

ACS Media Response Protocol

Many organizations already understand the importance of strong media engagement and have designated spokespeople and core messages in place. This protocol helps translate that foundation into a consistent, day-to-day practice. By outlining clear steps, roles, and communication touchpoints, it ensures that media inquiries are handled in a timely, coordinated, and mission-aligned way—no matter who receives the request or when it comes in. The goal is to support staff, partners, and leadership in responding with confidence and speaking with a unified voice, particularly when timing is tight or topics are sensitive.

BONUS TOOL: Use the [ACS Media Guide](#) to help your organization engage proactively—rather than reactively—with local media.

Why is a media response protocol important?

- ▶ It helps staff and partners feel ready and confident to work with media
- ▶ It protects organizational credibility and builds trust by ensuring communication is timely, accurate, and consistent

Communication Lead and Authorized Spokespeople

Clarifying who is responsible for managing inquiries and who is authorized to speak ensures your organization's message is consistent, aligned, and credible across all media interactions.

The communication lead, to whom all requests should ideally be directed, is:

NAME _____

TITLE _____

EMAIL _____

PHONE _____

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For more information about ACS, please contact us at info@advocacyandcommunication.org. Follow us on [LinkedIn](#).

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300 New Jersey Avenue, NW
Suite 900, PMB 9005
Washington, DC 20001

Phoenix
207 North Gilbert Road
Suite 007
Phoenix, AZ 85234

Authorized spokespersons are designated by organizational leadership and include:

SPOKESPERSON _____

SPOKESPERSON _____

SPOKESPERSON _____

SPOKESPERSON _____

Topic-specific spokespersons authorized to speak on behalf of the organization include:

TOPIC: _____

SPOKESPERSON _____

TOPIC: _____

SPOKESPERSON _____

TOPIC: _____

SPOKESPERSON _____

TOPIC: _____

SPOKESPERSON _____

Media inquiries should be referred to the organization's communication lead before involving topic-specific spokesperson(s).

Process for Handling Media Inquiries

A shared, repeatable process helps your organization respond efficiently and consistently, regardless of who initially receives the inquiry or the subject being discussed.

Step 1: Field the Request

Ideally, the communication lead or an authorized spokesperson will receive the request—in that case, move to Step 2.

→ If someone other than an authorized spokesperson receives a media inquiry:

- ✓ Do not provide comment or confirm any information.
- ✓ Forward written inquiries to the communication lead.
- ✓ For verbal inquiries, kindly request:
 - Name and contact information
 - Media outlet
 - Topic
 - Deadline
 - Specific questions
- ✓ The person receiving the inquiry should capture all information and notify the communication lead immediately.

→ If an authorized spokesperson is unavailable (e.g., on vacation, out sick) or does not respond within 24 hours—or within 2-4 hours of the deadline provided by the media outlet to the staff member who fielded the media inquiry—another spokesperson should be contacted by that staff member to step in and maintain responsiveness.

Step 2: Respond

→ The authorized spokesperson(s) should:

- ✓ Respond to all media inquiries within 24 hours or by the stated deadline.
- ✓ Review any questions and prepare responses, including any relevant talking points.
- ✓ Consult with other leadership or legal counsel, if needed.
- ✓ Alert the communication lead.
- ✓ Work with the other partners (as needed/applicable) on agreed-upon messaging.

Step 3: Review

Your organization may request (but not expect) an opportunity to review any media content prior to its release. If allowed to review, you should return reviewed content by the outlet's deadline.

Step 4: Monitor Coverage

- ✓ Identify a staff member to track media mentions and report coverage internally (this may or may not be the communication lead).
- ✓ If corrections or clarification is needed to any reported content, only the communication lead should reach out to the reporter/writer/outlet.
- ✓ Positive media coverage can be shared out across the organization's communication channels (e.g., social media, newsletters, etc.).



- ✓ Negative media coverage should be reviewed internally BEFORE anyone on staff responds to decide if a response is warranted, who else internally should be made aware, and what, if anything, should be done differently in the future to avoid negative coverage. (Related, staff should understand they are not to respond to negative coverage or comments on social media or websites.)

Step 5: Debrief and Refine the Process

After publication, your organization should debrief internally (and if needed, with staff, partners, committee members, etc.) to assess the outcomes of the coverage. This is a good opportunity to refine talking points and your overall approach for fielding future media inquiries.

Interview Requests

Clear expectations for how interviews are requested, prepared for, and conducted ensure that spokespeople are confident, well-briefed, and able to represent the organization well.

- ▶ Interview requests should be approved by leadership or the communication lead.
- ▶ Spokesperson(s) can request a briefing from the interviewer to be received at least 24 hours before the interview, which should include interview topic(s), questions, and any additional context. *NOTE: An interviewer may or may not honor this request.*
- ▶ Spokesperson(s) should avoid going “off-the-record” except in rare circumstances and only with journalists with whom the organization has a long-established, trusted relationship.

Crisis Communication

In the event of a crisis, review the organization’s [Crisis Communication Plan](#), which outlines roles, messages, and response procedures. Don’t have a plan? Use ACS’ tool online [here](#) to create one.

Confidentiality

Any public communication released by the organization (verbally or in writing) should respect confidentiality agreements, data protection laws, and the privacy of clients, partners, and staff.

Training and Review

Regular training and reflection reinforce consistency across staff and help the organization continually improve how you engage with media over time.

- ▶ All staff should receive annual media protocol training; new staff members should be trained as part of onboarding.
- ▶ This protocol should be reviewed and updated annually by organizational leadership, or as needed.
- ▶ If you have organizations partnering with you on media outreach, this protocol should be shared with them to ensure consistency and alignment.

By following the protocol, your organization can ensure that its voice is clear, credible, and consistent when responding to any media inquiries.