



Practical Tips for Responding to Media Requests

Purpose	This tool is intended to serve as a reference for researchers as they respond to media inquiries. With preparation and clear messaging, being responsive to the media can be an effective and cost-efficient way for researchers to share research findings with the public.
Format	This tool opens with seven tips for researchers to consider when responding to media inquiries.
Audience	Researchers and the general public can use this tool as a reference to help them prepare and respond to media inquiries.
Resources	The end of this document includes additional resources that researchers can reference when working with the media.

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Practical Tips for Responding to Media Requests

1. Follow the rules.

Many organizations have procedures in place for engaging with the media. These procedures help control messaging and represent the organization and information in the best way possible. For example, an organization may allow only certain people to interact with the media or may require staff to seek approval to grant an interview. 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 about 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 they are asking their questions. If you need to check on an answer, ask if you can email them or call them back with the information. If you are conducting a taped television, radio, or print interview, it is always okay to ask if you can see or hear the segment in advance to ensure its accuracy.

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 that you are involved with, identify two or three key ideas or facts you want to convey. If the conversation veers outside your area of expertise, provide suggestions for other people both inside and outside of your organization who could talk to the reporter. Conduct mock interviews with your media spokesperson to help you prepare. It may be helpful to have a backup spokesperson in case of an emergency.

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. Reporters may not use long answers, as they often distract from the point they want to make. If you do not want something to get lost in translation, keep your responses simple and clear so 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, anything you say or send in an email may be included in the story. The safest approach is to speak on the record when engaging with the 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. Speaking on the record protects you from saying something that you thought would not be attributed to you, only to discover that it is. Try to speak “off the record” when you feel it is your only option and with a reporter with whom you have already worked. Also, if you are going “off the record,” ask the reporter what their outlet’s formal policy is for this. It is often better to not share “off the record” information and lose out on an interview than to see private information in a public forum.

7. Inform your communications team.

When you receive direct outreach from the press, notify your communications team first. The communications team can help schedule an interview, create briefing materials on the reporter and publication, and act as the filter for you in terms of uncovering questions in advance.