



HAVING TOUGH CONVERSATIONS WITH REPORTERS

JANUARY 2022

Agenda for today's training

PART 1

- Presentation on tactics for tough conversations, with time for Q&A
 - Goals of Shift the Bay initiative
 - Best practices for engaging with reporters
 - Recording media interviews
 - Scenarios that do/don't warrant asking for a correction
 - Examples - best practices for engaging with reporters

PART 2

- Conversation with Louis Hansen, Bay Area News Group/Mercury News

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

**WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY
'TOUGH CONVERSATIONS'?**

Defining “Tough Conversations”

- **Corrections & retractions**

- This is most common

- **Improvements**

- Asking the reporter to change the language they're using
- Highlighting people + perspectives that the reporter may not have known to include
- Explaining how some types of reporting can be damaging to individuals and groups - especially those who have historically been marginalized
- Sending information you should've included as a follow up to your interview

Corrections



- **Correction** = adjusting an inaccurate factual error = though the error didn't take away from the main point of the article

Example of a correction

An [article](#) on Sunday about the eruption of an underwater volcano near the South Pacific island of Tonga referred incorrectly to New Zealand's location relative to Tonga. It is southwest, not northeast, of Tonga.

Retractions



- **Retraction** = the reporter and/or media outlet admitting that they got the story completely wrong. A retraction means they are fully taking back what they wrote.

Example of a retraction

"An earlier version of this story, published Thursday, incorrectly reported that One America News was warned by the FBI that it was the target of a Russian influence operation," read the correction by The Post, which first reported the news. "That version also said the FBI had provided a similar warning to Rudolph W. Giuliani, which he has since disputed."

"This version has been corrected to remove assertions that OAN and Giuliani received the warnings," the correction added.

Scenarios that warrant asking for a correction:

- There is a factual error, and you can provide a source for the correct fact.
 - *Note: Never guess when it comes to statistics*
- You or someone at your organization was misquoted
 - *Note: Always record your media interviews*
- There is a misspelling, incorrect title, or wrong description
- The reporter included something that was supposed to be off the record

How to approach a reporter with a correction

- Avoid assigning blame outright.
- Politely point out the error, provide the reporter with the correct information, and ask them to run a correction.
- Be prepared and available to workshop correction language shortly after outreach..

Scenarios that *do not* warrant asking for a correction:

- You don't like how your quote is perceived in the article
- You take issue with how your organization is being portrayed
- You don't like the tone of the article
- The reporter didn't use all/any of the information you provided

A quick note about “Off the Record” conversations

- **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.
- **After the interview:** You have limited options once a story is printed and your name is in it
- Follow up with the reporter and explain how you understood this was off the record / ask for clarification
- Bring in the editor / publisher if needed

Recording your media interviews

- Always record **all** media interviews – and get consent from other parties first!
- Reasons to record:
 - Get ahead of clarifications or corrections
 - Soundbites or quotes to use going forward
 - Helps with message development & interview skills
 - Resource for understanding different reporter interview styles
- Tips
 - Test recording devices beforehand
 - Consider generating a transcript for big stories
 - Keep media interviews organized in a tracker

Sample Interview Tracker



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Date	Outlet	Interviewer	Topic(s)	Video/Audio	Transcript?	Notes	
2	8.10.20	News Radio 570 WSYR	Dave Allen	Trump EO's, HEROES Act, DB's agenda	Drive	No		
3	8.19.20	Campbell Conversations	Grant Reeher	SOTR + other	Drive	Yes (Otter)		
4	8.19.20	Auburn Citizen	Robert Harding	Profile piece on Dana	Drive	No		
5	8.20.20	Spectrum News	Unknown	DNC reflections	Drive	No		
6	8.21.20	WAER	Chris Bolt	DNC reflections	Drive	No	Audio is in 2 parts	
7	8.21.20	Auburn Citizen	Robert Harding	DNC reflections	Drive	No		
8	8.24.20	Auburn Citizen	Robert Harding	Profile - follow up	Drive	No		
9	8.29.20	CNY Central	Unknown	Tillie's Touch School Supply Giveaway	Drive	No		
10	9.1.20	Palladium Times	Seth Wallace	SOTR	Drive	No		
11	9.18.20	Daily Orange	Chris Scarglato	Profile on DB	Drive	No		
12	9.19.20	CNY Central	Unknown	State of the Race	Drive	No		
13	10.1.20	News Radio 570 WSYR	Dave Allen	Hakeem Jeffries event/Trump white sup	Drive	No		
14	10.2.20	RollCall	Bridget Bowman	What's changed since 2018 race	Drive	Yes		
15	10.4.20	Auburn Citizen	Robert Harding	On The Issues: Climate change, immigra	Drive	Yes		
16	10.5.20	CNY Central	Tommy Sladek	Siena Poll	Drive	No		
17	10.5.20	Spectrum News	Katelynn Ulrich	Siena Poll	Drive	No		
18	10.6.20	CNY Central	Conor Wight	Trump stopping COVID relief	Drive	No		
19	10.7.20	WSYR	Josh Martin	Trump stopping COVID relief	Drive	No		
20	10.8.20	Bloomberg Government	Samantha Handler	Profile piece on new members	Drive	No		
21	10.9.20	Capital Tonight	Susan Arbetter	Pre-interview convo	Drive	No		
22	10.9.20	Capital Tonight	Susan Arbetter	COVID relief, ACA, court packing	Drive	No	Qs are in Dana's Full video w/ Qs	
23	10.12.20	FingerLakesTimes1.com	Gabriel Pietrorazio	Siena Poll, Katko, opioid epidemic, Ag, \$	Drive	Yes	Audio is in 3 parts	
24	10.14.20	Auburn Citizen	Robert Harding	Priorities as a lawmaker, motivation to dc	Drive	No	For his race preview story	



Interviews ▾

Ed Boards ▾

Debates & Forums ▾

Speeches & Events ▾

Debate prep ▾

Other ▾

EXAMPLES: ASKING FOR CORRECTIONS & IMPROVEMENTS

Example: Asking a reporter to make a minor correction



Dear REPORTER NAME,

Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me for your story on TOPIC. [Can add more detail if necessary].

I was just reading through the article and noticed that [my name was misspelled/my title was listed incorrectly/our organization's mission was misstated]. The correct [name/title/mission is: CORRECT INFORMATION. Can you please run a correction/make sure this gets corrected in the online version today?

Thank you,
YOUR NAME

Example: Communicating Updated Terminology to a Reporter



Thanks for sharing the story -- looks great!

I did want to mention one thing, though -- When possible, we try to advise journalists and others who write about people in prison to reconsider using words like "inmate," and instead use more humanizing language. I recognize that this is a stylistic (and sometimes personal) choice, but thought I'd send over a few resources in case they're helpful:

- ["Words Matter: Don't Call People Felons, Prisoners, Or Inmates,"](#) *Forbes* article by Erica Bryant, senior writer; and Raf Jefferson, Vice President, Communications and External Affairs; Vera Institute of Justice
- [The Fortune Society, "Words Matter: Using Humanizing Language"](#)
- [The Rewire News Group, "Names Do Hurt: The Case Against Using Derogatory Language to Describe People in Prison"](#)
- [The Marshall Project, "Inmate. Parolee. Felon. Discuss."](#)
 - [Responses from Marshall Project readers](#)

Thanks again for your time,

Example: Communicating Additional Resources to a ⁺ Reporter

Hi NAME,

Thanks so much for sending -- really appreciate your work on this! We'll certainly share it with our network.

One quick suggestion: in the section "What can cities do to protect renters?" it would be great if you could link to the [eviction prevention actions guide](#). Although the eviction moratorium is expiring tonight, local governments can still enact a number of measures to protect tenants, and we want to make sure folks understand exactly what those actions are.

If you're in need of a descriptor for the guide, you're welcome to use or adapt this one: "The [Eviction Prevention Actions guide](#) outlines eight essential actions that local governments and philanthropic leaders should take to prepare for the end of emergency housing protections. It has been endorsed by nearly 50 local organizations, and was written with input from community organizers, legal assistance organizations, service and referral providers, philanthropic leaders, and public health experts."

Thanks again for all your work,
NAME

QUESTIONS?

Conversation with Louis Hansen, Mercury News



Louis Hansen covers housing issues for the Bay Area News Group and is based at The Mercury News. He's won national awards for his investigations and feature stories. Prior to joining the organization, he was an investigative reporter at The Virginian-Pilot, where he covered state government, the military and criminal justice.

