



Practical Tips for Responding to Media Requests

Purpose	This purpose of this tool is to serve as a reference for researchers as they respond to media inquiries. Being responsive to the media can be an effective and cost-efficient way to share research findings with end users with preparation and clear messaging.
Format	This document opens with eight tips to consider when responding to inquiries from the media. The tips are followed by Web-based resources that offer additional guidance on engaging with the media.
Audience	Principal investigators and researchers can use this tool as a reference to help them prepare to respond to media inquiries.
Resources	Additional resources on collaborating with the media are identified at the end of this document.

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Note: The additional resources offered at the end of this document are intended for consideration only and you should not assume endorsement by the Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center. All Web site addresses were active as of December 8, 2014.

Practical Tips for Responding to Media Requests

1. Follow the rules.

Many organizations have procedures about engaging with the media to help control messages and represent the organization and information in the best way possible. For example, an organization may allow only designated people to interact with the media or may require staff to seek approval to grant interviews. Make sure you are familiar with your organization's media spokesperson and notify them when you have been contacted by the media. They may have additional guidance for you.

2. Respond quickly.

Journalists often work on short deadlines. They appreciate quick responses, even if it is to decline an interview request or to say you do not have the information they need. Swift replies encourage them to contact your organization again. If you cannot respond or do not feel comfortable responding, inform your organization's media spokesperson who may be better positioned to speak to the topic or who can find someone else to speak with a reporter.

3. Ask for specifics.

When a reporter contacts you, ask for his or her name, news organization, and deadline. Ask for a general description of the story, and ask if the reporter is pursuing a particular angle. That way, you will know why the questions are being asked. If you need to check on an answer, ask if you can email or call back with the information.

4. Stick to what you know.

Talk about subjects that fit into the area of your expertise. If a reporter is interested in a new study you are involved with, identify two or three key ideas or facts you want to convey. If the conversation starts or veers outside your area of expertise, suggest others both inside and outside of your organization who could help.

5. Speak in plain language and be brief.

Avoid jargon, acronyms, and technical language. Journalists produce stories to inform the general public – not experts in your field. Use language that is simple and direct. Be brief. Long answers do not get used, and often distract from the point you want to make. If you do not want something to get lost in translation, keep your responses so simple and clear that translation is not necessary.

6. Be pleasant, but cautious.

Be cooperative, but always keep in mind that even if the interview takes on a casual, informal tone, what you say or email may be included in the story. The safest approach is to speak on the record when engaging with media. “On the record” means that what you say can be attributed directly to you. “Off the record” means that a reporter may not use the information or attribute the information to you in their story. It protects you from saying something you thought would not be attributed to you, only to discover that it is.

7. Inform your communications team.

Let the communications team in your organization know when you speak to a reporter. They may want to look for media coverage and provide the reporter with additional information.

Additional Resources

2014 Knowledge Translation Conference: Effective Media Outreach Strategies

Archived Materials

<http://www.ktdrr.org/conference/>

This Center on Knowledge Translation for Disability and Rehabilitation Research (KTDRR) online conference focused on using various forms of media to expand the reach and use of research findings. Journalists and other experts representing traditional media, social media, and special focus media outlets shared perspectives on effective strategies to promote the uptake of disability-oriented research findings by the media.

60 Second Guide for Working with the News Media

Independent Sector

https://www.independentsector.org/60_second_media_guide

This guide offers tips on collaborating with the media. It addresses building and maintaining relationships and pitching a story, provides insight on disseminating a news release and guidelines for holding a news conference, and offers advice for getting involved with editorial pages, talk radio, and television.

Tips on Working with the News Media, Preparing for an Interview

University of Michigan, Public Affairs

<http://www.vpcomm.umich.edu/pa/resources/tips.html>

This tip-sheet offers guidance on preparing for an interview, advice on conducting an interview, insight on broadcast media, and steps to follow after an interview.

Working with the Media: A Best Practical Guide (PDF)

Economic and Social Research Council

http://www.esrc.ac.uk/images/Working_with_the_Media_tcm8-2674.pdf

This document offers guidance on communicating research findings to consumers outside of the academic community. It offers insight on what makes a good news story, working effectively with journalists, writing press releases, giving interviews, and collaborating with radio and television documentary makers.