



Master Media Interviews:

Essential Training for Municipal Leaders



COLORADO
MUNICIPAL
LEAGUE

What is your organization's philosophy?

Suggested elements

- Be responsive and talk to the media
- Partner with the media to get your messages out
- Work with deadlines when you can – if you can't then explain
- Tell the truth – and always remain factual
- Be polite – don't let it be personal – just business
- Correct mistakes - *QUICKLY*

When the news is “Bad”

- If you screwed up, say so – be *human*
- Try not to mess up on a slow news day – *OUCH!*
- Try to get all the bad news out all at once
(reduces the shelf life of the story)
- ***Be out in front of the story whenever possible
don't let media “uncover” bad news***

PIO or CEO?

When and Why a Leader should talk

There are times the public simply needs to hear from the Boss/Chief.

- Show who is in charge and responsible
- Show support for officers and employees
- Send condolences to family members
- Calm or reassure the public

Always Remember:

- If the Media doesn't get the **FACTS** from you, they will get the *STORY* from someone else...



What do we do BEFORE the media calls?

- Be Prepared

- Why?

- Organization –

- Panic will only hurt your ability to respond and have a media response protocol (whether a crisis or not) is vital.
 - Protocol should include the response chain of command, how requests are reported, responded to..
 - Include your community's core messages to reinforce in any response.



So, a media member has called you for an interview.

What's your first step?

- Contact your PIO/Communications Team, follow your protocol
 - Why?
 - Awareness –
 - The media person contacting you may have a specific angle they are pursuing.
 - They may have already talked to others who have provided information.
 - Message Consistency.

Why is message consistency so important?

A lack of a coordinated and cohesive message from your municipality will diminish trust with the public and other community stakeholders.

Multiple messages and themes creates confusion.

Who are you speaking for?

- Make sure you know this before going into an interview and make sure the media understands.
- Are you speaking as an official member of the organization?
- Are you representing the organization's position?
- Answering with a personal opinion may put you at odds with the organization or established Council policy decisions.
- If you are speaking for yourself only, give your colleagues a courtesy notification – include the name of the media organization and topic.
 - *No media surprises*

You have agreed to an interview. Now What?

- Have your Communications staff talk to the reporter – they can interview them about what information they are looking for.
- Know the reporter – general assignment reporter, Beat/subject matter specialist, investigative reporter? Why does this matter?
- General assignment reporter - cover various beats, no particular specialty - infrequent contact
- Beat reporter - expertise and knowledge in a focused area - frequent contact with sources (Police, courts, legislature, schools and health often have “beat” coverage)

You have agreed to an interview. Now What?

- Investigative Reporter
 - They probably already have information on something that they find worthy of pursuing.
 - There is a high likelihood you are not the first person they are speaking with.

You have agreed to an interview. Now What?

- Develop your Key Point(s) – work with Communications and/or subject matter experts.
- KNOW your key points – practice saying them out loud.
- Use Plain Language – no acronyms if possible.
- Speak with the resident's interests in mind.
- Professional appearance – represent yourself and the organization well.
- Try to not introduce any bias with your appearance or attitude.
- Build rapport with the reporter prior to interview starting or before the camera goes on.

Uh oh! This interview is getting tricky!

- Remember – it is OKAY not to know the answer to something!
- Be honest – “I don’t know that information, but I can try to get you an answer.”
- What if the interview starts straying into another subject or in a direction that makes you uneasy?
 - Stay friendly and say I don’t have that information right now and can get back to you.”

Uh oh! This interview is getting tricky!

- Key Points – you already developed and know your main message for the interview.
- PIVOT – “I’m not going to speculate with information I have not confirmed, but what I can tell you is
- Once you are in an interview, DO NOT TRY TO GO OFF THE RECORD – You are ALWAYS “ON THE RECORD”
 - Off the record really just means they won’t use it in a quote, they will use it to get more info from others.

Burning Bridges!



What does this mean pertaining to your relationship with the media?

Staff has a better chance to speak “on background” to a reporter.

Some issues need context and more detailed information than a short interview will provide.

Offer the reporter something that CAN be quoted after discussion.

What Kind of a Question is That?

- Being a good reporter is a craft – knowing the kinds of questions and how to ask them is a skill.
- Hypothetical – Asks you to forecast a reaction.
 - Solution: “That’s a hypothetical question, there is no way I can respond to that.”
 - Pivot to what you can respond to.
- False Facts – Incorrect information.
 - Solution: do not repeat false information

What Kind of Question is That?

- Phantom Authority/Absent Party – No real source for comment – “Someone said.”
 - Solution: Do not answer a blind charge.
 - **“I’m not aware of that information, but what I do know is....”**
- Omniscient Authority – Expects you to know everything.
 - Solution: “That is not my area of expertise, but I can get the information for you...”
- The Machine Gun – Multipart questions.
 - Solution: Answer the one you want or answer the issue raised by the questions.

What Kind of Question is That?

- The interrupter – does not let you complete your thought.
 - Solution: Ignore the interruption and answer the question later or
 - listen and say you'll address it after you finish.. "As I was saying..."
- The paraphrase – Unfairly and/or inaccurately restates what you say:
 - Solution: Don't get angry, just restate position carefully.
 - "I want to make sure I have made myself clear.."

What Kind of Question is That?

- Silence –
 - Solution: Don't feel like you have to fill void. Reporters love to stop talking so you feel the need to talk. Simply deliver your approved message/s and stop until they ask another.
- Charged words – Question that has negative language
 - Solution: Don't repeat negative language. "To the contrary..."

Why being responsive is so important

. . .

- What happens if you are not?
- Ambush Interview – unexpected encounter with a reporter.
- Do not walk (or run!) away – particularly with a camera running.
Do not block the camera with your hand.
- Stop – Be very calm – look the reporter in the eyes.
- Be attentive – listen to the reporter's questions.

Why being responsive is so important

. . .

- Possible answers for ambush interview –
- “It’s important to me that we provide you with an accurate answer on that. In order to do that, I’m going to need a chance to do some research and talk with others to get you a full and accurate answer.”
- “I’m not sure I have all the facts to provide you and the public an accurate answer to that right now.”

How NOT to do it . . .



Now, it is YOUR turn

- Pick a partner or small group
- Get your phones ready to record video.
- Think of a general topic you will answer questions about – tell your partner who will then be the reporter.
- Interviewees – write down at least 3 talking points for yourself.
- Interviewers – think of at least one question either not on their talking point list or something related but off topic. Keep the question to yourself.
- We will demonstrate first.

THANK YOU!

Master Media Interviews:

- Contact info: Todd Barnes
- Todd.barnes@thorntonco.gov
- 303-538-7279



Thank you for attending!

- Please don't forget to rate this session in the CML conference app.
- In the app, navigate to this session and click on SURVEY.
- Each time you evaluate a session, you are entered into a drawing to win a 2-night stay in a Junior Suite at Hotel Alpenrock.
- We appreciate your feedback!

