on the record unless there is another agreement. Off the record is an act of trust. Be cautious.
- The one thing you wished you did not say will probably be used by the reporter.
- Don't follow the lead of their question. Answer the question you want them to have asked.
- Stick with your points.
- Keep it positive.
- If you don't know, say so.
- Remember the audience. The reporter is one member of it, the public is the rest.

Crisis Communication

- Know the facts before you speak.
- Be honest, accountable and demonstrate that your agency is open to learning from events.
- Who else needs to be involved?
- Time is of the essence, but dissemination of accurate information is priority.
- Fill the void or someone else will.
- Set-up a staging area for media.
- Offer assistance and follow through.
- Set boundaries.
- Consider whether a press conference is best or individual interviews.
- Bring all the players together.

Be Ready For The Reporter To...

- Ask the question repeatedly or in different ways until they get answer they want.
- Go silent in hopes you will say something you don't want to in order to fill the gap.
- Call back for "clarification."
- Switch to an unexpected topic, then come back to the topic at hand.
- Push you to go off the record.
- Try to get information you can't disclose by asking for general policy.

What Do You Do When They've Done You Wrong?

- To err is human
- It's a balancing act: how important is the error?
- A wrong uncorrected statement becomes true, so it may be necessary to correct what is wrong.
- Is it even worth the battle?

Getting “Good” Press

- Be your own advocate. Use social media to promote your agency.
- Don't just forward press releases because they were requested, or something happened, forward the good and positive press releases showing what your agency has done.
- Tell the story through “regular” people.
- Find the anecdote.
- Pictures and video give the public an idea of what you do and help with public perception.

Conclusion

- The media can not be ignored.
- The void will be filled with the “information” OTHERS are providing.
- Ensure your side of the issue is represented.
- Be up front, proactive, and timely - especially with the negative.
- Be prepared, be controlled, be responsive.
- Be responsible but share the responsibility.

Good Luck!

Questions?



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