



Media Relations 101

Provided by the Arlington Office of Communications

COA COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

- The City Manager is the authorized spokesperson for the City of Arlington.
- Deputy City Managers and Department Directors may speak on behalf of the City on matters within their areas of control.
- Department Directors may designate individual employees to handle news media relations and/or public information requests.
- The Office of Communication (OOC) is the primary agency for creating and managing the flow of public information between the City government, its employees and citizens.

WHEN A REPORTER CALLS

- Call them back promptly. If you can't, contact OOC or your supervisor.
- Never speak off the record. Assume everything you're saying may appear in print or on TV.
- Find out as much as you can. Ask them what they need and what their deadline is.

REPORTER NEEDS

- What's their deadline?
- What are the visuals?
- What kind of sound will they want/need?
- Is it a hard news story, feature?
- Respect enterprise stories.

INTERVIEW TIPS

- **Streamline:** Establish three main points you want to make and **stick** to them.
- **Follow the MOM Rule:** Be conversational and avoid technical jargon. Think about how you would explain something to your mom. Prepare anecdotes to bring a topic to life.
- **Think sound-bite:** Look for one sentence to sum up the story.
- **Don't rush:** Remember, you're the expert. Take time to think.
- **Don't speculate:** Beware of hypotheticals. Stick to the facts. Avoid giving opinions.
- **Never say "no comment":** If you're unable to answer a question, say so and explain why.
- **"I don't know" is ok:** Don't be afraid to say "I don't know." Just ask for the reporter's number and deadline and offer to find an answer.
- **Clarify:** If a question doesn't make sense, don't answer it. Politely ask for clarification.
- **Silence is okay:** When you are finished answering stop talking. Reporters often use silence to make you feel responsible for continuing the conversation.
- **Listen:** Truly understand what the reporter is telling you he/she wants and try to gauge how much he/she understands about the topic.
- **Be prepared:** In addition to doing your homework, bring visuals to back up your points.
- **Don't Repeat:** If the reporter uses a phrase you don't agree with, don't repeat it in your answer.
- **Storytelling:** Think of it as a story with a beginning, middle and end.

CAMERA TIPS

- Look at the interviewer, not the camera.
- Slow down and take your time.
- If seated, sit on your coattails.
- Smile (if appropriate). This can put everyone at ease.
- Be yourself. Personality has great appeal.
- Avoid large gestures.
- Don't read. Consider the interview a conversation.
- Check the mirror before the interview.
- Assume the mic is always on.

PREPARATION

- **Interview the reporter:** Find out who will be doing the interview, how long it will last, and the subject matter. Don't be afraid to ask "What gave you the idea to do this story?"
- **Anticipate:** Think about what questions may come up during the interview. What are the worst possible questions that can be asked? Develop answers for possible scenarios.
- **Organize:** Build three talking points and facts to back each up.
- **Support:** Bring supporting materials and/or visuals if appropriate.

WHEN DEALING WITH THE MEDIA...

DO:

- Have a good attitude
- Speak slowly and distinctly
- Volunteer appropriate information
- Recommend other sources
- Use good verbal skills
- Be factual and accurate
- Remain in control
- Be honest
- Correct inaccuracies
- Be prepared
- Back up statements with facts
- Honor deadlines
- Give examples (if appropriate)
- Find out what the story is about first
- Give short, clear answers
- Update information/stories
- Dress appropriately
- Smile

DON'T:

- Say "no comment"
- Guess
- Try to snow the reporter
- Lie
- Feed the mic
- Panic
- Answer what you don't understand
- Give a speech
- Jump to conclusions
- Be funny, sarcastic or defensive
- Lose your temper
- Give personal opinions
- Go off record
- Use jargon
- Talk before you're ready
- Be afraid to stop and restate your answer
- Be afraid to say "I don't know"
- Accept reporter's facts, figures, quotes
- Let reporter put words in your mouth
- Say "never" or "always"
- Mislead or be perceived as covering up
- Assess blame
- Debate
- Delay sharing information you have

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