4-H Media Relations

Interview Tips

If you've sent out a news release or pitched a story idea to the media, be prepared when the reporter calls for an interview. If it's not a good time for you to talk, don't be afraid to ask the reporter to schedule another time to speak with you. Find out the reporter's deadline and be considerate of that. Then, you have a golden opportunity to ask the reporter what they want to know, so you can prepare yourself for this particular interview. Also, see if any 4-H members are available for interview and have them join you or provide the reporter with their contact information.

Here are some handy tips to make sure you have a successful interview.

Before the Interview:

- Create a reference folder for your own use. Include items such as:
  - Talking points you want to make in the interview. (The 4-H Brand Network site includes a set of talking points to get you started.)
  - Local impact data and national statistics.
  - Examples of success stories. Reporters love examples because they personalize a story.
  - Photos. (Remember photo releases!)
  - Your contact information including your Web site address.
  - Anything else that you believe will help the reporter.
- Create a media relations kit that you can give to the reporter so they can take the pertinent information with them. Include items such as:
  - A news release
  - Copies of the success stories you shared
  - A CD of high-resolution digital photos and the 4-H Emblem.

During the Interview:

- Be positive and enthusiastic about 4-H.
- Be honest, straightforward and clear. Do not exaggerate.
- Keep explanations simple. Avoid acronyms and jargon. Your audience probably won't understand it.
- Try not to say "no comment." People may think you have something to hide.
- Remember: What you say to a reporter is on the record.
- For in-person interviews, wear something with 4-H on it like a scarf, tie, pin or t-shirt.

For Radio and Television Interviews:

- Keep your answers short and to the point. Sound bites typically are 10 to 15 seconds.
- Avoid "yes" and "no" answers. Dead air is uncomfortable for you, the reporter and your audience.
- Keep your voice conversational. Clarity and sincerity, not volume, convey honesty.
- Pause before you begin to answer a difficult question to avoid "ers" and "ums."
- Expect interruptions if you fail to answer the question or if time is up. If you make the two or three points you want to make at the start of the interview, interruptions for time will not matter.
- If you do not think you made your point clearly, ask the reporter to record you again. This isn't possible for "live" segments, so do the best you can the first time.
- Think pictures and/or sound, so you can make suggestions about what might illustrate the story.

- If you are on TV:
  - Wear clothes that make you feel good. Avoid extreme styles, bold patterns, or ruffles. Do not wear black or white because light absorption and reflection distort skin color. The 4-H tie (for men) and the 4-H silk scarf or the ladies twill work shirt (for women) are both great items to wear during an interview – available through the 4-H Mall (www.4-HMall.org). Also, if wearing a collar shirt, add a 4-H pin on the collar, too!
  - Look at the reporter. Avoid looking up in the air or shifting your gaze when you are speaking. Remember, the camera may be on you even when you are not speaking, so be sure to look interested at all times.
  - Sit in a relaxed position, leaning slightly toward the reporter to convey ease and interest.
  - Take your cues from the reporter. Try to forget the cameras, so you won't look or feel self-conscious.
- If you are on the radio:
  - Think of the two or three points you want to make and take brief notes with you.
  - Talk in listener's terms. Ask yourself, "What do listeners want to know?"
  - Restate your points during live call-in programs. Listeners often are doing something else while they are tuned into the program.
  - If you are being taped over the phone, be sure to ask the reporter to let you know when taping begins.