

Are you ready for your close-up?

Present your nonprofit's best face during a media interview

Nailing a media interview can do wonders for your nonprofit and its perception in the community. But, while some say there's no such thing as bad publicity, the truth is that poor preparation can result in an interview that does more harm than good. Becoming a media star takes work.

Be prepared

Ideally, you'll be asked in advance to schedule an interview giving you plenty of time to prepare and refine your message. Preparation means becoming familiar with the publication, radio or TV show you're being interviewed for. What's its tone? Who are its audience? Ask the reporter what the story is going to be about, what angle he or she will take, and what other sources he or she will use.

Because of deadlines, some reporters may need to talk to you immediately. In these cases, ask the reporter what the deadline is and whether you can call back at a specific time. Even a 15-minute window can help you gather your thoughts and help ensure you deliver a concise message.

Be on message

If you give unclear, rambling responses during an interview, it will reflect poorly on your nonprofit. Things you say can be taken out of context or be confusing. So before every interview, think about the one or two things you want readers, listeners or viewers to come away with from the story. Think of these one or two things as your sound bites that you'll come back to for as many questions as possible.

Succinct answers that don't stray from the questions asked are the best. Don't fall for the common interviewer trick of staying quiet after you've finished speaking. Reporters are hoping you'll fill the silence with information that you may not want to share. Sometimes, silence really is golden.

Be a smart interviewee

Most reporters aren't going to grill you as a *60 Minutes* exposé would, but you shouldn't let your guard down regardless of how friendly the reporter seems. Stick to your message, don't be tempted to criticize other programs or people, and don't tell a reporter anything you don't want to see in print. Off the record often isn't. Keep these tips in mind to keep your organization in the news, not making news.