

To: OER Communications Field
 From: GMMB
 Re: Media Relations Guide
 Date: February 9, 2017

The rapid response protocol that GMMB and the OER Steering Committee are facilitating will allow the OER community to monitor coverage, promote positive stories and react to negative coverage in a timely fashion. But in order for the community to successfully protect OER from negative news coverage, there is also a need for proactive media outreach.

As awareness of OER among key stakeholders and journalists continues to increase, it is important that members of the OER community cultivate relationships with reporters to educate them about OER and position themselves as issue experts for future coverage. This will help pre-empt false claims made by critics who are proactively pitching stories, and will provide the OER community with a voice to help add balance to articles.

Below is a guide outlining best practices to help the OER community engage with journalists, decide whether to respond to an article, and prepare for potential on-the-record interviews.

When to Respond

Before engaging with the media, it is important to ensure that the outcome of any outreach activities clearly aligns with our strategy as well as the criteria the Steering Committee is using to determine when to engage. The following checklist can act as a guide for determining whether a response meets our strategic goals:

- Does this story reach our target audiences (K-12 decision-makers, higher ed faculty, policymakers)? If yes, we engage.
- Does this story impact our efforts to clearly and accurately define and promote OER? If yes, we engage.
- Will responding to this story fire up our opponents or draw additional or mainstream negative attention to the issue? If yes, we do not engage.

Relationship Building

Building and maintaining relationships with reporters is one of the most important factors in securing positive (or mitigating damage from negative) media coverage. Some easy tips to maintain relationships include:

- Be responsive—Return calls promptly.
- Be timely—Follow up on articles with requests for updates or corrections the same day.
- Be helpful—Provide referrals and background information if you're not able to help on the record.
- Be responsible—Show up for scheduled appointments and be on time for calls.
- Be informed—Follow how key reporters are covering the issue and familiarize yourself with recent coverage.
- Be human—Don't be overly formal; reporters are people too.

Remember that a reporter's objective is to tell a story, provide timely and interesting information, and sell newspapers or attract listeners or viewers. Your objective is to share your message within the context of the story they are writing.

Messaging

Whether you are responding to an article, writing an op-ed, or engaging directly with a reporter, stay focused on the information that is most important for your audience to hear, and include your key messages in your answer to every question you are asked. Keep in mind that reporters often only take one to two sentences out of a 10-minute interview—the only way to ensure they choose to include your key message is to make sure you are repeating it consistently.

As frequently as possible, clearly define OER:

Open educational resources (OER) are freely available learning materials that can be downloaded, edited and shared to better serve all students.

Then include topline messages:

Quality+Freedom+Cost
K-12: OER provide a broad range of high quality resources, give districts more local control of content and curriculum, and enable flexibility to reallocate resources to support teaching and learning.
Higher Ed: OER provide a broad range of high quality resources, allow for greater academic freedom for faculty and lower costs for students.

Have a copy of both the [key messages](#) and the [frequently asked questions](#) at the ready so you can quickly and easily respond on-message.

Remember:

- Everything you say should restate or reinforce your message.
- Stick to your message.
- Don't offer the opposition a platform by bringing up their position.
- Provide clear examples and anecdotes to make your message tangible.

Interviewing

Whether you're speaking on the record or just talking to a reporter informally and on background, treat the conversation as a formal interview. Always be prepared, concise and on message.

- You may only get one shot, so make it count by being prepared.**
 - Know in advance the key point you want to get across, and lead with it.
 - Stay on message throughout the conversation, always pivoting back to your key point.
 - Conduct a practice interview in advance, including tough questions.
 - Know in advance what the reporter wants to cover, and provide background materials if relevant.

☑ Make your first words count.

- Lead with your main point and then state no more than two supporting facts, using personal stories or anecdotes to make them tangible.
- Be brief. Responses to questions should be short—limited to 10-20 second bites.
- Pivot away from tough questions by blocking and bridging: block the question and then bridge into your message. Some common examples include:

“That’s a good question, but what’s really important...”
 “[Yes/no], but what readers really need to know...”
 “That’s not my area of expertise, but what I can tell you is...”

- Use flagging to emphasize what’s most important:

“The one thing to take away today is...”
 “We’ve covered a lot, but it really boils down to these three things...”
 “The most important thing to remember...”

☑ Take control of the interview.

- Determine the ground rules at the outset of the interview
 - On the record — Anything you say can be quoted and attributed to you.
 - Background — Information you share may be included in the story as context without attribution, or could be quoted as a non-specific source (e.g., “someone close to the issue”).
 - Off the record — Information will not be used as quotes or background context. *Keep in mind there’s really no such thing as “off the record,” though.*
- Set the pace of the interview—don’t feel like you need to rush to keep up with the reporter, and pause to gather your thoughts before answering questions.
- Print your talking points and refer to them during your interview.
- Don’t feel compelled to make up an answer; If you don’t know, say so, or tell the reporter that you will get back to them later with more information.
- Hard questions do not mean that the reporter has taken a side on the issue. Don’t become defensive.

☑ Never lose sight of who you are trying to reach.

- Keep in mind that your audience is not the reporter—it’s the viewer, listener or reader who will receive the reporter’s story.
- Avoid jargon or technical language, and keep things at an 8th-grade comprehension level.
- Match your answers to your medium. Technical language may be appropriate if you’re interviewing with a trade publication that will be seen by educational professionals.
- Don’t trash the opposition. It will make you lose credibility.
- Don’t patronize the media.



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