



Spokesperson Coaching and Media Interview Guide

Last Updated: Feb. 2016

Spokespeople help campaigns validate their support among community members, experts, and elected officials. When they are properly prepared, they can be some of the most effective people to reach new audiences and win public support. To do that takes serious coaching and practice with your media spokespeople.

Selecting your spokespeople

For any campaign, strictly following a common messaging framework helps ensure overall campaign coherence in media, among community members, and in front of elected officials. Consult our guide on messaging and framing and on selecting spokespeople for campaigns to help inform your strategy with recruiting and selecting spokespeople. Before confirming spokespeople for any media interviews, make sure your campaign has a single set of media talking points for all of your spokespeople to reference.

Setting expectations

Recruiting community members to tell their stories is a monumental responsibility and should be a priority for all campaigns. It may be difficult to convince LGBT people who have faced discrimination to publicly share their experience in media, especially if their city or state does not have comprehensive nondiscrimination protections. Due to trauma and violence, transgender spokespeople may need unique attention in the coaching process. At the end of the day, campaigns are responsible for the spokespeople they deploy in media. It must be made clear to them the pressure and scrutiny they will face if they choose to participate as a media spokesperson. But it is also the responsibility of the campaign to ensure that all spokespeople are truly prepared for what comes with the media spotlight.

Before an interview

A spokesperson's experience with an interview can make or break their role in your campaign. One wrong interview could mean not only a story that poorly reflects the campaign, but also a broken relationship for future media requests. Before arranging an interview for a spokesperson, make sure they:

- **Know and are prepared for the interview topic.** Provide them with talking points and role-play the interview with them. Make sure they are prepared for recent tensions in the community or controversies in your campaign to help anticipate hard questions. Make sure they have a keen understanding of the reporter's niche so your spokespeople and the reporter are having a fluid and helpful conversation. For individuals who are sharing

their personal story — perhaps as an ally of an LGBT person, or as someone who themselves faced discrimination — emphasize to them that they need not be policy or legal experts. Work with them on presenting their story in the most concise way possible.

- **Know what kind of interview it is.** Is the outlet radio, television, print, or online? For radio or television, is the interview live or taped? Is the outlet a priority market for your campaign? This informs which spokesperson you select for a particular outlet, and how you and your spokesperson prepare for the interview. For live interviews, make sure you arrange a spokesperson who has displayed comfort with live interviews in the past.
- **Know who the interviewer/reporter is.** Is the reporter you're working with friendly or hostile to your campaign? Have they covered LGBT nondiscrimination issues in the past? Do they have an understanding of the issues? Are they someone you can trust to report the story fairly and accurately? Setting the right expectation for your spokespeople helps them adjust their message so that your position resonates.

During an interview

It is generally a good idea to listen-in on the interview with your spokespeople. As the communications lead, your presence alone sets the tone for the reporter and tempers any questions that might go beyond the scope of that interview. For the spokesperson, your presence provides them with some comfort and makes it easier to intervene in case your spokesperson gets off-message, rambles, or is asked a difficult question.

Be sure to also take notes of the reporter's questions and develop an assessment of the reporter's friendliness to your campaign. Keep close track of common questions and follow-up questions you receive from reporter to reporter. That information may help clarify how you tweak your spokesperson's responses or the campaign's talking points between interviews.

After an interview

The campaign communications lead should assess every key media hit and evaluate the spokesperson's performance. For a lot of spokespeople, this experience may be the first time they've worked with press. For transgender people, this may be the first they've told their story to someone interested in listening to it. In either case, those spokespeople should have a conversation with the communications lead to receive feedback and suggestions for how to improve. Some questions to consider when evaluating a spokesperson's performance:

- Did they connect with the reporter?
- Did they stay in control of the interview?
- Did they stay focused?
- Did they speak from personal experience in a compelling manner?
- Did they tell their story clearly and concisely providing usable sound bites?
- Did they stay calm, positive, and friendly?
- Did they avoid repeating the opposition's messaging?

- Did they gently correct misinformation or inaccuracies?

When sharing feedback, allow the spokesperson to reflect on their own performance assessing what went well and what could be improved. After you have a chance to comment on their own reflections, share your input based on the questions above. Remember that this is a learning process. Having this dialogue is what solidifies their learning so they can be better prepared in the next interview.