



TIPS ON TALKING TO THE MEDIA

MEDIA ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

The media offer opportunities to reach a vast audience with your own words and images. Below are a few tips for honing your message and getting the most out of a media interview.

- **Don't use jargon.** Industries and professions have their own linguistic shortcuts. But remember who your target audience is, and communicate in language that they will understand. The best messages are ones that your audience can relate to personally.
- **Be pro-active.** Don't wait for reporters to call you. Be ready to suggest story ideas to them. Help them understand issues and developments, and how they affect the interests of their audience.
- **Be careful of how you use numbers.** Statistics can be boring and confusing unless you help the audience to understand what they mean. Why are your numbers or reports significant? Do they represent a trend? Can you use examples that make data come alive for your listener?

Example: Instead of saying, "We have added fitness facilities at our three senior centers," say, "Three times as many seniors have access to a fitness facility especially for them."

- **Be positive about your programs.** Use media opportunities to sell your program or ideas. Be positive and upbeat about your organization and its activities.
- **Look at a question as an opportunity to sell your agenda.** You are never restricted to simply answering the question. Rather, use questions as opportunities to make your points.

Example: If you are asked, "How will the withdrawal of Vioxx from the market affect seniors?" don't feel you have to limit your answer to pharmaceutical marketing. You can say, "It will be missed, but people with arthritis—and all older adults—can feel better by eating better and moving more."

- **Use storytelling to frame your message.** Since the beginning of time, the most effective communicators have been storytellers. Learn how to illustrate your point with examples or anecdotes that help the listener to visualize and empathize with your position. Help the listener to identify with your story and understand its personal relevance.
- **Use your volunteers as spokespeople.** Look outside of your own organization for third-party validation. Well-briefed volunteers who can give compelling interviews are often more credible than paid staff. (See "The Messenger Is as Important as the Message.")

For additional information on working with the media, see "Media Relations" and "Media Interviews."

