



# News Media Workshop

*The Basics of Building Good Relationships with the Media*

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# Introduction

## Why Are The News Media So Important?

The No. 1 reason we, as public employees, need to learn about media is because *Americans use the media* — for information, entertainment, distraction, education and more. We can't avoid it; we can't act like it doesn't exist. So we might as well try to understand it.

- We're a public service agency, so everyone who reads a paper, watches TV or listens to radio is a customer who helps pay our bills. Their perception of us will help determine if they react favorably to department programs and services or to requests for legislative support.
- Employees are media watchers, too, and seeing a department representative in the public forum reminds them we're doing our best, and helps make them proud of the department.
- The news media provide the best opportunities to tell our side of the story.
- Reporters who get enthusiastic cooperation from us will give us a fair shake, as well as the benefit of any doubt.
- The media also provide an 'early-warning system' of public concerns or complaints that are surfacing.

## How The News Media Work

The news business is based on deadlines. Every story has to be ready for the 5 p.m. news or the morning newspaper, and reporters often have to rush to finish on time. So it's important that you provide information as quickly as possible to reporters.



## Channels To The News Media

There are several ways to get information to the media. ODOT Public Affairs helps coordinate news media contacts for the department. Here are a few ways we can work with you to communicate with the news media and the public:

### News Conferences

All news media that cover your organization are informed about time, date and place of the news conference. A statement is prepared and read by the agency's representative. A news release, fact sheet and visual aids, if necessary, also are made available. After the official statement is made, questions are taken.

### News Media Interviews

These are usually one-on-one interviews, either in person or by phone, usually done at the request of the media. They can be short, informational discussions — or in-depth stories.

### News Media Tours

Organized events to show the media a location or activity.

### News Releases

Information provided in a timely fashion to the general public through the media about ODOT issues, activities and programs.

### ODOT Radio News Service

A unique form of press release in an audio format that often works in combination with a newspaper press release. Public Affairs sends news-oriented, broadcast-ready stories to Oregon's radio stations statewide. Although programs, issues, and activities that have statewide appeal are preferred, regional issues also are covered.

### Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

A short information item, announcement or educational spot, offered by radio or TV as a public service — not as paid advertising.

### Special Events

Special events help the department project a positive public image through activities such as ground breaking ceremonies, grand openings and other celebrations. Special events also help develop positive community relations between the department and the public, creating community interest and support.

## Tips For Good Relations No Matter Which Medium

### Be Honest

Whether it's good news or bad — be honest. If the agency has erred, say so and explain what you are going to do to remedy the situation.

### Avoid Jargon

Explain in everyday English. Avoid using in-house acronyms, technical terms and jargon.

### Don't Argue With A Reporter

The reporter has the last word in print or on the air. You can disagree, however. Politely correct misconceptions. Be firm in your own viewpoint. Don't get mad.

### Think Of The Story From The Public's Viewpoint

What does it mean for individuals, businesses, neighborhoods, and taxpayers? Try to express numbers in 'people' terms — landmarks, licensed drivers, and motorists — rather than mile points, licenses, vehicles.

### If You Don't Know The Answer, Say So

Offer to get the information if you don't have the answer. Be prompt in getting back to the reporter, or call and let the reporter know there will be a delay. Many of ODOT's activities are a matter of public record, but if the issue is protected information — personnel records, property negotiations — say so rather than "no comment."

### Make Your Point Up Front

Radio and TV reporters may edit your remarks to 30 seconds or less. Make it easy for them to keep your comments intact by keeping your answer short and clear.

### Honor Deadlines

If you need to get more information, find out the reporter's deadline. If you can't meet it, let the reporter know.

### If You Don't Want To Be Quoted, Don't Say It

Anything you say may be printed or broadcast. You can't go 'off the record' retroactively.





**Relax**

Get to the point, but don't rush through your presentation. Take a deep breath. Pause every now and then to collect your thoughts and keep on track.

**Be Aware Of Time**

The reporter has a job to do — get the story and meet the deadline — and has little patience for chitchat. If you are unaware of the reporter's deadline, ask. It will help you both to have clear expectations.

**Don't Be Afraid To Say, "I Don't Know"**

If you don't know the answer to a question, be honest and say you don't know. Don't hazard a guess. Do tell the reporter where they can get that information. Don't just let the information request drop.

**Be As Objective As Possible**

Like the reporter, you need to remain as objective about your topic as possible. No personal opinions, please. Don't let personal bias creep into the conversation. Remember: you will be perceived as speaking on behalf of ODOT.

**Employ The Human Angle**

Example: a former railroad employee turned deaf by exposure to excessive noise can no longer hear the wind or the voices of his wife and grandchildren.

**Offer Story Ideas**

This is best done at the end of an interview; any other time would be distracting. No matter how rushed they might appear, reporters are always looking for good story ideas.



## Tips For A Successful Radio Interview

### “The Six Ps”

#### *Prepare*

When you get a call to do a radio interview, take a few minutes to find your news release, fact sheet or notes. Jot down a few notes on the main points you wish to make. Then talk to the reporter with confidence.

#### *Positive*

When you are preparing your notes, look for the positive aspects of the story. It's refreshing to hear something positive, and it helps your agency look good in the public eye.

#### *People*

Radio listeners are people who are affected by what you and your agency do each day. Radio reporters are trained to talk about — and do stories about — people. Talk about how your story affects people: taxpayers, drivers, tourists, merchants, commuters, car-poolers, pilots, air shippers, etc.

#### *Point*

Stick to one or two main points. Try to keep your comments to no more than three sentences, or a maximum of 30 seconds. If you can make your point using a good example and clever or colorful language and explanations, do it. A reporter will often use an 'actuality' that sounds lively rather than one that is colorless.

#### *Project*

Your voice is the only way you can communicate directly with radio listeners. When you are being interviewed — in person or on the phone — speak clearly and distinctly, using your diaphragm muscles for vocal power. Try to project your voice through the radio speaker to an imaginary listener in the back seat of an imaginary car. This has little to do with speaking loudly, but has a lot to do with speaking authoritatively and confidently.

#### *Practice*

Your best tool for practice is sitting on your desk at work. It is also in your home. It's called the telephone. Every time you use the phone, practice the other five P's. Pretend a radio reporter is on the other end of the line. Prepare your thoughts. Accentuate the positive. Talk about people. Make your point quickly and project your voice.



## **Anatomy Of A TV News Story**

### ***Interview:***

The crew will interview one or more people. The interview will last from five to 45 minutes. Final on-camera sound bites will run from 10 to 25 seconds.

### ***Visuals:***

The more action the better. Reporters prefer to have a picture of every element of the story they discuss. Sources should think of locations and good times for shooting. TV stations can quickly reproduce maps, charts or other graphics for display on screen.

### ***Length:***

Field reports are generally from about one minute to three minutes long.

## **Tips For A Successful TV Interview**

### **Prepare**

Jot down a few main points you want to make, gather facts and figures you wish to mention. You may need them.

### **Relax**

Concentrate on what you are saying and forget about the camera. If you stumble, take a deep breath and start over. If you feel you just presented one of your strongest arguments in a rambling or incoherent fashion, make your point again. The reporter wants your 'sound bite' to make sense.

### **Maintain Eye Contact**

Always look at the interviewer and not at the camera. If your eyes dart around the room, you look less credible, and it's distracting.

### **Always Assume The Tape Is Rolling**

Often the photographer starts the tape without telling you in order to help make you less nervous. The photographer always records sound when recording a picture, so be careful what you say, even after the formal on-camera interview is over. Any comment you make may end up on the air or be stated by the reporter as part of the story.

## **State Your Point And Speak Briskly And Clearly**

If you want a reporter to use certain information, say it in a clever or colorful way. Often a reporter will pick a lively sound bite over one with more substance. It is also better to pause and gather your thoughts before you answer than it is to punctuate your sentences with “. . .uh-uh-uh . . .”

## **Be Concise In Your Response And Be Conversational**

Avoid long words, lengthy sentences and technical explanations. Most TV sound bites average 15 seconds. Few run longer than 25 seconds. But don't get carried away, just be aware of how you get your point across. Also, be conversational. An interview that is stilted or filled with jargon will stand out like a sore thumb in a broadcast story.

## **Try to Relate Your Statement to People**

Ask yourself, “How does this affect the average person? How can I state this in a way that the average person can relate to and understand?”

## **Avoid Using Numbers And Figures**

Avoid the temptation to dazzle the audience with a lot of facts and figures. If you want to make a statistical comparison, keep it brief and use a concept that people can visualize in their mind's eye: “It will take a line of dump trucks four miles long to remove this slide debris.” Then if you want to give the reporter detailed figures, give them in writing.

## **The Camera Does Not Blink**

Messy hair or a crooked tie may be overlooked in person, but the TV screen seems to intensify it. Look in the mirror before you go on camera. And if you are sitting in a chair that rocks or swivels — don't. If you get nervous and rock, all the television audience will see is your head bobbing up and down on the screen. It can be quite amusing, at your expense.

## **Don't Argue With The Reporter Or Lose Your Cool**

The reporter may be playing devil's advocate, just to get a colorful sound bite. Keep your cool. Don't give an angry or defensive response. And if you're tempted to argue, remember: the reporter always has the last word.





## How to Develop Your SOCO — Single Overriding Communication Objective

Figure out ahead of time what your main message is and how to say it in one, simple sentence. This is your guarantee that no matter if the interview is friendly or not, you always are able to clearly state your main message.

- Make sure your message is clear, focused on the positive, and brief.
- Remember that a colorful sound bite that tells how people will be affected is the one that reporters are most likely to use. But, beware of being too flip.
- Use flagging and bridging to work your Single Overriding Communication Objective into every question you're asked.
- To reinforce your SOCO, follow up with a short list of facts and information.

### Flag Your SOCO

Reporters like good sound bites. You can point them to a good sound bite that features your message by flagging it ahead of time. Here's how:

- When answering a question, point the reporter to your Single Overriding Communication Objective by saying, "If there's only one thing you take away from today's interview, it's this: . . ." and then tell them what it is.

### Build A Bridge

Answer negative questions by bridging. Respond directly to a negative question, continue with a brief transition statement, and then end with a positive conclusion by restating your SOCO. Use the 15-10-15 formula:

- Direct response = 15 sec.
- Transition = 10 sec.
- Restate your SOCO = 15 sec.

### Make Sure You're Clear

If a reporter unfairly or unclearly restates what you say:

- Don't get emotional. Instead:
- Politely say, "I guess I didn't make my point clearly. What I said was . . ." and then restate your SOCO.



## Reporter Tactics You Can Overcome

Most reporters are busy people trying to do a good job against the pressures of the never-blinking deadline hour. Hostile reporters are rare, but they do exist, and they may use some of the following tactics in their interview. Learn the tips for how to deal with them.

### The Machine Gunner

When you are asked several questions in a row, machine-gun-style:

- Pick the question you're most comfortable answering and bridge back to your topic.
- Or, toss the questions back by saying, "You've asked me several questions. Which do you want me to answer first?"

### The Interrupter

When a reporter doesn't let you finish your answer to a question:

- Stop and listen politely.
- Suggest that you'll answer as soon as you finish with the earlier question.
- Don't allow the pace of the interview to accelerate — it will only trip you up.

### The "Words In Your Mouth" Play

- Reporter: "Looking at the poor safety record, isn't this highway clearly a killer?"
- If the statement is offensive, don't repeat it — even to deny it.
- You: "Our primary concern is safety. That's why we're spending \$2 million for these safety improvements . . ."

### The "Pregnant Pause..." Strategy

- A reporter merely stares at you while pointing the mike in your face. What do you do?
- Resist the temptation to fill the silence.
- Instead ask: "Does that answer your questions?" Or, simply stare back — pleasantly, of course.

### The "Hypothetical" Game

- Reporter: "What happens if the steel beams in this bridge crack?"
- Don't play this game, aside from labeling the situation as clearly hypothetical.

## The “Missing Witness” Gambit

- Reporter: “Some people say . . .” or, “I am told that . . .”
- You: “Who said that?” Then wait for a clarification or a rephrasing of the question.

## The “Lesser Of Two Evils” Ploy

- Reporter: “Which does ODOT prefer, continuing to risk damaging wetlands and fish habitat with highway construction or increasing the effects of congestion?”
- You: “Neither one.” Then bridge back to your SOCO.

## The “Needle” Gimmick

- Reporter: “You really don’t believe that, do you?”
- You: “I do.” Then bridge back to your SOCO.

## The “Baiting” Lure

- Reporter: “Why does the taxpayer group say private contractors should do all the road work?”
- You: “You really need to ask them that question. I can tell you that ODOT is dedicated to saving taxpayer dollars. That’s why we contract out all of our highway construction work.”

## The “False Assumption” Ruse

- Reporter: “I assume you really don’t care about the problems caused by this project.”
- You: “I don’t agree with your conclusion. We are concerned and have done the following: . . .”

## The “What Do You Think” Tactic

- Reporter: “You’ve given the agency line, but what’s your personal view?”
- Your job is that of an agency spokesperson. Don’t offer your personal opinion for any reason.

## The “Responding For Someone Else” Maneuver

- Reporter: “How will the (mayor, legislator, governor, senator, business owner, etc.) react?”
- You: “You’ll have to ask (him, her, them).” Don’t respond on behalf of anyone else but ODOT.

## The “Inconsistency” Trap

- Reporter: “Last fall you said you’d build the new highway and now you won’t. Why?”
- You: “We made the best decision possible with the information we had at the time. When we got new information we had to set a new direction . . .”

## The “Secret Documents” Design

- Reporter: “We’ve got information from within ODOT that . . .”
- Ask to see a copy of the information being cited (the reporter may not want to share it with you, however).
- If you are unaware of the information, say so.
- If you are aware of the information, be as positive as possible.
- This is one of the questions you should have developed an answer for when preparing.

## The “Refused Comment” Threat

- Reporter: “If you don’t tell me, I’ll have to report that you refused to comment.”
- You: “I disagree. I’m not refusing to comment. I just have to get the necessary information you need so that I can make a comment as soon as possible.”

## Whatever You Do, PLEASE...

### Don’t Wing It

Take the time you need to be as well prepared as possible. Develop a good Single Overriding Communication Objective.

### Don’t Use Technical Jargon

No one but transportation techies will understand you.

### Don’t Go “Off The Record”

There’s no such thing. Anything you say is fair game.

### Don’t Shade the Truth

Ever, to any degree, for any reason. It will come back to haunt you.

### Don’t Argue with Reporters

They always have the last word. Always.

### Don’t Stonewall

Do get back to reporters with information on time.

### Do Talk From the Viewpoint Of the Public

They’re the ones paying attention to your message.

### Do Give the Score First, Then Play-By-Play

Using your SOCO, first tell your main points simply. Then follow up with any details reporters might need for background or analysis.

NOTES

# Create Your Message: Your Single Overriding Communications Objective (SOCO) Work Sheet

## Key Message:

In one brief paragraph, please state the key point or objective in doing the interview. This statement should reflect what you would like to see as the lead paragraph in a newspaper story or broadcast news report.

## Key Facts:

What are the three facts or statistics you would like the public to remember as a result of reading or hearing about this story?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## Think About Your Target audience:

Who is the main audience or population segment you would like this message to reach?

Primary:

Secondary:

## Interview Objective:

What is the one message the audience needs to take away from this report/interview?

## Primary Media Contact:

Who in your office/organization will serve as the primary point of contact for the media?

Name:

Contact info:









## On-Camera Interview Tips

Whenever you appear in an on-camera interview, there's one important thing to keep in mind:

### **The Camera Doesn't Blink; The Camera Doesn't Lie**

That means that the camera will record not only your appearance and words, but also your body language and the attitude it broadcasts to viewers. Here's how to avoid sending the wrong message through the TV screen to viewers.

### **Plant Yourself Comfortably**

Stand comfortably, with one foot pointed toward the camera and the other toward the interviewer. Face the interviewer and speak to him or her directly. This looks best on camera.

### **Avoid The Shifty-Eye Effect**

Maintain eye contact with the interviewer and have a direct conversation with them. Ignore the camera. Otherwise, as you look back and forth, you'll come off as shifty-eyed, evasive, and as a person not to be believed.

### **Don't Rock And Roll**

Remember that as you nervously shift your weight from one foot to the other, you'll be rocking from one side of the camera frame to the other, to hilarious effect when viewed later. Same problem if you rock back and forth on your heels, or if you can't keep still in your office chair. You'll look like you're on a rocking horse or aboard a leaky boat. The image you project will be unprofessional at best or an entry for "America's Funniest Videos" at worst. Learn to stand comfortably in one spot in front of the camera.

### **Give Your Hands Something To Hold**

One of the most common questions posed by people being interviewed is, "What do I do with my hands?" Suddenly, you can become conscious of your limbs and feel awkward and unnatural. And how you use them can send a signal to viewers about how comfortable you are answering questions.

It doesn't look good to stand with your hands behind your back like a pompous professor, or clasped protectively in front of your body like a fig leaf, or crossed akimbo like a pouting child. And holding them stiffly at your sides can make you look, well, like a stiff. What to do?

Take a tip from the pros. Make your nervous hands useful and you'll feel and look more relaxed. Calmly hold a pen, or a small notebook with the outline of the interview points you want to remember. The camera will then see you as a prepared professional instead of a fidgety amateur.

## **Appearances Count**

Please dress appropriately for an interview, given the setting in which you work. That means you may want to wear a jacket and tie or a suit if you normally would do so in your office. It also means that it's perfectly OK to wear a hardhat, casual shirt, jeans and boots if you're on a construction or maintenance job in the field. But please avoid wearing shirts, hats or jackets with logos other than ODOT's.

## **Remember Your 3rd Grade Teacher**

Miss Harris was right. Chewing gum is out of place in the classroom, and it's out of place in an interview. Please get rid of the gum. Same goes for snuff, chew, cigarettes and cigars. You can reward yourself afterwards with your favorite habit.

## **Forget The Foster Grants**

Please don't wear your favorite Buddy Holly sunglasses or those nifty photogray lenses that turn darker in bright light. Take off those dark glasses. Viewers will think you have something to hide if they can't see your eyes as you answer questions. Regular glasses are OK, however.

## **Keep It In Neutral**

When it comes to your TV wardrobe, it's best to keep it neutral. Solid colors in blues and pastels photograph well. Avoid wearing tight prints and patterns, such as checks, herringbones and plaids. Video cameras can't always resolve these patterns without causing unintended psychedelic effects — at your expense.

There's a reason talk show hosts stick to basic solid colors, such as the standard light blue shirt or blouse and dark tie or scarf. It's because those combinations look the best and most professional in front of the camera.

## **Check The Mirror One Last Time**

Tie straight? Shirt or blouse buttoned properly? Hair combed? Makeup OK? Ketchup stain from lunch wiped off your jacket? Remember that the camera reflects exactly what it sees.

## Television Talk

Television folk, like you, have their own special lingo. They use it so much, they often assume you know what they are talking about. Here is a glossary of common TV terms to help you understand them.

### Sound Bite, Bite, Sound Pop, Talking Head

This is your on-camera quotation. It is the short 15-second to 25-second portion of your videotaped interview that is used in the story.

### Cutaway

A shot of the reporter talking to you, taken immediately before or after the on-camera interview. When a photographer says, “Stay right there, I need a cutaway,” he wants you to sit or stand just as you were during the interview. He will walk around behind you and take a picture of the reporter over your shoulder. Don’t step aside, assuming you are in the way. He wants your head and shoulders in the shot. But remember that when the camera is rolling, the microphone also is on — so beware of saying anything you don’t want to hear on the air.

### Fonts

Printed words you see on the screen. When your sound bite appears on the screen, your name will often be ‘fonted up’ in the lower portion of the screen. When a reporter asks you how you want your font to read, she is generally asking you about your preferred job title.

### Live Shot

When a reporter interviews you live at a remote location (not in the studio). Generally the reporter on the scene will conduct the interview, unless the anchors do a ‘talk back’ with you.

### Talk Back

When the studio anchor interviews the subject of a live shot who is not in the studio. This is what you generally see on programs such as “Nightline.”

### Stand-Up

That portion of the story where you see the reporter standing with a microphone and talking directly into the camera.

## NOTES

### **Package**

A story produced with the reporter's own voice doing the narrating and generally ending with a stand-up. Longer, more involved stories are almost always done in package format (two minutes or longer). When you see a reporter doing a stand-up, you can assume this story is one of the priority assignments for the reporter that day.

### **Voice Over, VO**

A shorter story — generally 45 seconds to one-minute-and-10-seconds long. The anchor reads the story live from the studio while the videotape is shown on the screen (voice over video). If a reporter says the story is a voice over, don't expect much airtime.

### **Natural Sound, Nat Sound, Wild Sound**

Naturally occurring sound like a jackhammer or construction equipment working, or children playing. Reporters like to use natural sound in their story to make viewers feel they are on the scene. If a camera operator walks up very close to you while you are talking, he may be trying to record natural sound off the camera microphone. It is possible your remarks will be heard on the air, so be aware.

### **White Balance**

When a photographer turns on the camera, he or she will point the lens at a white object in order to adjust the camera to record true colors. Don't be alarmed when the photographer points the camera at a letter on your desk — he's just adjusting the color, not taking a picture of your correspondence. (But don't leave confidential correspondence on your desk during an interview.)

