

**WORKING WITH THE MEDIA**  
**NASAA PIO Peer Group Session**  
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Good afternoon. I'm delighted to be with you. Truly. And to share what I've learned about working with the media. So far. Because, there's always more to learn.

There is a lot we could talk about but in the 12 or so minutes I have with you, I'm going to touch upon two avenues, when media contact you and when you contact media.

Some of what I'm not going to talk about you, can be found in the NEA's **Working with the Media Toolkit** that you may be familiar with. Our grantees have found it to be helpful so I encourage you to go to the NEA website and check it out

([https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Spring\\_2018\\_media\\_toolkit.pdf](https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Spring_2018_media_toolkit.pdf)).

There are sections on organizing a media event, radio and TV etiquette, and working in social media. I also have a few copies with me.

We all know that getting positive media coverage is really, really hard, especially in our busy, changing, and crazy world. But there are three things that I have found that are key and that I want you take away and those are: be responsive, target your efforts, and tailor your message/ask.

**When the media contacts you:**

Your goal as a public information officer is to be a trusted source for journalists, someone they think of when they need arts information, even if it doesn't pertain specifically to your agency. Someone who is responsive,

trustworthy, and provides excellent information, or access to excellent information.

- Be responsive to media queries either via phone or email
  - If you can't provide the information they request right away, at least acknowledge receipt of their request.
  - Make sure you understand what they need, what form they need it in, and most important, by when they need it, then get it for them as soon as you can (even before their deadline).
    - If you need more time, ask for more time. Don't assume that later is OK.
  
- Be honest/forthright within the parameters of protecting your agency.
  - Understand that finding that balance is tricky but it is possible.
  - Most journalists are pretty discerning about what they are told but they also understand that you have a job to do.
  - Can still say, "That is the information we can provide at this time"; "The chairman is not available for interviews," and still be forthright.
  
- Be patient (i.e. when they ask for just one more piece of information).
  
- Make their job easy by "doing their job for them."
  - "Write" the story for them through the information you provide.
  - The information should be clear, concise, complete, jargon-free, and answer their query as closely as possible.
  - Provide context, place the information within a framework that highlights why your information is important.
    - Don't just send a link if the information isn't immediate and obvious from that link.

- For example, my super wonderful colleague Liz Auclair was contacted by a reporter looking to write a story on the NEA's support of folk and traditional arts apprenticeships. Before and after an interview, we provided the following information to help guide the reporter.
  - Outlined the ways the NEA supports apprenticeships—direct grants to nonprofits and through state folklife partnerships. Provided examples.
  - Directed the reporter to useful publications, citing *specific pages* with testimonials and history of the NEA's support in this area.
  - Provided numbers—overall amount of recent support in the folk and traditional arts as well as specific numbers about the state folklife programs.
  
- Interview requests
  - Determine if the request is worth the time of the person being requested or if there is a more appropriate person. (e.g., student requests for chair)
  - If you are setting up an interview with your director or other lead staff:
    - It's your job to confirm all of the details and staff the interview unless otherwise instructed or circumstances allow. (Story about Mpls jazz artist and local radio station)
    - Ask the reporter for questions they plan to ask so that the interviewee "is best prepared" or ask for the general thrust of the interview.
      - Don't be afraid to probe a bit as this can often help the journalist clarify their own thoughts.
    - Draft a briefing memo depending on the interviewee, outlet, and nature of the questions. Can range from a formal memo to an email.

- Other details you might need with a radio interview request include: live or taped, listeners' questions, others who are part of the segment.
- Not going to cover crisis communications since Leah will explore that topic except to say that my favorite phrase is, "Let me get back to you on that."

### **When you contact the media**

Kinds of announcements: Grants, events, research, initiatives, statements

It is important to have some kind of plan. Can be comprehensive or less formal but something that lays out what you want to achieve and how you're going to achieve it.

- Goals: why you're doing media outreach and how it connects with your agency's goals and messaging
- Objective: what do you want to achieve (kinds of coverage you're shooting for). Can include anticipated outcomes such as getting a story on a particular radio program or generating a certain amount of traffic on Twitter.
- Strategies and tactics: how you're going to accomplish the above using different platforms.
- Audiences: For whom. This can include the specific mailing lists you plan to use.
- Key messages
- Timeline

With daily outlets, make your pitch local, local, local.

- Even if you are pitching something that is relevant to the outlet's audience but not directly connected, it may not land a story. (Story about aging study and Las Vegas)

With trades, make it relevant/topical/current

### Pitching for feature stories

- Target your efforts and tailor your message
  - Research which outlets and which reporters might cover your news.
  - This takes a lot of time. Does the outlet take pitches from outside sources? What kinds of stories do they cover? And then to the specific reporter, what have they written about? What are their interests? How can you help them write a great follow up story to something they've already written?
  - It's helpful if your pitch can reference a specific article/story the reporter has written. Proves you've been paying attention and done your homework.
  - Send a tight, well-constructed email and follow up with a phone call.
  - One voice message but can call more often to try to reach them.
- If they aren't interested in a story, might they want photos or video?
- Outside of planned announcements, take advantage of news that can be leveraged to feature your agency.

### Create ancillary materials, fact sheets, infographics and icons

- Media really like fact sheets.
- Offers your agency a means to maintain consistency in messaging and data presentation.
- Quick easy to use resource for everyone.