

# Managing News Media Relationships: What to Say and Not Say Before, During, and After Incidents, Accidents, or Events

Presented for CSAC-EIA by

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# **PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS:** **Timely, Accurate, Updated Information**

**Incidents**

**Accidents**

**Injuries**

**Civilian or Line-of-Duty Deaths**

**Mass Events**

**Law Enforcement: Murders, Shootings, Children, Riots, Use of Force**

**Disasters**

**Weather**



# MEDIA INTERACTIONS

**You will *always* want the best spokesperson in front of the media, who may or not be your boss, CAO, CEO, Department Head, or elected official.**

**Resist their egos. Choose wisely. *The Internet never dies.***

**If you become the go-to person / PIO for your agency, ask for media training.**

**Best PIOs or media spokespeople: have media experience; have many journalism contacts in local and national media; are calm and calming; have a good speaking voice and camera presence; are fast thinkers, good on their feet; are not “slick,” but are polished, empathic, neutral, professional information-providers.**



# OLD-SCHOOL VS. NEW-SCHOOL JOURNALISM

**Field reporters, cameramen, soundmen, producers.**

**Evening newscasts and 11 pm newscasts.**

**Not much crossover to print newspapers.**

**Few follow-up stories.**

**Loyal viewers.**

**MMJs who carry it all and do it all: Drive to the story (in their own cars); shoot video; do interviews; do a live shot; shoot still photos; write captions; write a blog; write the copy for air; edit the video; do the story in-studio or as part of a package; post it all on station social media platforms.**

**Never-ending newscasts; lots of media partners; fickle viewers.**



## **STOP SAYING. . .**

**“No comment; we can’t comment on that; we will have no further comment; our attorneys told us not to comment; we wish we could comment, but we just can’t.”**

**“It’s a personnel issue; it’s a personnel matter; you should know we can’t comment on personnel matters; it’s a privacy issue; it’s a confidential personnel matter; the employee in this case has the right to privacy.”**

**“We’ll let the courts decide; that’s up to the courts to decide; our attorneys will argue/fight/present our case in court; we believe once this issue gets to court, we will prevail.”**

**“Let’s not rush to judgment.”**



# BRIDGE!



**Do what (skilled) politicians do: answer a tough question by bridging over to what you really want to say:**

**“Do you think your deputies used excessive force?”**

**“On a daily basis, the men and women of our Sheriff’s Department are faced with life-and-death decisions. Our community knows how hard their jobs are and how they have to make split-second decisions, as may have happened in this case.”**



# INSTEAD OF “NO COMMENT,” SAY. . .

**“That part is not clear to us right now, but what we do know is this . . .”**

**“There are still some things we don’t know at this early stage, but what I can clarify is this . . .”**

**Instead of saying, “We can’t comment because it’s a personnel issue,” say  
“Our Personnel Department is conducting a full investigation, which will give us more clarity at that point.”**

**“That’s a question we’re still trying to answer at this early part of the incident or investigation. We’ll have more later once we know.”**

**“We feel confident in our response to this incident, and we want the public to know we’re actively investigating what occurred, with information and support from . . . or in support of our colleagues at . . .”**







# PRESS CONFERENCES

**Manage the batting order.**

**Stop thanking everyone!**

**Offer help from your IT people with their audio, lighting, and camera setups.**

**Provide press releases with the names of the speakers, key officials, and contact information.**

**Keep your face and tone neutral, friendly, professional, and polite.**

**Never lose your cool. Be patient with stupid, obvious, long-winded, and compound questions. Know they will always ask one more after it's over.**

**Use your substitute “No Comment” phrases as necessary.**





# **PRINT INTERVIEWS:**

## **Newspapers, Magazines, Blogs**

Usually done by phone. Ask them to record you, so you have some hope they will quote you accurately.

**If not, speak slowly, provide one sound bite at a time, take breaks in between your ideas. Don't assume they can take fast or accurate notes.**

Stick to your themes. Use bridging and your “no comment” protocols.

**Ask about their deadlines and be prompt in getting back to them.**

E-mail over a press kit, either right before or right after.

**Send a thank-you e-mail when they capture your words correctly and write a true and favorable story.**



# RADIO APPEARANCES

E-mail some questions to the producer in advance if you can. (Spell out your name phonetically if it's unusual.)

**Have a message in mind.**

Prepare for the length: 30-second sound bite to one-hour long form.

**Talk in complete sentences; give them short sound bites, not long speeches.**

In-studio: test your mic, give short bites of information, be quiet and “on the record” in the studio.

**Phone-in: use a landline, get an inside callback number, no background noise. Try not to do it from your car or with a speaker phone**



# RADIO APPEARANCES

**Be careful answering compound questions; break them up or come back to the second.**

**Don't start your sentences with "Well, . . ."**

**Let the host(s) finish the question; only interrupt if they are way wrong.**

**Have patience while the host pontificates.**

**Talk quickly and clearly to get your point made in a short time.**

**Disagree with respect and don't let them wrap up with bad information.**

**Try to drive listeners to your agency web site.**

**Thank the host on-air and send a thank-you e-mail to the producer.**



# **TV APPEARANCES – IN THE FIELD**

**Give your business card and a press kit to the talent and/or the camera person.**

**Help them choose a good location – low noise, good light and background.**

**Discuss the questions they will ask in advance of the shoot.**

**Help them co-develop a theme for the story.**

**If you get tongue-tied, it's okay to ask them to reshoot it and answer the question again (once, probably).**

**Know your 20 minutes will get edited down to 20 seconds.**



# **TV APPEARANCES – IN-STUDIO**

**Dress carefully: no vibrating checks, big plaids, or bright blues or greens (matches the Chromakey screens they use); no loose jewelry. Check hair, makeup, and outfit one last time. Sit on your suit coat.**

**Give everyone on the production staff your business card (so they spell your name right in the Chyron captions and crawls).**

**Keep your head and your hands still. Keep your face neutral at all times (you never know when the camera is on you). No side chats.**

**Like radio, answer in sound bites.**

**Jump in and disagree with an “opposing guest.”**

**Remember your bridging responses to provocative questions.**



# SKYPE APPEARANCES

**Prepare the room lighting, camera view, and audio well in advance.  
Avoid the nose hair/double-chin view.**

**Set the look behind the camera – no distractions, movement, glare, inappropriate photos, posters, people goofing off.**

**Be ready to repeat your message more than once as they may have bad lighting or audio on their side.**

**Sit still and keep your hands down; Skype often has refresh rate issues.**

**Wait for the interviewer to ask each question before you start to answer.**



## **SOCIAL MEDIA INTERVIEWS:**

### **Blogs and Bloggers, Political and Media Sites, Working With Freelancers**

**It's okay to say no to sites you've not heard of, goofy freelancers, or groups you don't know or trust to provide accurate stories.**

**Try to get a sense of the scope of their readership. Don't waste your time with sites that will skew your words to match their agenda.**

**It may be safer to do all work with them by e-mail, so you have a record of what both sides said.**

**Ask them to take down stories that are factually inaccurate or write and post a new version.**

**Create a good list and a no-way list for the future.**



# MEDIA MANAGEMENT

Recognize the shortness of their news cycles. Update the story immediately for them. Send over press releases and press kits quickly.

**They will be on to another story tomorrow. But don't miss a chance to get them to do another, corrected story on your agency then.**

Kill them with kindness; they'll always have the last word.

**Send thank-you emails to them and/or their bosses when you get fair treatment.**

Update your media rosters; these people change jobs frequently.



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