

PRD Manual Extracts – 02. Public Relations & Communications

0204. Media Relations Materials

Speaking to the Media

Prepare for interviews by reviewing the following:

As Salvation Army officers and staff, your position commands respect, regardless of the situation. Your compassion and empathy should be a part of any interview. Remember during interviews that your experience and training are unlike the majority of the public, especially for officers. Thus, when situations arise that you have experienced, draw from what you have done previously to give the current situation some perspective and context.

Remember the Four C's – Control, Connect, Contain, Compassion

CONTROL: An effective spokesperson controls the interview, not the media. The control is largely dictated by a spokesperson's ability to clearly, succinctly communicate his/her message and then respond to questions by continually referring to those main message points.

CONNECT: Before any interview, prepare message points – essentially, the information you wish to communicate, including the media, employees, families, the general public, local officials, etc. Remember the Army's Mission. The purpose of an interview is not to speak with the reporter, but to convey information to the larger "public" reading, watching or listening to the media. Thus, consider this sample response during an EDS situation: "The Salvation Army has been well-trained to respond to these types of situations. We are a part of this community and will be here long after this response ..."

CONTAIN: Make sure your messages are specific to the Army's response to whatever situation is in question. Don't speculate or venture beyond the scope of the information you know. Thus, if you're asked, "What do think about ...", your response should be, "I can't speak to ..., but what I can tell you is that The Salvation Army is responding"

COMPASSION: The public responds to The Salvation Army spokespeople – be they officers or other personnel. A message of compassion and understanding is always welcome, and in our case, almost expected.

Interview Strategies

Practice answering questions. Before an interview, try to predict the reporter's questions and prepare answers, then practice them with staff or others who are familiar with the situation. **Never go into an interview unprepared.** If possible, read articles by the reporter and determine his/her reputation. Some reporters are aggressive while others throw nothing but softballs. The majority of reporters are fair and impartial and have one overriding interest – to get their story as quickly and accurately as possible.

DO'S AND DON'TS

- DO** Prepare. Practice your answers.
- DO** Answer all questions confidently.
- DO** Stay calm, courteous and cooperative.
- DO** Talk in simple terms; if you have to explain a complicated process, take your time.
- DO** Keep statistics to a minimum.
- DO** Face issues squarely. Be honest, responsive and factual.
- DO** Offer to obtain additional information when appropriate.
- DO** Speak from your heart. Emotions help build empathy and credibility.
- DO** Wear appropriate dress for an on-camera interview; uniform for officers and soldiers - identifiable Salvation Army red shield logo for employees.
- DO** Give brief answers. They are easily understood and most likely to be used unedited.
- DO** Work with a colleague, if possible; they can support during the interview by taking notes and assist with follow-up; your job is to focus on the interview.

- DON'T** Improvise. Stick to you message(s) and confirmed information.
- DON'T** Speculate or speak to hypothetical situations.
- DON'T** Repeat negative examples or words used by the questioner.
- DON'T** "Over talk." Deliver your message and stop talking.
- DON'T** Ramble. Say what you want to say as clearly and as quickly as possible.
- DON'T** Argue with a reporter.
- DON'T** Respond to information that you have not personally reviewed.
- DON'T** Tell jokes or give glib responses.
- DON'T** Overlap a reporter's question. Answer a few seconds after the reporter is finished.
- DON'T** Look at a television camera. DO look at the interviewer.
- DON'T** Move your head from side to side; speak directly to the reporter.
- DON'T** Talk "off-the-record." DO assume the microphone or camera is always on.

Here are some additional tips:

- Before speaking with any reporter, make sure you have a good understanding of the messages – the information – you would like to convey. Be prepared. A good technique is to draft three or four "key messages" about the story. Ask a colleague to help simulate an interview setting by going through questions and answers beforehand.
- Always assume any information you share with a reporter will be used and attributed to you at some point. A good rule of thumb - never say anything to a reporter that you would not want to read in the newspaper, see on the nightly news, or posted on an Internet site. There is no such protocol as "off the record" with a news person.

- Know what questions you can and cannot answer. Only answer the questions that you feel comfortable answering, and don't try to elaborate beyond what's needed. If you are asked a question that you can't answer, explain that you don't have the information immediately available. Let the reporter know that either you or a supervisor will get back to them with the information.
- When asked a question, be sure to project your voice, keep your head up, and keep your answers brief. A reporter wants clear and concise answers that are easy to understand. Know what message you want to convey and use clear and vivid words to depict that message.
- Work with a colleague during any interview. A colleague can support the interview by:
 - Monitoring the interview and taking notes for follow-up.
 - Keeping time for the interview.
 - Interceding if a problem with a particular question is detected.
 - Keeping interruptions to a minimum. [**A tip:** Turn off your mobile phone and/or pager.]
- If a reporter asks, "Is there anything else you want to say," at the end of the interview, use this opportunity to your benefit. If you feel there are some points in your message that need to be restated, don't hesitate to do so. Also, inquire whether the reporter has everything they need at the end of the interview.

Organizing a News Conference

Depending on the scale of the crisis and the level of media interest, it may be necessary to hold a news conference. This decision should be made in consultation with appropriate command input – between a Corps and Division, or Division and THQ. Once the decision is made, it should be communicated quickly to others within the Army who could become involved in media response based on the news conference content, thus escalating to a higher command level may be required.

A news conference:

- Provides the opportunity to present the Army's story from the Army's point of view
- Underscores the Army's candor and willingness to communicate
- Offers the opportunity to reach a large number of journalists with information all at once

Holding a news conference should only be considered if the volume of media interest is extremely high. If media interest is concentrated at the affected site, it is much more effective to hold the news conference at the scene and possibly in coordination with others involved.

Organizing the Room

- Identify and set up a room that is of sufficient size to accommodate media interest. The room should be large enough to accommodate a minimum of five cameras, potentially more. Media should not have access to areas where confidential work or conversations may be taking place.
- If possible, arrange for security to monitor access by journalists to other parts of the building
- If possible, inform reception of the time and location of the news conference, and briefing them on the likely number of visitors
- Try to establish a registration desk outside the conference room. Media materials should be available for distribution and all attendees should be required to register with their name, media

affiliation and phone number. Only accredited members of the media should be given access to the news conference.

- Ensure the room set-up is appropriate for a news conference:
 - Chairs should be laid out in theater style with a central aisle to enable television and radio crews' access for microphones. A good rule of thumb is to allow seating for at least 20.
 - Space (at least the equivalent of three rows of seating) should be left for cameras, toward the rear of the room.
 - A lectern should be provided for the spokesperson(s).
 - Ideally, the lectern should be positioned in front of a wall or curtain with a plain and un-patterned background. It should not be in front of a window or other area of activity. It should be well lit but away from direct sunlight.
 - If available, a sign showing The Salvation Army's shield and "Giving Hope Today" should be positioned on the front of the lectern or otherwise behind the spokesperson.
 - Water should be available for the spokesperson(s) on the lectern.
 - The spokesperson(s) should have a route to exit the room that is clear from camera equipment and seating.

Managing a News Conference

Any news conference set-up must be coordinated with the Incident Commander or appropriate command staff, who may be involved in talking with reporters. Regardless, at least two staff members should attend a news conference – the designated personnel who will speak to media and a second person to serve as support – accompanied with copies of news releases, etc.

Before beginning any news conference, the support staff should spend a few minutes reviewing the messages the spokesperson is expected to provide; and reviewing the news conference agenda.

Support staff can assume the responsibility for introducing the spokesperson, fielding questions and drawing the conference to a close, but this should be discussed before the news conference begins. The format should be as follows:

- Support staff welcomes members of the media and introduces the spokesperson, making sure to spell all names and give full job titles. Support staff clearly states the time allotted for the news conference and the protocol for questions and answers. Always set a time limit for any news conference – 15 to 20 minutes is a good guide to follow; be mindful of local media deadlines when a news conference is scheduled;
- Spokesperson makes brief statement regarding facts of the situation (maximum five minutes). The statement should be factual and not speculative;
- Support staff thanks the spokesperson and opens the floor to questions. S/he should request that members of the media state their name and affiliation when asking questions. Support staff should note the names and affiliations of journalists who ask questions;
- Support staff manages questions from the media and draws the conference to a close once the Army's message and incident facts have been communicated. S/he should not allow the news

conference to continue indefinitely; it should conclude within the time outlined during the introduction;

- Before the news conference ends, support staff should provide the media with a communications schedule: when the next conference will be held, when the next news release will be issued, etc;
- When the conference draws to a close the spokesperson should leave the room or venue promptly. Support staff should remain to deal with any additional requests for information and to ensure that all journalists depart.

Media List Development

The Salvation Army continually relies upon local media access and contacts during non-emergency and emergency-response situations. Thus, it is critical for officers and staff to regularly review their plan of action if a media-worthy situation arises. Recommended steps are outlined below that should assist in building and sustaining a mutually beneficial relationship with the media.

Here are four basic steps on how to conduct an audit of local media and develop a media list.

Assess local media news outlets

It is important to know what types of media outlets are available in area. The “traditional media” include:

- Newspapers
- Television stations
- Radio stations
- Magazines

Also review whether the area includes:

- Notable Newsletters [philanthropy, social services]
- Internet sites in addition to those maintained by traditional media.

Rural areas generally are included in the news coverage of nearby community news outlets. An easy way to find out which outlets are available in your area is to use online search engines like Google or Yahoo. At www.dir.yahoo.com/News_and_Media you will find a directory that provides a comprehensive list of media outlets, which can be searched by publication type or by region.

When researching local media outlets, it is good to keep in mind which outlets will respond to and report on a news-worthy event first. Not all media outlets respond to the same story in the same way. For example, if you have a breaking story at 6 p.m. that needs immediate attention, it is worthwhile to know which local television network has a news broadcast at 7 p.m. or 10 p.m. Additionally, it's beneficial to know news deadlines for all media covering your area.

Identify prior coverage

Although you may not be familiar with all of the media outlets in the area, it is possible, if not likely, that these outlets are familiar with The Salvation Army. This is something to take note of because if a local

news outlet has reported on The Salvation Army before, it's likely future coverage will be shaped by previous coverage. It's always beneficial, for example, to note for reporters and editors any previous coverage, particularly if you are suggesting similar coverage for a similar event.

A simple way of researching this type of information is again by searching the Internet. For example, you could simply visit a newspaper's website and search for articles on The Salvation Army or related topics like philanthropy, social service or religion. Web search engines like Google News or Yahoo! News may also be useful. It's vital that you determine who you will talk to about your news; keep in mind that newsrooms are in a continual state of change; news people come and go; a news release sent blindly to someone at a news outlet will likely be overlooked or ignored.

Another approach is simply calling the outlet directly, introduce yourself and ask who the correct contact for Salvation Army news would be. Media outlets are typically very accommodating to these types of requests.

Collect media contact information

Once you have identified your media outlets and reporters/editors, the next step is collecting the information of one or two contacts from that outlet. It is important to collect more than just a name and telephone number, as you may need to contact these people at hours when they are not in the office. And just as you should know who you will contact, any contact left with a news outlet should have the same information for The Salvation Army – who's our contact, how can they be reached during and after office hours.

A simple way to find someone's contact information is by using the media outlet's Web site and looking up the contact information. However, not all Web sites will have this information. Sometimes a newspaper, for example, will include a "masthead" with the names and contact information for the reporters and editors; these "mastheads" are usually published inside the various sections of a newspaper. TV and radio stations generally post names on their Web sites of key news people.

Important contact information includes:

- First and Last Name
- Title/Area of coverage
- Physical address of media outlet
- Work and cell phone number
- Fax number
- Email address [**A tip:** Avoid sending e-mails to reporters with attachments; most media outlets have strict Internet security that will disallow attachments from unfamiliar addresses or addresses that are not regularly utilized by the media. Include information in the body of the e-mail, rather than an attachment.]

Once this contact information is collected, save it in a database, like an Excel spreadsheet, for future reference that is easy to access – by you and others, such as an emergency disaster coordinator, or Divisional PIO. An Excel spreadsheet will allow you to store your information in a systematic manner and is a good place to keep track of reporter interactions and updates on the types of stories they cover. Review your database every six months to make sure your contacts are up to date.

Build good rapport with your media contacts

After your list has been compiled and stored, start building a relationship with your contacts. The best way to start this is by calling media contacts and introducing yourself. Perhaps offer to meet them informally for a cup of coffee or lunch to discuss The Salvation Army and its work in the community. [A tip: Don't offer to pay for a reporter's meal or even coffee; many media have policies that prohibit reporters from accepting such gestures.] Regardless, personal contact with a reporter or producer is always more beneficial than a "telephone voice" relationship.

Keep in mind that some reporters and editors may be, for one reason or another, unable to meet. If this is the case, stay in regular contact with them by phone or e-mail and try to arrange another face-to-face meeting at a later date. You should keep your media contacts regularly updated on Salvation Army issues and events.

If you have offered interesting, reliable stories to media in the past, it is possible they in turn will contact you with requests for information and interviews on future relevant stories. You can build a good relationship with media by responding to these requests, respecting deadlines and accommodating them as much as possible and appropriately.

Media Phone Calls

As a well-known and, widely respected charity with a wide range of programs, services and expertise, The Salvation Army frequently receives incoming media requests. As a general rule, accommodate as many media requests as possible. Remember that a media request almost always presents an opportunity to highlight the Army's critical work to potential supporters, volunteers and donors.

However, remember that you are never obligated to grant an interview or accommodate a reporter just because they've called your office. The point to remember is that the media is asking for your assistance, meaning that you generally have the ability to respond on your own terms. This dynamic is somewhat different when you proactively pitch a story – in which case the reporter has a bit more power in terms of setting the agenda or parameters for an interview.

Below is a brief check list of information you should gather in an initial phone call with a reporter. This information will ultimately help you to prepare a recommended course of action.

Media Call Checklist

- **Media Outlet**
 - Is this an outlet you know? Have you worked with them before?
 - Is this a national media outlet? Are they from your area? Should the request be referred to a Division or Territory?
 - Is this an outlet that has been friendly or antagonistic to the Army in the past?

- **Reporter's Name**
 - Be sure to get the correct spelling so you can easily conduct background web-searching on the reporter.
 - Do some quick web research to find past stories by this reporter – particularly if the stories cover a similar topic or even The Salvation Army specifically.
 - Try to get a sense of tone and any biases the reporter may have on the subject/in general based on web research.

- **Story Angle**
 - Try to get a sense of the story's focus.
 - Be creative and ask lots of questions – the more you learn up-front the better. If they are seeking comment on information to which you are unfamiliar, request a copy of the information.
 - What questions do they have for The Salvation Army?
 - How does the Army fit into the broader story?
 - Who else are they speaking to for the story?
 - Do they need information? An interview? A statement? Is a response by e-mail okay?
 - If they are reluctant to give you the background on their story, indicate that you are asking in order that the spokesperson will be better prepared to respond – remember, they are contacting the Army and the Army is under no obligation to respond.
 - Typically, a reporter will accommodate this request and if they will not it may be an indication that the reporter has intentions that run counter to Army interests.

- **Deadline**
 - Critical for scheduling purposes and also gives you a sense of the kind of story it is – quicker deadline typically means shorter “breaking news” type story.
 - Reporters will sometimes give a deadline that is shorter than it really is – to speed up the process and get the interview done more quickly; Still, you should generally take them at their word and make every attempt to accommodate within their timeframe.

- **Run Date**
 - This may or may not be soon after the deadline; the reporter may not know with complete certainty but should be able to give you an estimate.

- **Contact Information**
 - Request both phone and e-mail contact information; most reporters will provide both.

Newsroom Roles

It is also important to understand the various roles and responsibilities in a newsroom before contacting an outlet. For example, a reporter at a newspaper does not have the same responsibilities as a producer at a television station, but both may contact you at some point.

Here is a basic outline of titles and responsibilities within a newsroom. Also keep in mind that in today's world, virtually anyone with a mobile phone and computer is a reporter, and information that you disseminate can be used by people and in ways that may not be what you expect from “traditional” media:

Publisher/General Manager

- In a print newsroom, the chief executive is the publisher, but broadcast outlets usually refer to them as general managers. They direct all departments including news, advertising, and circulation, with an overall interest and desire to see balanced coverage by the news staff. They are not typically involved in news coverage decisions except in the broad sense of establishing a general direction or tone to their outlet's coverage.

Editor/Executive Editor

- Generally, these editors are in overall control of the newsroom. They may not be involved in the day-to-day decision-making, but they are aware of any news coverage decisions. Television and radio stations also use the title.

City/Metro Editor

- The “City Editor” or “Metro Editor” is a quality contact to establish for initiating coverage of a particular event or story. The City/Metro Editor supervises reporters and freelance journalists by assigning news stories and reviewing or editing those stories before they go into print.

Assignment Editor

- Similar to a city editor at a newspaper, the assignment editor supervises producers, reporters and free-lance journalists in a television or radio newsroom by assigning news stories to cover and by reviewing those stories before they air.

Copy Editor

- One of the several duties assigned to a copy editor is writing the headline of a story, which is often misconstrued as the reporter’s responsibility. Other tasks of the copy editor include reviewing news stories for accuracy, content, grammar and overall newspaper style. Copy editors must also ensure that news pages are ready for printing which includes the layout of the pages, photo selection, artwork, and headlines.

On-Line Editor

- Virtually unheard of a few years ago, news outlets are increasingly adding staff to their on-line editions. The on-line editor serves a role very similar to the “traditional” editor positions; the difference is that the responsibilities are solely focused on the Web site news gathering of the media outlet. Note that many media outlets today have increasingly larger numbers of staff assigned to them and that media are focusing more attention to their Web site news offerings, in some cases putting news stories on the Internet well in advance of the nightly news broadcast or morning newspaper.

General Assignment Reporter

- This is the type of reporter that you will most typically work with at a local newspaper with limited staff. A general assignment reporter may cover any number of topic areas as assigned by their editor. One day they may cover a parade in town and the next they may cover a bank robbery. In many cases, however, even general assignment reporters will have particular areas of expertise or interest.

Beat Reporter

- Distinct from a general assignment reporter, a beat reporter typically covers one specific area like science, City Hall, education, crime, religion or even social service/philanthropy. These topic areas are called “beats” in a newsroom. A beat reporter is a good contact to have if you want to pitch a particular topic of interest. For example, if The Salvation Army is working on a volunteer project with a school, the education beat reporter may be the best contact. Beat reporters are usually more experienced, with advanced academic study in the topics they cover. Budget cuts and consolidation in newsrooms nationwide have made beat reporters less common.

Producer

- Producers are usually considered among the most influential in any television or radio newsroom. A producer is responsible for a large percentage of story ideas and is frequently the front-line contact for initial news gathering forays and story follow-up. Keep in mind, when talking with a producer, that the interview and information you're providing is on the record and could be used in a story.

Freelance Journalist

- Freelance journalists work as a reporter for several different media outlets at the same time. They usually cover a beat and/or serve as a general assignment reporter, writing lengthy feature stories that focus on a particular person or issue. They may be assigned by an outlet to write a story or they may write the story on their own and then "pitch" it to various outlets and sell it to them for publication.

Photographer

- A photographer will generally be assigned to a job when a reporter or editor requests a picture to illustrate a story. A photographer is a good contact to have if you want to have pictures of an event or interview. It is important to remember though, comments you make to a photographer can be used in a news story even if a reporter is not present.