

## COMMUNITY

# TOOLKIT

Whether you're reaching out to journalists for help in telling your story or have been contacted by journalists who are looking for information, documents or quotes, interacting with the media can be daunting. Here is a guide for dealing with journalists.

If you are soliciting media coverage for your cause, you're going to need to convince the reporter that your story is worth telling. The ideal story is well documented, will strike a personal chord with an audience and will have wide-reaching implications. Often, those stories are bred out of many smaller ones. If you know of a government controversy, problem in your community, institutional struggle, or illegal or immoral acts, reach out to California Watch. Talk to a reporter in the appropriate beat. If your story is small in scope, reach out to your local newspaper or radio or television station. If you make claims, bring proof. Give details. Return phone calls, and be respectful of deadlines.

If reporters are asking you for information or an interview, respond in some form. If the story is important, reporters are persistent. If you do not want to be quoted or provide information, tell them that, even if only through e-mail. Suggest other possible sources. When speaking with reporters, be clear about which information is OK for them to use for publication and which is not. Try to get as much information as you can about where the journalists are coming from, how they are approaching the story and with whom else they have talked. See more tips for interviews below.

If your story has been picked up by a news organization, there is a good chance you will be approached by photographers and multimedia (video and audio) journalists. It is important to remember that public events and public spaces – including parks, sidewalks and some government buildings – as well as the people in them can be photographed and recorded on video without specific permission. However, you can always ask not to be included in footage.

Usually, journalists will want to verify your name for photo or video captions or narration. If you want to increase your chances of not being included in their coverage, do not offer it to them. Photographers and multimedia journalists cannot trespass on private property, though they can get shots of it from a public area. If you give an interview on video or allow one to be recorded for radio, be aware that the footage will be edited at the reporter's discretion.

### KEY TERMS:

**Angle:** The focus, approach or perspective of the story.

**Beat:** A reporter's area of focus. Examples include public safety, health, crime or education.

**On background:** Information given to a reporter that provides important context, which might be included in the final report but will not be attributed to you by name and cannot be quoted.

**On the record:** Information given to a reporter that can be quoted, paraphrased, cited and attributed to you.

**Off the record:** Information given to a reporter for his or her personal understanding but cannot be quoted, paraphrased, cited or otherwise attributed to you in any way.

**Fact checking:** Verifying that objective statements made in the published product are accurate.

### DURING INTERVIEWS, DO:

- ▶ Ask your own questions.
- ▶ Speak about things you know.
- ▶ Tell your story, using examples and anecdotes.
- ▶ Follow up, both after the interview to find out when and how your information will be used and after the product has been published to give feedback. Ask whether you will be contacted for fact checking.
- ▶ Take your time to answer a question or collect your thoughts if needed.
- ▶ Correct misinformation the reporter offers or cites.

### DURING INTERVIEWS, DON'T:

- ▶ Be pressured to give up personal information that you are not comfortable sharing.
- ▶ Give information you are not confident is accurate.
- ▶ Be overwhelmed by multiple questions at once – break the questions down, or ask the reporter to do so.
- ▶ Allow the interview to be taped or recorded unless you have given consent.
- ▶ Expect to see the product before it is published. However, you may ask to see your quotes that are being used.