

Practical Tips for Responding to Media Requests

Purpose	This tool serves 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, especially when the messages are clear and well-prepared.
Format	This tool offers eight tips to consider when responding to inquiries from the media. It also includes 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 for and respond to media inquiries.
Resources	Additional resources on collaborating with the media are identified at the end of this document.

Practical Tips for Responding to Media Requests

1. Follow the rules.

Many organizations have procedures to follow when 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 provide interviews. Make sure you are familiar with your organization's media spokesperson, which is usually someone in the public affairs or communications office, 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 that you do not have the information they need. Swift replies encourage journalists to contact you and 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, the name of the news organization, and the 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 your area of expertise. If a reporter is interested in a new study you are involved with, identify two or three key ideas or facts that you want to convey. If the conversation veers outside your area of expertise, suggest other sources, both inside and outside of your organization, who may be able to help.

5. Speak in plain language and be brief.

Avoid jargon, acronyms, and technical language. Most 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 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. 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, often the public affairs office, know when you speak to a reporter. Staff in the public affairs office 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, Center on Knowledge Translation for Disability and Rehabilitation Research (KTDRR)

<http://ktdrr.org/conference2014/>

This online conference from KTDRR focused on using various forms of media to expand the reach and use of research findings. Journalists and other experts from traditional media, social media, and specially focused media outlets shared perspectives on effective strategies to promote the media's uptake of disability-oriented research findings.

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

10 Tips for Scientists on Talking to the Media

The Scripps Research Institute (TSRI), News and Views Online Weekly

https://www.scripps.edu/newsandviews/e_20141013/mediatips.html

The October 14, 2014, issue of *News and Views* highlighted 10 tips to help researchers communicate effectively about research to the media. These tips include knowing the media outlet's audience, keeping sound bites short and using stories to demonstrate examples, and not feeling the need to "break the silence" during an interview.

Standing Up for Science: A Guide to the Media for Early Career Scientists

Sense About Science/Voices of Young Scientists

<http://www.senseaboutscience.org/data/files/resources/13/Standing-up-for-Science-interactive.pdf>

This guide contains interviews and insights about how the media works, and practical tips about what you can do if your research area hits the news. The guide includes scientists' views of the media, insights from journalists on how best to work with them, tips on how best to work with press officers, and a media checklist.