



Members of local sister city organizations are sometimes called by news media to comment on stories about local sister city programs. You can be successful in an interview if you understand how the media works, anticipate the kinds of questions you may be asked, prepare for the interview and follow-up after talking to the reporter. Here are a few tips to help you be prepared for your next interview.

What You Should Know About the News Media

Variety: News media vary widely in variety and scope, and many now re-package stories into multiple formats. There are newspapers that publish print editions and special Web site articles, radio stations that broadcast through traditional radio waves and through broadband online, and television stations that upload stories to the Internet. You may find that a print reporter is more focused on details, while photographers and television journalists are especially interested in visuals.

Immediacy: Reporters face tremendous pressure, with daily deadlines to file stories. The expansion of media outlets to the Internet, the proliferation of alternate media sources, and a decline in the number of news staffers means that reporters are often overburdened and time-crunched. They may not have the time to follow through and research information, and many will welcome your offer to provide them with additional materials.

Accuracy: Unfortunately, the rapid pace of the news cycle and the elevation of ambush journalism have sometimes led to sloppy reporting and left the public questioning the accuracy of the news. However, many reporters pride themselves on getting the story right and going the extra mile to ensure that details are correct. They may call you after an interview to confirm a detail, and fact-checkers are routinely employed at large media outlets to ensure accuracy.

Objectivity: A reporter is interested in a story that is timely, interesting, and relevant to his/her readers. Reporters often treasure and value their independence and ability to write about what they choose. Ideally, news stories should be balanced and not favor one side over another. It is rare that a news reporter will offer to allow you to see a story before it goes to print or is broadcast, so don't ask to see a story ahead of time unless you know the reporter very well personally.

Things Media Often Ask Members

Numbers: How many sister city relationships does our community have?

History: What steps did our community take to start its sister city program? How long have sister city programs existed in our community?

Details: What are our sister communities like? What do they share in common with our community? How are they different from our community?

Impact: What benefits do sister city programs provide to our community? Does the sister city program cost our community money and do the program's benefits make it worth the expense? Are the activities conducted in the name of the program worthwhile?

Money: How much money does the sister city organization have? Where does the organization's funding come from? Does the sister city organization encourage economic growth in our community?

Anticipate: Where do you see sister city programs going next?



How to Be Prepared for a Media Interview

Return calls promptly: Try to meet the reporter's need to get accurate information in a timely fashion. Reporters are often under daily pressure to file stories on deadline, so call them back within the same business day when possible. Do not insist on taping the interview with your own video camera, tape recorder, or voice recorder. The reporter will view this as both rude and hostile, putting your interview onto shaky footing.

Be calm and collected: If you are rushing and want time to collect your thoughts and refresh your memory on key details, ask the reporter if you can call him/her back in a few minutes. Most reporters will be more than happy to allow you a couple of minutes. After all, they want good quotes for their story, so they are relying on you to be the expert on sister city programs. Some reporters on a very tight deadline may not be willing to do this, but most will give you a couple of minutes if you ask for it.

Dress neatly and appropriately to the interview environment: If you are talking to the reporter about a new sister city signing ceremony alongside the mayor in a television studio, then you may want to wear a business suit or professional outfit. If the reporter is interviewing you while you take exchange student to visit an amusement park, often casual clothing will suffice. Very few people photograph or look good on television wearing white, so choose strong solid colors. Avoid big prints or large jewelry.

Speak in your natural speaking voice and use good posture: Use your normal speaking voice during the interview. You do not need to shout. If the interview is conducted in person, look the reporter in the eye and talk to him/her. During a television interview, the reporter will usually position the camera to focus on you. Stand or sit up straight for the interview, but do not look too rigid or stiff.

Don't be afraid of questions you can't answer: If the reporter asks you for information you don't know, say that you will check on the information and get back to him/her promptly. Then follow through and provide him/her with the needed information. Never, ever say, "No comment."

Know some basics about your local organization: You should be able to easily say in your own words what the sister city organization does locally and describe the relationships that are active in your community.

Talk about the sister city movement: Your local sister city organization is part of a network through Sister Cities International of more than 2,000 sister city relationships in 136 countries. This network connection adds importance to your local organization's work. Mention Sister Cities International in the interview and tell the reporter about our website: www.sister-cities.org.

Remember that you are in control of the interview: You are the expert that the reporter is talking to about the sister city movement. The reporter cannot quote you with a comment that is never said. If the reporter does not ask a question that allows you to talk about what you intend to say in the interview, you can use a "bridging" technique to insert the information you want. For example, your response might be, "That's an interesting question, but the real issue/big picture is..." Do not use this technique to duck legitimate questions, but you can use it to add information. Many reporters will give you the opportunity to add information at the end of the interview by asking a question such as, "Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?" If the reporter does not give you the opportunity to add information, ask for a chance. Just say, "I know you are busy, but I think it's important to add..."



Giving a Media Interview

Realize that silence is not a bad thing: After answering a question from the reporter and being thorough and truthful, close your mouth and don't talk. It can be easy to ramble or make a mistake during pauses between questions.

Visualize a successful interview and rehearse if needed: Rehearsing the interview in your mind can help you visualize success. Practice responses to questions ahead of time if possible. If you are nervous, try practicing in front of a mirror, answering practice questions into a tape/voice recorder and listening to them, or rehearse with a friend.

More Resources

Information from Sister Cities International: We can provide quotes, interviews, historical facts, and other information. Contact our Communications team at communications@sister-cities.org for this information.

News Story Tips: Do you know about a great sister city story that is interesting, innovative or unusual? Sister Cities International can help publicize the story to the entire network as well as the public via its website and social media channels! Please submit your story ideas here:
www.sister-cities.org/submit-your-member-story

Press List: Sister Cities International subscribes to a media database that lists news media outlets and reporters. We can pull a list of local media for you from that database and e-mail it to you as an Excel file. To obtain a list, email the communications team at Sister Cities International at communications@sister-cities.org. Put "Press List Needed" in the subject line of your e-mail message.

Sample News Releases: Sample news releases are available online on the Sister Cities International website Toolkits page at www.sister-cities.org/toolkits