



A partnership between American Library Association
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**MEDIA TRAINING GUIDE FOR
SMART INVESTING@YOUR LIBRARY
PROJECT LEADERS**

Introduction to the Media Training Guide

Even in an age when media are fragmented, journalists still have the power to influence public opinion. And any interaction with reporters, editors, or columnists can be nerve-wracking.

We often think, what's their real agenda? How are they going to represent me and my organization based on my comments? And, who else are they going to talk to that could repudiate my side of the story?

The purpose of this media training guide is to help you proactively shape your message to the media. Use the tips and tactics inside to change every nerve-wracking experience with the media into an empowering one.

UNDERSTANDING THE MEDIA IN A 2.0 WORLD

As you develop relationships with reporters and representatives of the media, whether in your local media market or on the national level, keep in mind how the digital world is affecting their roles in covering news.

- ***Reporters are overwhelmed***
Paid reporters are scarce these days. There are too many stories to cover. Make sure you land on the top of their list. Treat them as professionals. Also, the more you can help them with facts and suggestions, the easier you make it to cover your story.
- ***Reporters work within a highly competitive environment***
Reporters are generally nice people whose job it is to serve the community. But they are under increasing pressure to *find an angle* for your story that is provocative. Competition among media outlets to cover a story first is strong. By cultivating relationships with a few key reporters, you can offer them first crack at newsworthy stories.
- ***Reporters can be your most cost-effective marketers***
Research shows that people who care about libraries also follow the news. That's why reporters are some of the best resources you have to engage the public. A well-placed story about your library can mean the equivalent of thousands of dollars worth of positive impressions.
- ***Reporters have limited time and attention spans***
Deadlines drive the business. Reporters tend to cover stories where spokespeople have good information, offer it promptly, and can explain their issue succinctly. Media coverage favors the well prepared.
- ***Reporters are not your enemy***
The media are not out to get you. They can be educated to understand your position and write about it favorably.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Given what we know about the media, do whatever you can to:

- ***Work within their time frame***
When a reporter calls you for information, always ask about his or her deadline. Sometimes reporters are working a week in advance; other times they are one hour before deadline.
- ***Be considerate of deadlines***
If you need to call reporters right before their deadlines, acknowledge that you are calling at a bad time and explain the urgency of your call. Reporters will recognize and appreciate your consideration of their work schedules.
- ***Don't neglect or overwhelm them***
Respond to queries promptly. Return their calls. But strike a balance between being helpful and being a pest. Too many follow-up calls can be a turnoff.
- ***Never be combative***
Don't argue with a reporter. You may see it happen on television, but it can backfire. Even if you think the reporter is being unfair, simply state your case calmly and look at other ways to affect the reporter's views by offering to gather facts and stories from others to lend perspective.
- ***Be a resource***
Be a resource to reporters in ways that will help them tell your side of the story. For instance:
 - ***Call reporters personally*** with key pieces of "breaking" news or inside intelligence on stories in the news.
 - ***Mail reporters information*** to provide them with helpful descriptions and recent events related to your issue.
 - ***Compile your own fact sheets*** and distribute them to the media as easy-to-use reference tools. Provide quick facts and the names and phone numbers of your office and key staff.
- ***Capitalize on every opportunity***
When a reporter does call, regardless of the premise, seize the opportunity! Consider it a bird in hand. It's much harder to "pitch" a reporter on a story he or she hasn't already committed to covering.

PITCHING A STORY TO THE MEDIA

Never assume that just because you have mailed, e-mailed, or faxed something to a reporter that it will get published. Here are a few tips for effective follow-up and pitching:

- ***Prepare what you're going to say***

Before you pick up the phone, determine two or three things you're going to say to a reporter or leave on his/her voice mail as a follow-up to your press release, pitch letter, media advisory, or calendar listing. This can range from checking to see if the reporter got your information, to having a few salient points on hand as to why your story is worthy of news coverage (in the case of pitch letters and press releases). Remember, a follow-up call is not just a follow-up, it is also a pitch—you are selling the newsworthiness of your event or story.

Have your information on hand. Make sure you have a copy of whatever was sent to the reporter and be prepared to re-fax or resend it. Many reporters get so much mail that yours may get lost in the shuffle.

- ***Don't be afraid to leave messages***

Practice leaving a brief message that not only includes your contact information, organization, and title, but that also quickly highlights the newsworthiness of your event or story.

Example: “Hi, this is Mary Hatch from Bedford Falls Public Library. I'm calling to invite you to our Teen Smart Money Graduation Ceremony. It's a chance to meet the participants and see how the library is helping young people manage their money by avoiding credit card debt and learning how to save for college. I'd appreciate the opportunity to discuss some of our innovative financial literacy programs that put Bedford Falls on the map as a national model. Please call me at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.” Repeat your name and number.

- ***Don't get frustrated***

Don't be surprised if reporters do not call you back or do not immediately respond to your pitch. It takes time to build relationships and get on a reporter's radar. Be persistent without being annoying. If a reporter says he/she will keep your information on file, ask whether you can send information periodically as an update. If you are not getting anywhere with a particular reporter, find out whether there is another reporter who may cover the same or a similar beat.

- ***Don't take it personally***

Reporters are very busy people who can sometimes be abrupt. Keep in mind that they are inundated with story ideas on a daily basis. Be polite and always ask if you can contact them in the future with additional information. Do not take rebuffs or rejections personally.

- ***Don't be intimidated***

At the end of the day, reporters are people too. Remember to keep your follow-up calls conversational and use them as an opportunity to build relationships and learn more about the topics that are of interest to the reporter you are contacting. Even if you don't succeed the first time, keep the door open so that you can come back to the reporter at a later date with new, more targeted information.

- ***Time of day matters***

Try not to call reporters at newspapers and broadcast media outlets at the end of the day, as they are probably rushing to meet deadlines. The best time to call is mid-to-late morning, after they have had their morning coffee and before lunch.

WAYS TO IMPROVE COVERAGE

Here are a few basic points that can improve your chances of getting good press coverage:

- ***Make it timely***
Reporters look for stories that relate to current events or problems already on the public's mind.
- ***Make it visual***
Ever wonder why the local zoo gets so much media coverage? People love photos of animals. Stories that can be told with an eye-catching snapshot always prevail.
- ***Make it multimedia***
The best events cater to every medium. Television is visual. Radio is aural. Newspapers like to build stories around interesting people. If you want to increase your odds of getting broad-based coverage, include every possible media channel.
- ***Keep it simple***
Don't have too many elements. Keep the number of messages, facts, and spokespeople to a reasonable amount so as not to overwhelm.
- ***Use real stories***
Reporters like to hear stories about interesting people and human-interest issues. Tell stories of real people in real situations who were helped by the library.
- ***Feature recognized names***
Invite reporters to interview leaders of your organization or experts. "Names" will help to attract more media interest.

IMPORTANCE OF CRAFTING AN EFFECTIVE MESSAGE

The term “message” gets thrown around in the communications field all the time. Your key “messages” are the main points you want to convey to your audience. They are the distilled phrases that clearly and succinctly define your issue or position. As you prepare for your first interview or interaction with the media, developing your key messages should be your first priority.

Developing Your Message

As you develop your key messages, adhere to the following principles:

- ***Keep it simple and concise***
Your message should not be too complex or include too many issues. Test your message on others for clarity.
- ***Keep it relevant***
Your key message should always be relevant. It should include a sense of urgency or immediacy.
- ***Keep it substantive***
Do not water down your message so much that it becomes meaningless. It needs to have some content for people to grab on to.
- ***Don't use jargon***
Jargon can quickly deflate the potency of your message. Use everyday language. Avoid acronyms.
- ***Relate it to a broader issue***
In almost every case, your issue will relate to other important issues in your community. Identify these related issues and highlight them in your message.
- ***Make it preemptive***
Consider what the “other side” might say about the issue and include words or phrases that will preempt its criticism or objections.
- ***Make it powerful***
Effective messages are catalysts. They should compel people to take action.

ENGAGING THE MEDIA

Tips for Building Relationships

Below are general guidelines for building relationships with individual members of the news media:

- ***Establish a media contact person***
Appoint a contact person in your organization for consistency in media relationships.
- ***Develop a contact list***
Make a list of reporters who speak with you frequently, but with whom you feel you could improve your relationship and increase media outreach.
- ***Do the “social thing”***
Invite reporters you would like to know better to lunch, coffee, or some other social activity. This will enable you to talk informally about yourselves and your work.
- ***Acquire new outlets***
Think about new key media outlets—such as wire services, major dailies, and the Internet. Ask yourself whether you have a strong contact at each of these. If not, then target them.

How to Generate News

Activities and events provide your organization an opportunity to mobilize constituents, build relationships, and generate media coverage. The events and activities described in this section are but a few of the possible outreach tools you can use to inform and educate the press as well as the general public about your project. With any activity or event, thorough planning is essential to success.

Regardless of the type of event or activity, make sure you have “news” to deliver. Otherwise, you risk damaging your reputation as a serious and credible news source.

- ***Special Events***
Special events such as fundraising breakfasts, speaker profiles, rallies, or your organization’s anniversary are great opportunities to generate media coverage and show support for your organization and its messages.

An organization may have several additional reasons for sponsoring an event including raising money, recruiting new members, thanking volunteers, or generating community support.

Remember, events typically require a lot of work. Planning for an event requires an honest assessment of whether or not you have the resources and labor to make it successful.

- ***Press Conference***

Use a press conference for only a big news announcement or major event. Reporters are so busy and eager to get an exclusive that it takes effort and a big event to draw them.

Press conferences can be either proactive or reactive, announcing or creating a story or responding to breaking news. They require a great deal of preparation *and should be used only for a "larger" story.*

- ***Letters to the Editor***

Letters to the editor are vehicles for expressing an opinion about a recent event or issue, or how that event or issue was covered by a publication, radio station, or television program. A well-crafted letter can also do double duty as a blog post and gain additional readership.

This useful outreach tool is an excellent means for getting the word out (in your own words) on short notice. They are usually written by individuals concerned about the issue and submitted in a timely manner (within a few days).

- ***Opinion Editorials (Op-Ed)***

The opinion-editorial is much like a short persuasive essay. It can lend credibility to your organization if it appears as a guest column.

RESPONDING TO THE MEDIA

The key to responding to the media is to come as prepared as you would with a proactive media effort.

What to Do When a Reporter Calls

If you're ready—that is, if you're focused, have your key messages in front of you, and are well informed on the topic being discussed—you can start talking.

If you're not ready—or if you're at all apprehensive and need a few minutes to concentrate, develop your key messages, or identify other sources for referral—you need not respond immediately. Instead:

- ***Find out why the reporter is calling***
Ask if he or she is calling about something in particular.
- ***Determine the time constraints***
Say something like, “Are you on a deadline? Can I call you back within the hour?”
- ***Buy yourself time***
No need to launch an interview off-the-cuff. Simply say, “Can I call you back in a few minutes?” to allow enough time to gather key messages, data, and examples that will win you coverage.
- ***Prepare a statement***
Read a prepared statement. Sometimes, especially when there are legal matters involved, you may need to manage your comments more tightly by writing, issuing, or reading a prepared statement. If you are accosted and don't have a statement on hand, you might say, “We have no comment at this time. However, we will have a statement for the media within the hour.”

Call the Reporter Back

The reporter will try to elicit a response anyway: “Can I just get one quick statement? My editor wanted this story an hour ago.” Be careful. Simple quips can become headlines. You and the reporter have very different needs—the reporter wants a candid response. You want to provide a well-prepared answer.

So, call the reporter back when you are ready to talk and know what you want to say.

REMEMBER: Respect the reporter's deadline. If you wait too long, he or she may call someone else or write the story without your input.

SUCCESSING IN AN INTERVIEW

Things to Remember

Some people dread interviews, but interviews don't have to be feared. If you are prepared, you can control the interview and the audience's perceptions of you and your issue.

General Tips

- ***Talking points***

Prepare one page of "talking points" on your key messages. Read them, refine them, rewrite them, and rehearse them. For any interview, three strong concise messages are usually enough.

- ***Be the source***

Many stories are assigned within a tight time frame. This means a reporter often will have little time to research the story before interviewing you. Never assume the reporter understands your subject. You should explain it to him or her as new information.

- ***Be succinct***

In radio and television, journalists want a spokesperson who expresses ideas succinctly. They are always looking for the five- or ten-second quote that highlights your side of the story.

Before the Interview

- ***Know the angle***

Be well versed in your subject. Ask the reporter in advance what angle he or she is interested in talking about.

- ***Use your messages***

Prepare short, simple answers and easy explanations to anticipated questions in advance. Think in visual terms. Review your talking points. Stay "on message".

- ***Set the stage***

If the interviewer is coming to your office, find a "good visual" location with a banner or logo behind you. Clean up the place. Camerapersons tend to wander around filming whatever happens to be on top of desks or tacked to walls. You could stage a visual by having people nearby involved in some interesting activity.

- ***Research the reporter's previous work***

Read other articles the reporter has written. Talk to others who know the reporter. And, before the interview "officially" starts, try a little small talk with the reporter. You stand a better chance of fair treatment when you seem personable and human.

During the Interview

- ***Relax***

Stay relaxed and focused. Reporters never ask the exact question you've practiced, so be calm and ready.

- ***Avoid the bait***

Reporters can be curt. Don't allow yourself to be baited into a defensive reaction. The reporter is neither your enemy nor your friend, just a liaison between you and your audience. Also, don't be tempted to answer a question when you aren't sure of the answer. Tell them you don't know, but that you will find out.

- ***Keep the reporter focused on your side of the story***

Many times a reporter will ask you questions that divert you from your intended message. Useful phrases such as "That's an important issue, but . . ." or "I understand some people have that opinion, but . . ."

- ***Stay "on message"***

Use your key messages, making two or three key points as early in the interview as possible.

- ***Stay "on record"***

Avoid going "off the record" with a reporter. Never say anything to a reporter that you wouldn't want to see in the media.

- ***Take the high road***

If an opponent is also present, avoid the temptation to rebut his or her comments—if you do, this dignifies those comments and detracts from your message.

After the Interview

- ***Follow-up***

Call and ask if they need more information. Answer any lingering questions the reporter may have.

The Results

- ***A good report***

Whenever your story is written accurately and fairly, a thank-you note or call may be appropriate.

- ***When the media errs***

First, remain calm. Resist any immediate desire to telephone a reporter about a mistake. Here are two alternatives you may consider:

- ***Do nothing***

Most of the time this is the best approach. Reporters usually don't take kindly to a critique of their news story. To revisit it could create bad relations with the reporter and hurt instead of help you.

- ***Write a Letter to the Editor***

Write on your organization's letterhead. It should be signed by your senior management or the person most directly involved in the issue.

THE MEDIUMS OF MEDIA

All press is not the same. Print, radio, and TV are very different mediums with different needs. Nonetheless, their ultimate objective is the same: to tell an interesting story. Understanding their differences will help you to tell your story. All the rules on working with print media can also be applied to television and radio.

Working with Print

- ***Know the reporter***
Do your homework on journalists before you talk to them; review their past work carefully.
- ***Be the source of information***
Never assume the reporter understands your subject. You should explain it to him or her as new information. Remember, it is better to be the source than the subject.
- ***Use and repeat your key points***
Use your key points when answering questions. Remember why you're there and to stay "on message".
- ***Tell the truth***
If you don't know something, offer to research it and phone the reporter back with the answer before the deadline.
- ***Use clear, jargon-free speech***
Be clear, concise but descriptive.

Working with Radio

- ***Paint a picture with your words***
The listener will not have any pictures to support what you're saying, only your words. You need to speak in visual, descriptive terms.
- ***Use a conversational tone***
In an interview or talk show, treat the reporter like a friendly associate. Explain things to the reporter in a manner that shows interest and respect. Make your speech as conversational as possible, avoiding complicated answers and jargon. Use anecdotes.
- ***Avoid nervous noises***
Don't tap pens or jingle your change. Drink water in advance to avoid dry mouth sounds.

Working with Television

- ***Arrive early***
Get to the studio or event venue early so you can meet the reporter/host before you go on camera. Use first names with people—it tends to result in a more relaxed interview. Introduce yourself to the cameraperson. He or she has the ability to make you look good or bad.
- ***Give the reporter eye contact***
Talk directly to the reporter, never into the camera, unless instructed otherwise. Television is a very intimate media. You are really in a one-on-one situation with the reporter interviewing you. Try to call the reporter by name during the interview (once is enough) to establish rapport.
- ***Educate the reporters***
Broadcast reporters typically won't know any more about the story than what they read in a news release or newspaper story they're following. They require education.
- ***Be lively, but not spastic***
Be enthusiastic but calm, avoiding sweeping gestures. What you do will be amplified on the screen.
- ***Talk in sound bites***
Your answers should last no more than 15 to 20 seconds. If longer, they will get edited down or not used. Remember to stay “on message”.
- ***Avoid jargon***
You should be colorful, yet clear in your answers; use anecdotes to help illustrate your point.
- ***Dress appropriately***
Look comfortable and professional in both body language and dress. Avoid loud patterns and don't wear a white shirt unless you also wear a jacket. Blue looks great on camera.

10 TIPS FOR COURTING BLOGGERS

1. *Be selective*

Make a list of several bloggers you plan to work with. Choose the ones for whom you feel an affinity. Not too many. It's better to cultivate a select few and engage them consistently.

2. *Follow their blogs*

Read and analyze what a blogger is writing before you approach him or her. Try to realize why readers like the blog. Choose only those who cover your topics (know much about your field). Hold an inquiry and find those who are needed and may be helpful.

3. *Leave comments*

If you are a newcomer in a niche, you need time to create an impression. Leave an occasional comment on the blogs you are targeting. Leave your name and affiliation. It will create rapport with the blogger and his or her readers.

4. *Engage using Twitter*

Most bloggers also tweet. Once you have identified the reporters and bloggers you want to target, follow them on Twitter. Retweet them and they will take notice. When you come across a great post, tweet it up and add the blogger's Twitter handle. "Great ideas for biz start-ups bitlyhvbsolu via @johndoe"

5. *Befriend your target blogger*

Be in contact with bloggers before you need them. Host "blogger" events in the community to help local bloggers connect to one another. The best way to gain loyalty is to engage the blogger as an expert. Send him or her an offer to participate in an event or invite that person to do a review blog of a new book or service. Offer up celebrity authors for interviews when possible.

6. *Offer to help*

Introduce yourself and ask how you can help—with information, your latest market research results, photos? Promise to help any time and in any case of need, and keep your word. Bloggers often have the same deadline pressures as traditional journalists.

7. *Acknowledge bloggers*

If you want to repost, ask permission. Provide a link to the blog site. Mention bloggers by name in your own posts or tweets.

8. *Don't send press releases*

Pitch bloggers via personal e-mail. Share your news succinctly—no more than a paragraph will do. Give a reason the story is right for their blog. "I've read your review of xyz and think that your readers might appreciate knowing about . . ." Include links and a photo or video if you have them. They'll improve the likelihood you'll get coverage.

9. *Be patient*

Bloggers often have more story ideas and content demands than time to write about them. They back-burner stories when other news hits, but will return to topics. Follow up gently if a promised post doesn't appear. Ask if they are stuck or need more information. Be persistent, not irritating.

10. *Offer "exclusive" information*

Bloggers are similar to journalists in preferring information that's truly unique. Learn to dole out exclusive information and story angles by fitting the topics to the blogger's beat.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF TALKING TO THE MEDIA

1. You don't have to answer every question directed at you.
2. Stick to your point and repeat it. Repetition is good!
3. Believe in your point.
4. Stay calm; don't get defensive.
5. Admit when you don't know the answer to a question. But always get the answer and call back.
6. Don't speak off-the-cuff or off the record.
7. Don't interrupt when others are effectively conveying your message.
8. Speak concisely and clearly so you will be quoted—and quoted accurately.
9. Treat reporters with respect. Acknowledge that they are only doing their job and help them to understand your story.
10. See the media as messengers who can tell your story to a broader audience.