Tips for handling reporter calls

Obtain basic details
- Write down the reporter’s name, media outlet, phone number and story deadline
- Ask what the story will be about and how the interview will be used
- If TV or radio is calling, inquire about the interview format (live, taped, etc.)
- If you’re the appropriate expert but are not ready to talk right away, set a later time for the interview, respecting the reporter’s deadline. Even 15 minutes gives you time to prepare yourself.
- If you’re not the best expert, refer the reporter to someone else who is or to the Media Relations office (642-3734).

Preparing for an interview
- Take a few minutes to write down the message(s) you want to convey. Use a sentence or two for each message.
- Avoid technical jargon. Use lay terms.
- Make sure that what you have to say is clear and succinct.
- Be ready to support your message with a few examples and facts.
- Keep in mind what the public needs to know, and how the topic impacts people’s lives
- Anticipate tough questions the reporter might ask.
- Practice delivering your message(s).
- In preparing for a TV interview, avoid wearing white, cream or busy prints. (This may not be possible to avoid for impromptu interviews.)

During the interview
- Offer a brief background on the subject at hand if the reporter seems to need it.
- Assume everything you say is on the record, from the time you meet or talk with the reporter until he or she leaves the room or hangs up. This is true even if you are just casually chatting. Jokes or sarcastic remarks may end up in print or on air.
- Know that agreeing to go “off-the-record” - providing information that would not be attributed to you - is a risk.
- Speak with authority and energy, particularly for TV or radio interviews.
- State your position in positive terms, even if a reporter’s questions take a negative turn or sound loaded.
- If the reporter’s questions are veering off track, politely steer the interview back to the points you want to make.
- If you’re not sure the reporter understood the major points you were making, ask the reporter to repeat them. Some (print) reporters may read back your quotes once the story is written, but it is not the practice of most journalists to show sources an entire story before publication.