

Media Engagement Strategies

CML Mayor's Summit

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Media Engagement Strategies

When you are the Mayor, you are often also the face of your community. You have an interest in representing yourself *and* your community as best you can. Knowing how to effectively interact with your local media outlets is crucial for yourself and the community you represent.

Mayor? Manager? PIO?

When and Why a Leader should talk

There are times the public simply needs to hear from the Mayor.

- Hear from top elected official
- Project 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...



Your Media philosophy is important!

Suggested elements for you

- 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*

Why being responsive is so important

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- 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

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- 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.”

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***

What do we do BEFORE letting the media know about bad news?

- Be Prepared
 - Why?
 - Organization is key–
 - Uncertainty will only hurt your ability to respond.
 - 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 you or your municipality will diminish trust with the public and other community stakeholders.

Multiple messages and themes create 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 someone talk to the reporter (Manager or Communications Staff) – 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. Usually staff is not a fun “Quote” for 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..."

What other kinds of reporters are there today?

- Let's discuss . . . Resident "journalists"
- Alternative news sites
- Social Media
- Combatting misinformation

- What is YOUR experience?
- Questions?