

ATTACHMENT

Sample

Media and Communications Memorandum: What to Do and Say When You are Contacted by the Media

TO: ALL NIJC STAFF
FROM: PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER / PROGRAM DIRECTOR
SUBJECT: MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY
DATE: OCTOBER 11, 2006

HOW TO HANDLE PRESS CALLS

If a reporter calls you directly, before speaking with them “on the record,” please request the following information or pass the call to the Public Affairs Officer, then request to call them back:

- Reporter’s name
- News Outlet
- Topic of Inquiry
- Deadline
- Contact Information

It is important that you tell the reporter that anything you say at this point is “off the record.” In most cases, it is better to not say anything substantial to the reporter before informing the Public Affairs Officer of the interview. This will ensure coordinated and consistent handling of media calls and messages, especially because reporters will often call several staff people on the same topic. It will also give us the chance to consider any sensitive issues that may come up during an interview, for which we want to be prepared. Finally, it will help us keep track of how often we talk to/appear in the media, which is important for internal and funding reporting.

The Public Affairs Officer will gather more information about the news outlet, reporter, and topic, then contact the Director.

Consultation will then immediately occur with appropriate program person(s) and other relevant parties.

The Public Affairs Officer will set up a call with the reporter and appropriate respondents. The Director may participate in the call, if appropriate.

All press calls should be returned and handled *promptly*.

The Public Affairs Officer will then follow-up with reporters to ensure they received the information they need and track its publication/broadcast.

WHAT TO SAY

Once an “on the record” interview has been set up, you may find it useful to use the following three-part structure for media communication:

1. Frame the problem: think about the five questions: WHAT is the story, WHO does it effect/involve, WHO is the audience, WHERE and WHEN did it happen/is it relevant, and perhaps most importantly, WHY is it important?

2. Illustrate the problem—reporters inevitably want to talk to clients to get the “human face” for their stories. Think in advance of clients who are in a safe and stable position in their lives, are eloquent, and preferably speak English, who would be willing to talk to the press generally, and respond to specific issues/media inquiries. Make sure the client has consented to speak with the press before using their name or story.

3. Make the “ask”—what is the solution? This can be both a short-term solution (e.g., Congress should oppose this bill) and a long-term solution (e.g., we need comprehensive reform to fix our broken immigration system).

After getting an inquiry from a reporter and before calling him/her back, you may want to write down some notes using this basic structure. Break down the problem, examples, and solutions into sub-points and **STICK TO THEM**. Do not ramble. When asked questions, refer back to your outline and your basic points and sub-points so that throughout the interview you are clear and consistent—better to be redundant with the same message than tangential and unclear.

WHEN YOU DO MEDIA OUTREACH

All media outreach should be coordinated through the Public Affairs Officer or Director.

All staff are encouraged to provide suggestions, ideas, and drafts for letters to the editor, press releases, press advisories, press briefings, etc.—you work with the clients and see the issues as they emerge, so it’s up to you to bring problems that you think deserve wide media coverage.

*** We plan to start designating a few minutes in each Department Meeting for program staff to mention upcoming events/cases/issues that could make interesting media stories. The Public Affairs Officer will then work with program staff to create press releases, OpEds and/or other media materials that will help raise awareness on the specific immigration issue and NIJC. ***

WHEN TO GO TO THE MEDIA

1. Always have a “hook”

- Compelling cases that highlight access to justice issues, due process issues, integration issues, basic rights (education, work, etc.), and reflect of or impacts a large group.
- Impact litigation
- Pending legislation

2. When to go: Time your media outreach around important deadlines, events, anniversaries, etc, such as:

- Case filing
- Issuance of decision on compelling case
- Bill introduction/hearing/vote
- United Nations Human Rights Day/International Women’s Day, etc.
- Trainings, rallies, etc., that highlight an issue and which reporters can attend. Even if these don’t seem like a big deal to you, they could be an interesting opportunity for the local papers to report on issues that are new to their communities, thereby raising public awareness.

MEDIA CHECKLIST

1. Why is the case/issue/legislation/etc. appropriate for media exposure?

2. Has the client consented to speaking with the media and/or using his case?
3. WHAT is the story, WHO does it affect/involve, WHO is the audience, WHERE and WHEN did it happen/is it relevant, and perhaps most importantly, WHY is it important?
4. What media would provide the most direct access to the desired audience (for example, national v. suburban newspapers; mainstream publications v. legal newsmagazines or other ; NPR v. Spanish radio; etc.)?

**Credit: National Immigration Justice Center (NIJC)*