GETTING ALONG WITH THE MEDIA
Some Obvious and Not So Obvious Tips

BE TRUTHFUL
Nothing will offend a reporter or incite a media frenzy as well as an exposed lie. Because reporters, by their profession, must by objective and truthful, they generally respect sources who are open, frank and honest. Being truthful, even when circumstances are difficult, is the best policy.

BE ACCESSIBLE AND HELPFUL
Reporters must contend with daily deadlines. They are under immense pressure to provide stories at a moment's notice. Sources who take impromptu telephone calls, or who are willing to return calls as quickly as possible are much appreciated. In addition to working quickly, reporters are expected to become knowledgeable about a broad variety of topics. Your assistance in teaching a reporter about a complex topic is very helpful. Something to remember when the reporter calls: Granting an interview is not the same as signing your own death warrant.

THINK AHEAD
The sooner you contact the media about an upcoming event, the greater your chances of obtaining advance coverage and same-day coverage. People who wait until the final minute to contact the media are increasing their chances of not being covered at all. Although many news organizations will drop everything to cover breaking news such as a bank robbery, structure fire or serious traffic accident, such is not so often the case when someone phones to say, "By the way, our event starts in about 30 minutes, and I just thought you might like to know..."

THE MEDIA IS NOT YOUR PUBLICITY AGENCY
Do not expect the media to print only the "good news" about your organization, or to throw itself wholeheartedly into helping you promote special events or a general sense of satisfaction among your patrons. Among the foundation of journalism is the need to challenge authority. In its role as the public's watchdog, the media often must ask difficult questions, dig for information from sources you would prefer they didn't, and distribute information that may be less than flattering.

EXPECT TO BE CHALLENGED
Quite frequently, a representative for one side of an argument is flabbergasted when the media interviews him or her, then interviews a representative of the opposing viewpoint. Such dual interviewing is intended to create balance in news stories, and is the mark of a reporter who is trying to do a fair and thorough job. Readers deserve to see and hear both sides of the story. Your side may not be the only one.

EXPECT TO SEE WHAT YOU SAID IN PRINT
It is interesting to hear people who spent 30 minutes speaking with a reporter the previous day claim after the interview is in print that they had "no idea I was going to be quoted." It is seldom that a reporter will strike a casual conversation when on the trail of a story. When you are speaking with a reporter, there is a strong likelihood that you are being interviewed. If there is a question as to the purpose of the conversation, do not hesitate to ask. Over time, you may develop a rapport with a reporter. If that occurs, you will probably be safe when you ask to speak "off the record." When dealing with reporters for the first time, you should assume that anything and everything you say may be used in a story.

EXPECT TO SEE WHAT YOU SAID CONDENSED
Newspapers have space limitations. Radios and television newscasters have time constraints. It is unusual when any media outlet has the space or time to print or air everything said in an interview. Newspapers can be broader in the amount of information they include in a report. Radio and TV normally limit their reports to a single topic. Because of these limitations, your complete interview will not be aired or published. Make certain the reporter knows what areas are of greatest importance to you.
AFTER THE INTERVIEW ...
Tell others in your organization that you have been interviewed and may be quoted in the news. Tell your colleagues what you said and when you expect it to appear in the news. Letting others in your organization know about your interview will help them understand your obligation to work with the media, and that you’re just as committed to keeping them informed as you are the media. In granting an interview or sharing information with the media, you are setting an example for others. Reporters respect organizations that are open to interviews with the top leader as well as everyone else down the line.

BE INFORMED
Reporters respect sources who know what’s happening in the news. They feel confident about interviewing people who are up to speed on important issues and whose views are more credible because of that knowledge. If you expect to be in the public eye, stay informed about your profession, legislation that may affect your organization’s operations, and other topics of current interest that might affect your organization.

BE AVAILABLE IN A CRISIS
Dealing with the media might be the last thing on your mind when a crisis strikes, but be open to sharing some time and information. The news media is a link with your constituency and/or customers. When a news vacuum is imposed, journalists will find other ways to tell the story.

MAKE YOUR RECORDS AVAILABLE
All appropriate information should be accessible or be made available to reporters. Many reporters operate on the assumption that public records are open under law and thus should be available for inspection. Denying access is inviting a confrontation with the media and possibly county and state officials charged with enforcing open records and meetings laws.

ABIDE BY THE OPEN MEETINGS LAW
Restrict closed sessions only to appropriate matters. Also, provide the media with the same information packet that's available to board members or other officials, if it is a legal gathering.