

Being a Media Spokesperson

A Training by Picture the Homeless

Go-Round: How are homeless issues normally presented in the NYC media?

Go-Round: How does the media present the police and city government?

So we see what we're up against. Most mainstream media outlets are very supportive of city policies. Reporters buy into the stereotypes about homelessness and do not understand the issues the way homeless people do. Even if they are sympathetic, they have to submit their stories to editors who are very hesitant about publishing stories that challenge the city. That's why we have to be 100% on-point because otherwise they will take us out of context and distort or disregard our message.

Go-Round: What are some techniques that journalists will use to discredit you and what you're saying?

Tips For Being Interviewed

Don't answer the question, respond with your message. Interview segments are often only 8-15 second soundbites. Don't get thrown by the reporter and get caught answering a bad question. Remind yourself that your audience is never the reporter, it's the people on the other side of the camera, and this is your chance to speak to them. Repeat your message, and you control the interview.

Be CONFIDENT. People believe in those who are perceived as confident, who know the issue and can show how they are personally connected or affected by it, able to reach people's hearts and minds. Commanding a strong presence assures your audience that you are a credible spokesperson and shows that you believe in yourself and your expertise, that what you have to say deserves and needs to be heard.

Keep it short. You don't need to explain everything to be heard. Rather, it's better to keep it brief. Think about what you want to say beforehand, create short soundbites (eight seconds in length) that capture your main points and your key message about the issue or campaign. And practice, practice, practice.

Personalize your message. Add something personal at the beginning of your soundbite to create more of a human connection between you and your audience. Some examples are: "As a working mother..." or "As a first-generation immigrant..."-be sure that this is a genuine connection that people will resonate with your audience.

Formulate your sentences so they can't take you out of context. Reporters love to chop your sentences in half so you come across looking like a fool, or so that your message is

diluted. For example, if you say: “It doesn’t make sense to give curfews to all shelter residents just because some homeless shelter residents do have criminal backgrounds,” you might be featured on the news in a two-second clip saying “Some homeless people do have criminal backgrounds.” A better sentence would be “whether or not some homeless people might have criminal backgrounds, it’s unconstitutional to punish a whole group of people for the actions of some individuals.”

It's OK to say that you don't know. If you don't know the answer, it's OK to say so. Remember nothing is "off the record," but it's better to be honest about what you don't know than to say "no comment."

Keep it slow and steady. Remind yourself to speak slowly. It is OK to pause and take a deep breath. Practice enunciating, and even over- enunciating, each syllable so that your words will be clearly articulated. If you catch yourself speaking too quickly, it's OK to pause, take a breath and start again. Remember, slow and steady.

Practice, practice, practice!

Role Play Scenario

Practice Role Play Scenario

Needed: 2 volunteers to act out in front of the group.

Picture the Homeless is holding a press conference to proclaim victory in our campaign to force the NYPD to repeal its “Quality of Life” policies. Volunteer #1 is the media spokesperson from our Civil Rights Campaign, and is street homeless. Volunteer #2 is a reporter from the *New York Post*, who clearly does not agree with our perspective and thinks that the police should be allowed to vamp on homeless people because they are “a menace” and “bad for business.”

After a sixty-second interview, go around the room and solicit feedback from EVERYONE. Then switch roles and repeat.