



Who Should Read

Chief Research Officers
(CROs) and Their
Communications Staff

Departmental and Central
Communications Staff

Research Faculty

Effective Media Conversations Planning Worksheet

A Tool for Preparing Faculty to Clearly and Concisely
Communicate Their Research to the Media

3 Ways to Use This Tool

- Distribute to faculty before media conversations to boost their confidence by helping them prepare talking points, develop responses to commonly asked questions, and identify potential pitfalls in the conversation
- Utilize the completed worksheet to guide faculty through the preparation process, assess whether faculty are communicating their research in a digestible manner, and pinpoint areas for improvement or clarification
- Ask faculty to convert their written worksheet responses into verbal responses in a trial interview with a research communications staff member

Effective Media Conversations Planning Worksheet

As it becomes increasingly important for faculty to interact with popular media outlets about their research, CROs must find new ways to support their communications endeavors.

Many CROs and Research Communications Directors report that faculty are wary of speaking with the media due to past experiences in which journalists did not accurately portray their research. But if properly trained, faculty can more effectively connect with popular media to encourage informed and favorable coverage of their research. Progressive institutions encourage their faculty to prepare before each media conversation to plan their message and avoid potential pitfalls.

How to Use This Tool

This tool will help communications staff guide conversations with faculty who are preparing to speak about their research with the media.

While faculty might be reluctant to fill out yet another form, completing the Effective Media Conversations Planning Worksheet ahead of conversations with journalists may actually save faculty valuable time. If faculty can effectively describe their research in clear, concise terms, it can shorten the length of their media conversation. In addition, this tool can empower faculty to more effectively promote their research and have greater control over the results of a media conversation.

Part One: Explaining Complex Research in a Bite-Sized Medium

When faculty explain every complex detail of their research to journalists, the most important elements may get lost. Before the conversation, faculty need to develop an overview of the key takeaways a journalist should understand.

The first page of this tool will guide faculty to discuss their research at a high level, which includes its significance in its field and in broader terms. Faculty with little or no media experience may need support in this area to distill their research into messages that are easily understood by a lay or less-specialized audience.

Part Two: Avoiding Potential Conversation Pitfalls

Faculty should think through potential conversation pitfalls related to their research topic before they are faced with difficult questions during an interview:

- Is there background the journalist should have to contextualize the research?
- Is there a controversial aspect to the research?
- What questions might arise around methods, outcomes, or funding?

Determining what pitfalls might occur prior to the conversation will not only better equip faculty to have meaningful discussions with journalists, but will also help faculty to clearly envision how the conversation may proceed. Even if faculty do not anticipate every difficult question a journalist could ask, their answers will be better informed by going through this thought exercise.

Effective Media Conversations Plan, Part I

Use the below template to describe your research and chart your next media conversation.

Name of Researcher:

Title of Media Outlet:

1. Explaining Complex Research in a Bite-Sized Medium

Using minimal field-specific jargon, describe your research in 300 words or less:

What is its importance to the field? (150 words or less)

What is the larger significance (whether theoretical or societal) of your research? (150 words or less)

What's the number one most exciting thing that has happened with your research, whether in terms of findings or recognition, that has happened recently? (150 words or less)

Why should this **specific** media outlet care? (100 words or less)

What are the three most important ideas, findings, or other takeaways you'd want the **audience** of this **specific** media outlet to know about your research? (100 words or less)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Effective Media Conversations Plan, Part 2

Use the below template to describe your research and chart your next media conversation.

2. Avoiding Potential Conversation Pitfalls

What are the five questions most likely to be asked about this material, and how will you answer those questions? (100 words or less for each answer)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Take your preparation to the next level.

Practice is critical. Completing a trial interview with a research communications staff member not only helps to work out the kinks in your media conversation plan, but can also ease any concerns you have prior to the actual interview.