

## Tips for talking with reporters

If you are successful in creating relationships with the media and become a "source" on your issue, you will get calls for interviews.

- Call them back promptly. Ask when their deadline is.
- It is best if you already know what kind of story the reporter tends to do, what kind of questions they ask. If you have time, look up some of their work.
- Prepare as much as you can. If you know what they are calling about, get some background information. I recently got a call on a new program for the uninsured in New Haven. Before I called back, I had looked up the number of uninsured in CT and similar successful programs in other states.
- Be helpful. Ask what kind of story they are doing, how much information they need, if they would like to speak to a person directly affected by the story (unless that is you).
- If you are setting up another interview, e.g. with another consumer or a provider, get all the details straight. When will they call or visit? Do they need a translator available? You can role-play with the consumer first, if that will make them more comfortable. Be sure any confidentiality issues are settled before the call or visit.
- Relax. If you are nervous or this is your first time talking to a reporter, it is OK to say so (off camera or off the air). A good reporter wants to get it right, not to embarrass you.
- Listen carefully to the question. Take a few seconds to frame your answer.
- Speak slowly and avoid jargon. Speak with confidence and enthusiasm.
- Smile when you speak. Even if they can't see you, it comes through.
- Don't be thrown off but you may hear them typing while you talk. There may also be pauses after you answer a question - it doesn't necessarily mean they are looking for more, they may just still be writing what you said.
- Be brief. Keep to major points and broader issues. Don't spend ten seconds on the point and two minutes on the exceptions.
- If you don't know an answer, say so. Ask if they would like you to look into it and get back to them. Ask how much time you have.
- If it seems that you have been misunderstood, fix it immediately. Be gentle, but fix it.
- Be clear about your position and/or that of the organization you represent. Provide materials if possible.
- Nothing is ever off the record. Assume that anything you say or give them could end up in the story. Be careful making jokes.
- If you are quoted in an article, clip and save it.
- If you aren't quoted, don't take it personally. If you were helpful, they may call again.

For television and radio appearances:

- Learn as much as you can about the show - Will it be live or taped? Will there be call-in questions? Will there be an audience? Will there be other guests, if so who? How long is the show, and how long will you be on?
- Check the style of the show beforehand. Is it confrontational or conversational? Are personal stories or statistics more common? Is there a specific audience or issue targeted?

- Dress conservatively for television. Avoid bright white, loud colors or oversize prints. Avoid flashy jewelry. Consider a place for a microphone to be clipped, e.g. jacket lapel.
- Be on time.
- Get a tape if you can. Other outlets may replay it.