

Advocacy: a practical approach Dealing with the media

From Lobby for Libraries, Virginia Walsh, ALIA executive director

The nature of successful lobbying today invariably means having an interaction with journalists, reporters, producers, editors, interviewers and many other staff working in the media industry. There are a few simple rules that can be employed to ensure that your interaction with the media is successful whether you are dealing with radio, television or newspaper personnel.

All contact with the media involves careful thought and preparation. There are also important issues of presentation that must be considered.

Television and radio interviews

There are a number of ways of getting your message across using television and radio. The most likely opportunity will be through a pre-arranged interview but it could equally be an on-the-spot interview or request for comment. You may be fortunate enough to instigate a session, feature or program with your own agenda.

The first question you should ask is: **Am I the most appropriate person to be interviewed?** If you are not, find the person who is. The most appropriate person is the one who is in the best position to give the most informed answers, or to make the most pertinent points in the allocated time. If you are the best person for the job then make adequate preparation for the task at hand. **Work out what points you want to make** and rehearse your comments so that your points are made simply and clearly.

ALIA has produced a video that highlights the way in which you should approach a television interview, but many of the same principles of communication apply to radio. The ALIA video *How to manage the media* makes a number of points:

Be prepared: Be prepared for any eventuality. Don't expect that the pre-recorded session you have arranged will necessarily be just that — be prepared for a live session just in case! Know where to go, who to meet, what to do, and what to say — well before the event. And avoid making pressing engagements for immediately after the

planned session: putting some programs to air can take longer than anticipated. An increasingly agitated interviewee will give the wrong impression.

Be on time: Arriving early will not only create a good impression, but allow you time to get ready, and to make last-minute changes if required. It also allows you time to ask questions of the interviewer, and to find out more about what to expect.

Look/sound professional: For television wear clothes in a single strong colour. Wear make-up, even if you normally don't and dress conservatively. Above all, don't let the clothes you wear distract viewers from the things you wish to say. Speak clearly and succinctly in a calm and considered voice. On radio your voice is all the listener can use to build a picture of you and your message.

Sit comfortably: This allows you to appear more relaxed on air, and gives you one less thing to worry about, either on radio or television.

Mentally rehearse: Rehearse the points you want to make and how they can be made. Rehearse the awkward questions that may trip you up too. For radio, brief and accessible written notes can be a useful aid.

Be succinct: Rarely will your interviewer ask you to go into great detail about the issues under discussion. Select no more than three key points that you want to make, and make them clearly and forcefully. This will mean that in some instances you will need to answer questions in a creative way in order to get your message across.

Correct misinformation: By correcting misinformation early you are better able to put your case and prevent the issue from being sidetracked. It also allows you an opportunity to move the subject of the conversation back to the area of focus.

Never interrupt: It is rude and will invariably weaken your position and the points you wish to make.

Make sure you've made the point:



A black and white still from the 'How to manage the media' colour video, part of the ALIA Lobby for libraries program

Even if you have to repeat it again and again. Some questions can lead you away from the point you wish to make, for example:

Q: Do you believe that this issue has been politically motivated to destabilise the state government?

A: There may be many reasons for this issue being raised at this time but the point that I want to make is...

Keep your temper: Don't be provoked. A cool, calm and collected interviewee is better able to make the point. No one gains points by trying to be aggressive and bad-tempered in putting across a view.

The interviewer is merely a means to the end: Treat the interviewer as a channel to the outside world. Don't take their comments or questions personally.

Relax, be enthusiastic: If you are not interested in the subject, how can you expect the viewer to feel enthused?

Treat every microphone and camera as live: Anything you say or do before or after the interview could go to air. ■