

DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

The most effective techniques are those used before the fact:

- **Return phone calls.** Leaving questions unanswered invites errors and unintentional bias.
- **Respect deadlines.** Return phone calls promptly. Most of the time, reporters need a response in minutes, not hours or days.
- **Be prepared.** This means creating in advance of meetings a very succinct written summary of your event. Minimize acronyms and "organ" jargon.
- **Do not try to dictate a story's content or tone.** Instead provide enough information so that the story tells itself. Very few reporters set out to write an unfavorable story. Usually it is ignorance or laziness that produces one.
- **Cultivate a good source relationship with reporters who "get it right."** They like to be rewarded for their work, just as you do.
- **Alert the media to favorable stories.** Contrary to popular perception, good news gets in the paper too.

When things go wrong, these techniques work *after* the fact:

- **Promptly ask for the correction of factual inaccuracies.** But be brief and specific, and don't get into a debate over the tone of the article; it will cloud your request.
- **Ask for an appointment with the reporter.** Discuss the issue and explain your event. Do not use this session to achieve corrections to a story. Instead, use it as a way to repair the source relationship the reporter has with you.
- **Alert the press to good stories** well before they break, and supply lots of facts.

What To Do During An Interview....How To Handle It, Then?

- Be well briefed. This may mean rereading materials in TAO or on the AGO Website.
- Anticipate questions. Know the background material about the event and the artist. In an in-depth interview, you're not likely to anticipate all the questions, but the more the better. Try to avoid curves.
- Be sure to answer very carefully. This is how to minimize that "I was misquoted" syndrome. The less you have to say on the wing, the better you're going to like the way the story comes out.
- Rehearse. Unless you're a former secretary of state, with experience in being interviewed almost daily, the more you rehearse the fewer mistakes you're going to make.
- List the key points you want to make, in order of importance. You may not get to make them all, nor will you be assured that they all get printed, but that list of points is the spine of the successful interview.

For a successful interview, everything depends upon this list of points, because if you're careful, and skillful, you can lead the interview. How? By crafting your answers so that those points are made, even if they are not always directly responsive to the question.

Keep it up and you'll be very subtly running the interview. And if you're calm, friendly and cooperative, the reporter brings no inherent hostility, and the editor doesn't cut or rewrite it, the story can come out the way you hope.

MEDIA FOLLOW UP

When to follow-up with the media:

Goals of the initial follow up call:

- To make a quick initial introduction
- To make sure they got the packet, release or pitch letter and/or had a chance to look at it
- To make sure you have all the necessary contact information for them
- To set up a good time to call and discuss the materials and event

The following tips will boost your chances of success:

- Media should be called approximately two - three days after sending the pitch letter.
- Be courteous and ask if the reporter has time to talk. If not, offer to call back at a more convenient time.
- If the reporter can talk to you, keep your initial pitch to 20 seconds; afterward, offer to send written information to support your story ideas.
- Know exactly what you're going to say before you telephone the reporter. Have it written down in front of you--it's easier, and you'll feel more confident.
- Everyone likes a compliment. If you've read a story you particularly enjoyed by the reporter you're contacting, let him or her know. This will also show that you're familiar with the reporter's work.
- Be persistent. Remember, not everyone will be interested. If your story idea is turned down, try to find out why and use that information to improve your next pitch. Just keep going, and don't give up. You will succeed eventually.
- If a reporter rejects your idea, ask if he or she can recommend someone else who might be interested.
- Don't be a pest. You can easily be persistent without being annoying. Use your instincts; if the reporter sounds rushed, offer to call back.
- Be helpful and become a resource by providing reporters with information. Remember, they need your story ideas. There are only so many they can come up with on their own.
- Always remember that assistants get promoted. Be nice to everyone you speak with, no matter how low they are on the totem pole. After you establish a connection, keep in touch; you never know where people will end up.
- Say thank you. When you succeed in getting publicity for your chapter, always write a thank-you note to the reporter who worked on it with you. You'd be surprised how much a note means.

Plan your publicity efforts just as carefully as you plan the rest of your event. You'll be glad you made the effort when you see your event featured in the news.

MEDIA INTERVIEWS

Don't forget the possibilities of media, especially those interested in the arts, interviewing your performers and/or playing their recordings. If your local radio station has a talk show that frequently has artists interviewed and if your artist has time, try to set up an interview. If your artist has a CD or DVD, see if your local media would be interested in playing parts of it, and announcing that the artist will be in the area. Sometimes, for public media, it helps if your chapter members offer to answer phones for a fund drive. When your group is announced when the phone answers, your event can also be mentioned.