

Interviewing Tips

As a matter of routine, media interviews should be on the record and attributable to the person speaking to the media representative, unless an alternate attribution arrangement is mutually agreed upon in advance. The following are the most common forms of attribution.

On the record:

All statements are directly quotable and attributable, by name and title, to the person making the statement.

On background:

All statements are directly quotable, but cannot be attributed by name or specific title to the person commenting.

On deep background:

Anything that is said in the interview is usable but not in direct quotation and not for attribution. The reporter writes it on his or her own.

Off the record:

Information is for the reporter's use only and is not to be printed or made public in any way. The information also is not to be taken to another source in hopes of getting confirmation.

- When you receive an interview request or media call from a reporter, it is important to respond as soon as you can, even if it's just to set up a better time to talk. That way the reporter knows you are responsive, and that his or her request is important to you and your organization.
- Before an interview, write down your key points, with some facts or anecdotes to reinforce them. You can even do a mock interview with another staff person to help you think about how to most effectively respond to particular questions.
- Speak clearly and in a conversational tone. If you're doing a TV interview, do the best you can to engage the reporter and ignore the camera.
- Try to avoid overly technical language and jargon, or use too many acronyms. Using plain language is important regardless of the type of communication but it is especially important when your words might be reduced into a short sound bite.
- It's okay to tell a reporter you don't know an answer, and that you will get back to them if they ask you a question that stumps you. It's better to come back with the correct answer later than to give inaccurate information.