

## Media Relations

News reporters often call on Illinois Extension staff for their subject matter expertise. Media outlets are a fantastic way to help meet our mission of sharing information with the public.

### Build Relationships

Media outlets want valuable content and Extension has it! Build a regional or topical media contact list and understand content specialties. Know what topic might motivate a reporter.

**Build relationships before you pitch a story.** Call to introduce yourself or get in touch on social media. Understand their staff hierarchy. Tour the studio or newsroom.

**Why is your item news?** Why is it important to cover? What problem does it solve for whom? News values: Timeliness, proximity, impact, novelty, conflict

**Get the scoop!** Use exclusivity to motivate coverage. *“We’re working with this newspaper on this story and we wanted to let you know first”*

**Don’t be boxed in by Extension program areas.** For example, pumpkins can be about agriculture, food, the local economy, climate, family, wellness, etc.

### Create a media outreach strategy

**Be strategic:** Consider your goal, audience, timeline, and format and decide what your most effective media strategy is. This may mean you can’t do it all sometimes.

**Set up reoccurring content:** Bi-weekly or monthly columns, news segments, etc.

**Responding to an interview:** When a reporter contacts you, you do not have to respond immediately. Set up a follow-up call. Ask: *When is your deadline? What questions do you have? What time can I call you back?* You can also refer them to another expert.

### Prepare for the interview

**Create 3-5 talking points** and have them on paper. Prepare answers for questions, including questions you don’t want to answer. Have related links and event information ready.

**Rehearse:** In front of a mirror or with a colleague. Record yourself and rewatch it.

**Offer materials in advance** (if relevant): Logos, a headshot, pronunciations, photos/video.

**What to wear:** Extension logo wear, name tags. **What not to wear:** Busy patterns/stripes, loud jewelry, solid green.

**Bring with you:** A printed media release, other resource materials, props.



## During the interview

Keep sentences short. Use common words, not acronyms or Extension jargon. Assume the viewers or readers are beginners. Be relaxed and conversational. Remember, you're always "on-the-record" even before the official interview.

- **TV:** Look at the person you're talking to, not the camera. Speak in "sound bites" of 2 minutes or less.
- **Live TV/Radio:** Aim for 30-60 second answers. Always assume you're recording until you get confirmation that you're not.
- **Phone:** Speak clearly without rushing. Spell names or titles that might be misunderstood
- **Email:** Proofread thoroughly

**After the interview:** Follow up to emphasize a point or to provide more information  
*"I just wanted to reiterate this and that you have this link..."*

**After it airs/is published:** Track your media hits. Like and share it on social media. Share it with Extension leadership to raise visibility and impact. Follow up with the reporter.

## Crisis Communications

Prepare talking points and have them approved by relevant parties.

Don't say "no comment." Stay calm. Reiterate the question being asked and ask clarifying questions: *What is your deadline? When will this air/be printed?*

Delay tactics: *I'm going to need to speak to our staff/director to get you those answers. Can you email me your questions so that I can connect with others on this subject?*

Referral: *I can put you in touch with our state program leader/marketing and communications director/university public affairs office.*

Share these tactics within your team so that anyone who might get a call knows how to respond if approached. This includes Office managers, educators, volunteers, social media managers, etc.

## Questions we don't answer

If you're asked to speak on a potentially contentious topic, don't say "no comment." Refer them to public affairs and then notify Extension Communication Director Bridget Lee-Calfas.

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