

CHOOSING AND PREPARING SPOKESPEOPLE

Speaking to the media can seem a bit daunting, but by telling a compelling story you can gain tremendous traction with the public and decision makers. Unlike any other tactic for your campaign, engaging with key media could allow you to access a wide audience in a personal manner.

With the appropriate preparation and practice, your spokesperson will be able to speak articulately and passionately about the issue. The guidelines below will help you prepare your spokesperson for media success.

Choose Spokespeople

Develop a small cadre of spokespersons whose perspectives are especially important to the cause and who the media might be interested in interviewing. For all of these, strive for diversity that represents your community, and be sure to include spokespersons who are fluent in other languages as it makes sense for your community. Below are examples of spokespersons to consider:

- ▶ Advocates directly impacted by the issue (especially parents and youth) who can provide a personal appeal that no one else can.
- ▶ Doctors who see the impact of chronic diseases such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes on their patients. They will instantly add credibility to the issue. Researchers who can share data on your issue for a specific city or state will add quantifiable evidence to your stories.
- ▶ Finally, top-level representatives from your organization or partner groups are always important faces to add to your campaign. They can speak specifically about your efforts in your state.

Reach out to these types of spokespersons, ask if they would be interested in speaking on behalf of the issue you are advocating for, and begin preparing them for the task. Be sure to identify folks who would do well on television or on-air through radio or talk shows, and who would be more comfortable with print articles.

Preparing Your Spokesperson

It is important to begin preparing your spokespersons as soon as possible. The more your speakers prepare, the more comfortable they will be, and the better their delivery will be. Here are some things for you and your spokespersons to think through:

- ▶ **Who is your audience?** Your message should directly relate to the interests of your audience. Ask yourself:
 - ▶ What can they do and how is it in their interest to help?
 - ▶ What common ground do you share with your audience?
 - ▶ How can you “go to them” rather than making them come to you?
- ▶ **What do you want your audience to takeaway?** Before the interview, identify the key message you want to deliver. Use every opportunity to get your message in, and don't be afraid to repeat it. Ask yourself:
 - ▶ What are the two or three most important points you want to make during the interview? Write them down, and check to see if you were able to include them each time you practice.
 - ▶ What would success look like? Provide numbers, statistics, and milestones to help frame the problem as well as the resolution.
 - ▶ How can others get involved? Make sure the audience knows that there is a call-to-action for them to get involved with your campaign, and be sure to share easy information on how to do so, either by visiting a website or contacting the spokesperson directly.
 - ▶ Are there more ways to restate the main goal of the campaign? People need to hear things at least three times to remember them, so make sure to keep bringing the messaging back to your core points.

- ▶ **Can you share a story?** Facts can easily be forgotten, but stories remain in people’s memories. Ask yourself:
 - ▶ Why are you telling this story? Don’t tell a story just to tell it. Make sure there’s a point and that it ties back to your message.
 - ▶ How does your audience relate to this story? Show them how they can be part of the solution.
 - ▶ Is your story predictable? If the end of your story is predictable, it’s also forgettable. Surprising or counterintuitive endings stick with people.
- ▶ **What questions do you expect?** What questions do you least want to be asked? Spend some time anticipating questions and developing direct responses or ways to turn the conversation back to your key message. Some common bridging phrases are:
 - ▶ “Yes (the answer) ... and in addition to that (the bridge/your message)”
 - ▶ “No (the answer) ... let me explain (the bridge/your message)”
 - ▶ “I don’t know, but what I do know is (the bridge/your message)”
 - ▶ “What’s important to remember, however ...”
 - ▶ “The real issue here is ...”

Rehearsal

No matter how familiar spokespeople are with your talking points, it is important to have them rehearse multiple times before the interview. Here are some ideas:

- ▶ **Read the text alone silently.** Read the content with a critical eye. Do all proof points support the overall story? Is the central message clear?
- ▶ **Read aloud alone.** Spokespeople might be surprised to hear themselves speaking aloud, especially if it is their first time participating in an interview. Watch your speakers talk, and make note of places where they take natural pauses or get tripped up on words.
- ▶ **Stand and read in front of a mirror (if the interview is on television).** When spokespeople read the content aloud standing, they will begin to get a feel for their natural body movement and non-verbal cues that will help bring the story to life.
- ▶ **Stand and read in front of peers.** Gather your colleagues to listen to the spokespeople deliver their talking points. This can help increase speakers’ confidence and provides a safe place for them to receive feedback. At this point, they should be able to deliver their content without reading directly from papers.
- ▶ **Record their delivery, and learn from it.** One of the best ways to rehearse is to make a video recording of your spokespeople presenting—smartphones are an excellent tool for this purpose. This allows them to see what the interviewer sees and will make speakers aware of any distracting movements or phrases they may unknowingly use.
- ▶ **Rehearse in a similar setting to where the interview will be held.** You may not be able to take your spokespeople to the actual interview location, but try to create a setting that feels similar. Spokespeople can practice their movement in this similar space, developing a sense of how to move and talk effectively when they are in the interview room.

Interview Delivery

As your spokespeople arrive for the interview, they should be friendly and engaging, greeting reporters, editors, and producers confidently.

- ▶ **Own the space.** When you are on-site in the room, remind your spokespeople of the movements they practiced. If it is the right setting, encourage them to move around or use gestures so he or she doesn’t appear stiff or uncomfortable.
- ▶ **Engage the interviewer and the audience.** Remind spokespeople to maintain eye contact with the reporter as often as possible. They are the window to the viewers who are watching or listening. If there is an audience present, make sure spokespeople speak directly to them.
- ▶ **Relax and enjoy.** By this point, your spokespeople will have mastered their talking points and be comfortable with their delivery, so remind them to relax and enjoy their time on stage or in front of a reporter.
- ▶ **Say thank you.** Thank the reporter at the end and offer meeting with them later for a follow-up interview.
- ▶ **Share the story.** Remember to share the story once it is printed or once it airs. You can share on social media (tagging the journalist), in your email newsletter or with your supporters.