

WHEN A REPORTER CALLS

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- ▶ Take control; don't answer questions until you're ready.
- ▶ Note the reporter's name, affiliation, and phone number.
- ▶ Ask what the story is about.
- ▶ Find out the reporter's deadline.
- ▶ Define the role you'll play in the story.
- ▶ Suggest other sources.
- ▶ Set ground rules for the interview: subject area, time, place, duration.
- ▶ Pick an interview site that is convenient and comfortable for you.
- ▶ Regard the interview as an opportunity to tell your story or to make your points.
- ▶ Remember your audience is the public, not the reporter.
- ▶ Decide what you want the public to understand about the subject.
- ▶ Pick one or two points you want to make.
- ▶ Keep your language simple, as though you were explaining to a neighbor.
- ▶ Avoid jargon.
- ▶ Prepare relevant examples and analogies.
- ▶ Make notes for easy reference.
- ▶ Prepare a list of probable questions and short, concise answers.
- ▶ Collect material that will help the reporter understand the story.
- ▶ Rehearse with someone you trust.
- ▶ If possible, tape the interview so you can catch your own errors before they're part of the permanent print or broadcast record.
- ▶ If a reporter asks you to comment off the record, decline. Assume everything you say in an interview will appear in the story.
- ▶ Don't wait for the reporter to ask the "right question." Make your main point early and often.
- ▶ Be concise; you will be less likely to be quoted out of context if you are clear and concise.
- ▶ Make sure you understand each question.
- ▶ If a question contains erroneous information, don't let it slide. Correct it.
- ▶ Don't evade questions. If you don't know the answer, say so.
- ▶ Never lie.
- ▶ Beware of hypothetical questions; don't be pressured into speculating.
- ▶ Don't ask or expect to approve the story before it is printed or broadcast.
- ▶ Be available for follow up; encourage the reporter to call back with other questions or for clarifications.
- ▶ Ask others what they thought of the story. If the story has major errors, don't let anger or embarrassment rule your response.
- ▶ Call the reporter to correct errors in the story; uncorrected errors get repeated as fact in follow-up stories.
- ▶ If other reporters call you, use the new contact as an opportunity to correct any errors or misperception.

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