



Responding to the Media: Preparation and Delivery

Department of Social Services

Division of Public Affairs

June 16, 2011



Effective Media Relations:

- Raise Awareness
- Educate
- Establish Credibility
- Identify Issues
- Provide a Balanced Perspective

Presentation Overview

- Types of Media Outlets
- What Makes News
- Media-initiated Contact
- Interview Preparation
- Do's & Don'ts
- DSS Public Affairs Activities
- Staff Contact Information

Types of Media

- TV and Radio
- Daily and Weekly Newspapers
- Magazines
- Internet
- Wire Services
- Blogs
- Trade Publications
- Organizational Newsletters

Television & Radio

- Types of Programs
 - News
 - Talk Shows
 - Regional or Local Spotlight
 - Public Service Programming

- Contacts
 - Assignment Editors
 - News Directors
 - Program Producers
 - Reporters

Print

- “Beats” or Issue-Oriented Coverage Areas
 - Metro (City)
 - Family
 - Health
 - Business
 - Government
 - Opinion Editorial
- Contacts
 - Editor
 - Beat Reporter

The Press Covers What Makes News

- **Celebrity**
- **Criticism and Controversy**
- **Crime and Tragedy**
- **New, Unusual or Different**
- **Successes and Failures**
- **Trends and Statistics**
- **Change**

Media-Initiated Contact

- The Media are after your opinions and thoughts on topics and issues before the Board.
- They want to know why you took the action you did on regulations and policies governing social services.
- If they ask for information/data, direct them to the DSS Public Affairs office.
- You may always decline an interview and direct the reporter to DSS Public Affairs office.
- Be responsive – NEVER IGNORE a reporter. Return the call promptly.

Media-initiated Contact

- Be in control. Approach the call/contact with courtesy and control.
- Hear the reporter out and take careful notes.
- Ask for clarification if a question is unclear. Review all questions with the reporter.
- Ask the reporter his/her deadline.
- Tell the reporter you need to get back with them and reschedule a time to respond.
- Or you could provide your responses in an Email, which offers a more controlled response.

Interview Preparation

- Know the strengths and weaknesses of the issue(s).
- Stay on topic and articulate key messages.
- Know when to stop talking. Less is more.
- Develop Key Talking Points
 - Short Concise Meaningful Statements
 - High Impact Statistics
 - When Confidential Information is involved, focus on process and procedures
- Localize Information
 - Explain How the Information Impacts Your Area

Media Interview “Dos” and “Don’ts”

- **DO** use short words and simple, declarative sentences. Avoid acronyms.
- **DO** be genuine and enthusiastic.
- **DO** firmly support your message. Be confident.
“The decision to reduce final accounting of the recipient's funds from 60 to 30 calendar days of the event is to allow for a more timely assessment public funds spent via the Auxiliary Grant Program.”
- **DO** be non-confrontational but assertive, so that the conversation centers on subjects you want to talk about. You may answer a different question than the one asked. “That’s an interesting question, however the real purpose of the regulation is to safe-guard children in our care.”

Media Interview “Dos” and “Don’ts”

- **DO** start your response with a general reply which sums up your position succinctly and accurately. Narrow down the second part of your answer by giving the specifics.

“The Neighborhood Assistance Program is a great program which benefits impoverished people. the Board’s vote to increase the percentage of expenditures from 50% to 75% demonstrates our commitment to reducing poverty in the Commonwealth.”

- **DO** listen carefully to the question. If you consider it difficult, pause before you answer. Taking a few seconds to formulate a response will make you appear thoughtful and deliberate. If you don’t understand a question, ask that it be repeated.
- **DO** set the record straight or present facts.
- **DO** highlight key points with phrases like: “The most important thing is...” or “Our primary goal is”

Media Interview “Dos” and “Don’ts”

- **DON’T** assume the reporter is an adversary. Relax, but stay mentally alert.
- **DON’T** speak “off the record.” You are fair game as an appointee of the Governor. Consider your entire interaction with the reporter as “on the record.”
- **DON’T** allow yourself to be provoked. Keep cool.
- **DON’T** repeat a reporter’s words unless that’s what you want to say. Reporter: “Would you say this is a good decision?” You could say: “Yes, this was a good decision because”
- **DON’T** feel obligated to accept unfamiliar facts or figures. If a reporter quotes numbers or examples that you have not heard before say “I haven’t heard those figures, but let me share what I do know....”

Media Interview “Dos” and “Don'ts”

- **DON'T** answer hypothetical questions, which tend to obscure your true position. State your general position and offer examples. Reporter: “What if the public petitions the Board for an additional comment period rather than accept the final regulations, what will you do?” Your response should be “Once the final regulations have been published in the Registry, the Board will consider its next steps in accordance with the *Code of Virginia*.”
- **DON'T** attempt to bluff your way through a question. Say, “I don't know and will find the answer and get back to you.” If you have a legitimate reason for withholding certain information, then politely say it's confidential. “The closed sessions of the Board, as prescribed by the *Code of Virginia*, are confidential.”
- **DON'T** over-answer. If satisfied with your reply, stop talking.
- **DON'T** ever lie to or mislead a reporter.

Soliciting Media Coverage

- Contact the right reporter.
- Pitch a news worthy/interesting story.
- Be courteous. Ask for their deadline.
- Get to the point. Be concise.
- Be prompt in returning a reporter's phone call or email.

Mock Media Interview

Eileen Guertler, Director of Public Affairs, will conduct a mock interview with Board Member, Robert Spadaccini.

Please feel free to take notes regarding the interview, as questions on the process will be entertained.

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- Questions?

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