



TIPS FOR MEDIA INTERVIEWS

NOVEMBER 2021

What are we trying to accomplish?

Our goal is to elevate the conversation around housing in ways that prioritize racial equity and highlight the challenges faced by renters across our region. This approach is also designed to unseat negative attitudes about renters and reduce resistance to the 3Ps consensus policy frame. We want to shift the narrative:

- **From housing scarcity → housing justice**
- **From individual responsibility → structural change**
- **From “rugged individualism” → a shared community that benefits all**
- **From fear of loss through change → confronting the risks of the status quo**
- **From defeatism and reliance on luck → belief in change through collective action**

How do media interviews help us accomplish these goals?

- Push back on dominant narratives that we see in the press
- Opportunity to explain our messages to reporters/producers and audiences
 - Reporters and producers decide how to frame their stories
- Builds relationships so that reporters will come back to your organization for future stories



Best Practices for Engaging with Reporters

- Respond in a timely manner
 - Don't ghost reporters -- they will remember!
- Be a resource for data & voices
- Connect them to other information or orgs
- Be aware of sounding/seeming self-promotional
- Thank reporters for their work
 - You don't always need an ask to reach out to reporter



TYPES OF MEDIA INTERVIEWS

“COFFEE” INTRO



BACKGROUND (NOT “ON BACKGROUND”) +



BROADCAST (LIVE / PRE-RECORDED)



PRESS CONFERENCE / PANEL





UNDERSTANDING ON BACKGROUND vs. ON/OFF THE RECORD



ON BACKGROUND vs. ON/OFF THE RECORD

- **On background** = the reporter can publish the information given but won't use your name.
 - Examples: “A senior official with the Biden administration..” or “A source close to the matter says...”
- **On the record** = expect your name and title to be printed! Think of it as a public conversation
 - Don't say anything in an interview you wouldn't want to see on the front page of the New York Times.
- **Off the record** = the information cannot be used for publication
 - ***The terms of the conversation should be negotiated up front.***
 - Need to make sure you get agreement from the reporter **before** you start speaking.



BEFORE YOUR INTERVIEW

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LOGISTICAL TASKS WHEN REPORTERS REACH OUT

- Ask the reporter to **clarify** exactly what they want to talk about.
- Confirm the **deadline** for when the reporter needs to talk by.
- Confirm that you need to do an interview instead of sending a **statement** via email.
- **Schedule** an interview time and set up a phone number or video link.

BEFORE YOUR INTERVIEW



MENTAL PREP ONCE INTERVIEW IS CONFIRMED

- **Write down on paper:**
 - Your 3 main points,
 - Examples
 - Best supporting evidence
 - Personal stories
- Read a few of the reporter's **recent articles and tweets** so you're familiar with their work.
- Prepare for any **tough questions** that you could be asked.
- Do a **practice** run-through with a colleague.
- Practice **pivoting** back to the points you do want to make – “I can't speak to that, but what I can tell you is...”



DURING YOUR INTERVIEW

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DO'S

- Keep your answers short and simple. Once you make your point, **stop talking**.
- That **awkward silence** between questions is ok. Embrace it.
- Share **stories** and real-world examples.
- Be aware of your **body language**.
- When a reporter asks, "Is there anything else you'd like to add?" take the opening to **repeat your most important message** one more time.

DON'TS

- Don't just give a **one-word "yes" or "no"** answer. Back up your answer with stories or facts.
- Don't use **jargon or acronyms** that your uncle wouldn't understand.

DEALING WITH TOUGH QUESTIONS



- **Reject the premise** of bad questions → *“Actually, what’s relevant here is...”*
- Pivot back to your **main points** to avoid directly answering a question → *“What I think is most important for people to know is...”*
- **Don’t force an answer** or make things up. You can always say → *“I’m not sure – let me get back to you with more info.”* / *“I’m not an expert on that but what I do know is...”*
- **Avoid** saying “no comment.”
- It’s ok to **end the interview** if it’s hostile or makes you feel uncomfortable.



AFTER YOUR INTERVIEW

AFTER YOUR INTERVIEW



- Ask the reporter **when they expect** the final story to be broadcast or published so you can keep an eye out for it.
- **Email any follow-up items** (links, materials, contact info for other voices) that you think would help the reporter while they're working on the story.
- You can **thank the reporter for paying attention to the issue**. (But don't thank them for this story or including you. They aren't doing the story as a favor and can be put off by these kinds of thank yous.)
- Follow them on **Twitter** (if you are active on Twitter)
- Send short **3-4 sentence emails** when you have an update or when you like a news piece they worked on.



STRONG MEDIA INTERVIEWS



Example 1: KGO-TV Interview with Stephen Menendian



What makes this a strong interview?

- Gets his main point across at the top of the interview
- Concise answers -- stops talking after making his point
- Uses accessible language instead of policy/academic jargon
- Smoothly pivots when he doesn't have the exact answer
- Wraps up answers with powerful factual statements
- Guides the listener through the information

Example 2: Detroit NPR interview with Cynthia Harrison



Mental Health Professionals, Not Police, Should Respond to Crises, Say Michigan Advocates

by [Detroit Today](#), [Nora Rhein](#) | Nov. 12, 2021



What makes this a strong interview?

- Hooked the audience right off the bat with “What I want you to visualize is...”
- Clearly explained the opposing position, quickly blunting any counter-argument
- Continued to engage the audience with “I want you to envision..”
- Final powerful line
 - “Individuals who are experiencing a behavioral health crisis need to be met with help, and not handcuffs.”

IT'S 100% OK TO NOT DO THE INTERVIEW...



- If a reporter calls you directly out of the blue → schedule a **better time** to talk.
- If you **distrust** the reporter/outlet.
- If you are too **busy**.



QUESTIONS?



IT'S HUMAN TO BE NERVOUS

DEALING WITH NERVES



- Write down your **main points + examples**. Have them in front of you.
- **Practice** taking off and landing the plane.
- Take some **deep breaths** before + during.



YOU'RE PROBABLY WONDERING...

WHAT TO WEAR



- For broadcast interviews, **avoid wearing:**
 - All black, all white, all green
 - Clothes with small patterns such as pinstripes and polka dots
 - Jewelry that makes noise (necklaces or bracelets) that will get picked up on audio
- For all interviews:
 - Wear something you feel **comfortable** in and won't be fidgeting with.

WHY DIDN'T I GET QUOTED IN THE STORY?



Unfortunately...

- Word count space is **limited**
- **Editors** remove sections without talking with reporters

Fortunately...

- Your conversation always helps **inform & shape** the story
- Reporters will think of you for their **next stories**



IF YOU REMEMBER JUST 3 THINGS...



1

Write down your **main points & examples**

2

Be **brief** with your answers

3

Take a few deep **breaths**



QUESTIONS?

