

Interacting with the Media

Handling the media is a skill you need to develop as both a candidate and a politician.

The relationship between the media and the candidate is interdependent: the media cannot do a story without a candidate, and the candidate needs the media to get her message out to a wider audience.

A respectful relationship with the media will help ensure that your position on issues is articulated fairly and accurately.

Media Do's

- Be polite and clear about your limits, and always bring the subject back to your key messages. If the media asks you a question you find objectionable or too personal, do not feel obligated to answer.
- Make an effort to be on good terms with reporters, commentators, and columnists, along with their editors, as they determine what and how much to write about you and your local campaign. Interacting with local reporters on social media is one way to reach and garner interest from the local media and beyond. However, just like traditional media, you must be aware of your social media content to ensure you are managing your messages strategically.
- Stay aware of what is shared to the media and track how the media presents that information.
- Keep updated media lists with names, addresses, telephone numbers, and e-mail before an election. This should include local, provincial, and national media outlets of all forms, including print, electronic, radio, and television.
- Maintain a separate media list that includes reporters, columnists, and commentators specific to your constituency or riding so that you can be sure that press releases and other notices get to your contacts and are not overlooked or forgotten.
- Keep track of your media allies: it will become clear early on which reporters are supportive of you or the issues you focus on.
- Always respond to a media request even if you don't intend to grant an interview. It is not only professional, but could be helpful later when you want coverage on a particular issue.
- Try to know what issue the reporter is asking about in advance. Have your research officer provide you with as much information as possible before you speak to the reporter, including what your opponents may be saying about that same issue. But most importantly, as a candidate, you need to know your message and stick with it during any media interview. Be consistent and strategic.

Media Don'ts

- **Don't believe that anything is EVER "off the record"**. Everything you say may be reported. If you don't want to read it on the front page of tomorrow's newspaper, don't say it.
- Don't try to pretend you know the facts when you don't. If you are asked questions about an issue you don't have an answer to, say so. Most reporters and voters will respect a candidate who is honest and upfront about what they know and what they don't know. Make a commitment to get back to them later, do the research, and get back to them as promised.
- Don't assume that the reporter is knowledgeable on the issue or is trying to trip you up deliberately. They likely had little time to research or gather background material in advance of the assignment. Providing background information will make their jobs easier, and will ensure the coverage is accurate. This will also help to build a trusting relationship that benefits both the reporter and the candidate.
- Don't overreact to bad press. The purpose of an interview is to communicate your message.
- Don't make promises to the media or the public that you are not prepared to keep.



Keep in mind that the **party leaders** will dominate most of the election coverage locally, provincially, and federally.