



Working with the Media:

How to Prepare for an Interview about Center For Family Services or your program

Media interviews are one of the most effective ways to get information out into the world. Not only do they help our services reach a larger audience, it also serves as a medium for our staff to share their expertise. No matter if it's by phone, TV or radio, the goal of any media interview is to get positive information out and build interest in our work and mission. However, working with the media can be unpredictable and intimidating. The Public Relations team is here to support you in all aspects of preparing for an interview.

Types of Interviews

There are a variety of media interviews, each with their own advantages and disadvantages. Here are some of the most common:

- **Virtual**
 - This is done through a virtual platform like Zoom or Skype at home or in your office. This format is becoming increasingly more popular as it allows journalists easy access to experts from around the world.
- **Broadcast**
 - This is an interview that takes place face to face with a reporter in a tv studio or radio station and is live on air.
- **On camera**
 - This interview is filmed face to face on camera with an interviewer but is shown on TV or another media platform at a later date. These interviews can take place in or out of a tv studio and are edited before airing to the public.
- **Radio**
 - This type of interview is often done live in studio with a radio host or team but can also be recorded and aired at a later date. Listeners may also be allowed to call in with a question or comment for you to answer.
- **Phone**
 - This is an interview with a member of the media that takes place over the phone. It is either recorded for a later date, aired live, or quotes/statements from your responses are shared in print.

Tips for All Interviews

While every type of interview requires unique preparation, there are general tips that will help you prepare for any interview style.

1. The interview starts *before* your mic is on.

In most cases, you'll have a few minutes to chat with the reporter before filming. Use this time wisely and share why you're looking forward to bringing the topic to their audience. Often, this can help direct the questions asked on-air, so make the small talk count!

2. Have plenty of energy.

Media segments often take place early in the morning, so it's important to bring the enthusiasm. Use your voice to communicate excitement and passion; if you're excited about the topic, your interviewer and the audience are more inclined to feel the same.

Increase your energy by 10% when on camera/video. What may seem as over-the-top to you comes across as normal on camera, while your "regular" conversational tone may be viewed as tiresome or uninterested.

Remember to smile. You won't always be aware when the camera is focused directly on you (this includes teasers leading up to the segment).

Nerves can be turned into positive energy and excitement which will bring authenticity to your interview.

3. How to Dress.

Dress appropriately for the topic and tone. This can range from a branded t-shirt to business casual attire. Keep it simple and forgo heavy fabrics (the lights in a tv studio can get hot!) and avoid busy patterns or distracting jewelry that might turn your appearance into the focal point.

4. Practice Makes Perfect.

Take the time to repeat talking points out loud enough times that the words flow naturally. Study key messages, but be sure to practice putting answers in your own words for authenticity. Practicing will also help alleviate nerves.

- Pause after the interviewer's question, before you respond.
- Speak slowly. Be aware that most people tend to speak quickly when they are nervous, so be sure to slow down even more if you are nervous.
- It's okay to pause and think about the question before you reply.

- Replace the word “we” with either Center For Family Services or your specific program name. Connect with the PR Department prior to your interview to determine the focus of your interview.
- Determine if you’ll be sitting or standing—if standing, practice keeping your feet planted firmly on the ground to avoid swaying.

5. You are the Expert

In some cases, the reporter may not review your topic until just a few minutes before the interview. If they leave out a vital fact, it’s appropriate to bring it up on your own to help guide the conversation.

Brainstorm “tough questions” that may come up and exactly how you will respond to them effectively. If you simply don’t know the answer to a question, practice bridging statements such as “I’m not sure about that, but what I can tell you is…” to bring the segment back on track.

6. Make it about the audience.

What does the audience already know about your program or Center For Family Services? What do we want them to know and to remember? Keep in mind, people are generally bad at listening so keep your phrases short and simple as they best way keep their attention.

7. Make it visual.

Bring visual elements to the interview by submitting video or images. Connect with the PR Department for high quality images.

8. Familiarize yourself with the style of the interviewer

You may want to watch past interviews or news segments the reporter has done to understand their interview style and techniques. This will help you understand the tone of the interview and what to expect.

9. Make a clean exit

“Anything else you’d like our viewers to know?” This often arises at the end of the interview and there’s *always something to add*, such as directing them to your website. If you’re prepared with extra content in your back pocket, parting words aren’t an opportunity to be missed!

You can:

- Thank the interviewer for their time;
- Share the hours or location of your program, if applicable;
- Share how the public can get involved in your program;
- Encourage your audience to follow your program or the agency on social media;

- Mention any important upcoming events for your program or the agency (i.e. Empower Run & Walk, Domestic Violence Awareness Month).

Virtual Interview Tips

Though virtual interviews are generally held in more comfortable environments that can be lower stakes, they can be just as challenging.

1. Be aware of your background and surroundings.

Your interview should take place in a quiet space free of distractions and with a *neutral background. Make sure the room you're in is brightly lit from all sides. This will allow the audience to easily focus on you and what you have to say. Remember to also silence your phone and mute any notification sounds.

*looking for a background with Center For Family Services branding? Visit the Public Relations page on the Employee Portal for branded virtual backgrounds.

2. Test your technology and set up beforehand.

Technology is not always reliable. Testing your set up, including your camera and microphone, beforehand will alleviate any technology mishaps and make you feel more comfortable during your interview. You can even record yourself speaking beforehand to get an idea of how will look to an interviewer and viewers.

3. Look directly at your camera when speaking.

For all virtual interviews, use the camera on your laptop and not your cell phone. Imagine that your camera is your audience in the room in front of you and that you are speaking directly to them. Ensure that your camera is on before the interview begins and leave 1-2 inches of space between your head and the top of your camera display.

Broadcast/On Camera Interview Tips

1 . Arrive early.

This will give you time to gather your thoughts, ask questions, and get acclimated to the studio and culture.

1. Don't look at the camera.

Always keep your eyes on the interviewer, *not the camera*. It should appear as if you are having a conversation with a friend.

2. Go with the flow.

Breaking news happens. Your airtime might get delayed, prop set-up time might be reduced or the time segment could get cut in half. Keep calm, stay focused and go with the flow. Being able to adapt to the studio changes will mark you as a reliable guest for future segments.

Radio/Phone Interview Tips

1. Communicate Succinctly

Hosts find it frustrating if guests talk too long, especially if they're not on point. Short answers allow the host to ask another question, take another phone call, or go to commercial easily. They're also easier for the audience to comprehend. Have a clear and concise message and remember to use simple language that your audience will understand and connect with. If you're on the radio, rephrase your important points and say them several times, since listeners will be tuning in at various times throughout the interview.

2. Remember to smile

Though your face won't be seen during a radio or phone interview, listeners can pick up on someone that is smiling as they speak. Smiling will help you feel more confident and make you sound natural to your audience.

3. Sit Up Straight or Stand

Either sitting up straight or standing will help achieve your best voice and tone and make you sound alert.

4. Know your time frame

You can get a lot more across in 30 minutes than you can in 3 minutes. Having this information before your interview help you prepare your key points and questions.

5. Provide a bio beforehand

Send your bio and other information to your interviewer in advance. This will ensure that the host has a clear understanding of who you, Center For Family Services, and your program are.

6. Have a glass of water nearby

Your mouth may get dry as you speak. Have water or something to drink on hand so you can avoid any mishaps and feel comfortable.

7. Think of your interview as an intimate conversation with a friend

Speak directly to the interviewer and make eye contact when in person. The most engaging interviews have an upbeat pace and the banter easily goes back and forth between host and guest.

8. Keep going if you make a mistake

It's okay to stumble over your words. Often what you perceive as a mistake, the audience won't even notice.

9. Have a cheat sheet in front of you

Prepare a cheat sheet of 3 key messages and a variety of prepared answers to questions your interviewer or the audience may ask. This will help you to deliver your message and avoid getting side-tracked.

10. Sit close to the microphone in studio

For the best quality, it's recommended to sit no farther than a "fist's-length" away from your microphone.

Public Speaking

Being a good speaker has nothing to do with your personality, with overcoming shyness or learning to act confident. It is a technical skill that nearly anyone can acquire.

Be aware of a simple formula that considers the following:

- Who is your audience?
- What is your purpose?

As a result of my talk, my audience will understand (xx) and respond by (doing xx).

For example: As a result of my talk/interview/speech, viewers will understand that many kids in our community need help with back-to-school items and Project Backpack is a great way to make an impact. Project Backpack is a community wide collection to get backpacks filled with supplies to kids in need and they will respond by donating and rallying others to get involved.

Remember the 5 P's to Communicating with Impact

1. Purpose

- Each thought has an idea or purpose (i.e. to shock, to explain)
- Your purpose is the overall effect you want to have on the audience

2. Preparation

- Practice your speaking points as much as possible

3. Presence

- This is your energy and delivery
- Your presence should vary based off your audience

4. Personality

- What makes you unique and how can you bring that into your presentation

5. Passion

- If the audience can feel your passion they will care more about your cause/topic

General Public Speaking Tips

- Memorize your intro, key points, and conclusion. It's okay, and even recommended, to say the key messages over and over. Prioritize and repeat what you want your audience to remember.
- It's not about you, it's about the audience. Make sure you are talking for your audience
- Do everything you can to help the audience hear and understand you. People are bad at listening. Use short sentences and distill your message to 15 words. Eliminate anything that does not clearly support your purpose, and don't drown your audience in data. Use everyday language and avoid professional jargon.
- Organize your speaking points in the most effective and engaging manner.

With this information in mind, you'll be sure to have an engaging interview. Again, the Public Relations Department is here to make working with the media a smooth and enjoyable process. Please reach out with any questions or media inquiries.