



## A How-To Guide for Interviews

*Interviews can be intimidating for people who have never spoken with reporters on the record before. But with the right research and preparation, there's nothing to be nervous about. In fact, interviews can be incredibly powerful and beneficial opportunities to promote the work of active and retired federal employees and raise the profile of NARFE in your community.*

### **If a reporter is interested, prepare spokespeople for interviews.**

Before entering an interview either for print or broadcast media, be sure to research the reporter's background and previous stories he or she has written that relate to your issue. It's also important to understand the audience the reporter is writing for so you can speak to them in your answers.

To prepare for the interview, you must also feel confident speaking on the issue, so before it begins:

- Anticipate what questions may be asked and have answers ready;
- Identify potential issues that may arise;
- Know the facts;
- Understand that you may not know every answer; and
- Practice “bridging” techniques that bring the conversation back to the points you wish to get across in the interview.

### **Things to do in an interview.**

During an interview, there are many ways you can guide the conversation. During your introductions, set the frame of the conversation by explaining your position and particular areas of expertise. When you begin to tell your story, keep it simple and cite the facts and figures that are relevant in an interesting way. Don't overwhelm the interviewer or the broadcast audience with too much at once, however. Talking about one thing in 10 seconds shows that you are in control. Talking about 10 things in 30 seconds is when you risk losing control.

Remember, the human attention span is short, so use colorful examples, personal human experiences and real-life comparisons to get your point across. By avoiding jargon, statistics, acronyms and complex concepts, you'll also keep the interview on track.

Although you do not have control over what questions the reporter asks, you are in control of bridging your answers back to the messages you want to convey. To do this,



first acknowledge the question and then bridge to your message. This may sound something like: “That may be the case, but one thing to consider is...” or “That’s not my area of expertise, but I can tell you...” or “That’s an interesting question, it reminds me of...”

### **Things NOT to do in an interview.**

Don’t answer hypothetical questions (“what would you say if...” or “what do you think will happen if the Senate doesn’t pass a bill?”), but instead acknowledge that it’s a hypothetical inquiry and bridge to an important key message of your own.

Don’t guess; always tell the truth because reporters will check accuracy.

Don’t say “no comment” but either bridge to another message or, when appropriate, say you’ll have to get back to them with the most accurate findings.

Avoid “yes” and “no” answers by seizing the opportunity to tell an interesting story.

And lastly, avoid long and complex answers.

### **Helpful interview tricks to remember.**

If it is a phone interview, consider standing up to sound more energetic. Smile – and your message will sound more appealing.

#### **When interviewing *in person*:**

- Sit straight in your chair, slightly forward;
- Use your hands effectively by keeping motions between your abdomen and shoulders;
- Maintain eye contact with the reporter.

#### **When a camera is present for a *TV interview*:**

- Speak clearly and not too fast;
- Avoid wearing any clothing that might cause distractions like loud prints and shiny jewelry;
- Remember that medium-tone blues and grays are recommended colors for attire.



## **General Media Outreach Tips.**

***Be Helpful:*** Reporters are busy, and it's in your best interest to help make their job easier. Organize all the information they will need before your first contact. If you're holding an event, have some materials on hand about NARFE and the issue in case they'd like further information.

***Be Specific:*** The more specific information you give reporters, the better. If the media knows what to expect, they will be able to better cover it. If a prominent figure is working with you, mention this. If you're holding an event, describe in detail where it will be held.

***Answer "Why":*** Why is this newsworthy? This will be a key point for the media, so don't hide what you are advocating – put that up front.

***Be Polite:*** Always remember to thank people – it will go a long way the next time you have an announcement. When in doubt, treat them like a client in a business setting – give them what they need, gently nudge them to follow your lead and be deferential when they tell you to back off.