Organize to Communicate

- Identify organization’s spokespeople
- Build network of “talkers”
- Calendar
- Communicate
  - Press kit core materials
    - Bio(s)
    - Brochures/fact sheets
    - Press release
    - Contact info
Organize to Communicate

• Messaging documents
• Press list(s)
  • Media types
  • Programs
  • Beats: Reporters, producers, personalities, bloggers
When the Media Calls...

- Return calls promptly
- Do not feel obligated to answer questions on the spot
  - Which outlet are you calling from?
  - What is your story about?
  - When is your deadline?
  - What is your contact information?
- Prepare
Prepare

• Read the latest articles by the journalist
• View or listen to the latest TV or radio segments
• Think through possible questions
• Develop concise, accurate answers
• Know the rules – on the record, on background, off the record
• Know your message
The Message

- Effective messages
  - Distinctive
  - Repeatable
  - Concise
  - Simple but not simplistic
  - Avoid jargon
The Message

• Specific examples
• Analogies
• Colorful words (devastating, chilling effect)
• Clichés
• Contemporary references
• One-liners
• Personal experiences
The Message

- Absolutes
- Meaningful statistics
- The audience
- Second-person perspective
The Message

• Talking points
• Message box or triangle
  • Three-legged stool or four-legged chair
The Message Triangle

• Address the question, then transition to message point(s)
  • That’s an interesting question, and to put it in perspective...
  • I’m glad you asked this because it brings me to a point I’ve been wanting to make...
  • I don’t have the precise details, but what I do know is...
  • Let’s not lose sight of the fact here, which is...
  • What I think you mean by the question is...
  • A more important point is...
Counties play a key role in our nation’s election system

- Counties are central to our nation’s election system and work with states to ensure the security and integrity of the process.
- We run all elections on the ground.
- There are almost 9,000 dedicated local election officials throughout the country who administer all elections.
- We oversee 100,000 polling places and more than 700,000 poll workers every two years.
- This process begins long before and extends after election day.
  - Training
  - Auditing
  - Security
  - Accessibility

All elections are local

Counties face real world threats that can erode the public’s trust in elections before, during and after votes are cast

- Counties defend against cyber attacks every day.
- In fact, the state of Utah reported it fends off nearly 1 billion cyber attacks each day. If successful, these hacks could damage websites, communications and vote tabulations.
- We also protect against traditional security threats by analyzing polling locations, contracting with local law enforcement and safely storing voting machines.
- After the election, we secure vote tallies, audit the election and safeguard voter information.

A strong federal-state-local partnership secures and improves our nation’s election system

- Ensuring that vote totals are safely and accurately counted is not a single player game.
- A partnership with federal, state and local governments is crucial to combat new, sophisticated risks to election security.
- Dedicated funding for local governments reduces election costs and makes sure counties have the resources to protect against attacks.
  - Resources often get stuck at the state level.
  - Uncertainty in the federal or state budgeting processes can hinder local efforts.
No Comment? No Way!

• That’s the $64,000 question. As soon as somebody hands me the envelope with the correct answer, I will open it and let you know.”
• “What you want to know, I can’t tell you, because I don’t know yet. When I do, I’ll let you know.”
• “The picture isn’t clear yet.”
• “The issue is undergoing a thorough review at this time, and I wouldn’t want to prejudice the review by making a premature comment.”
• “As you know, the law imposes very serious obligations on the county, and we need to move carefully to make certain that our actions comply with the law.”
• “We need to find out the facts before commenting.”
• “Our timetable is however long it takes to do it right, and not a day longer.”

(Adapted from Sheehan Associates, Inc.)
Lights, Camera...  

- Types of TV interviews
  - Live
  - Live to tape
  - Edited
Lights, Camera...

- Eye contact
- Smile
- Posture
- Animation
- Color
- Clothing
- Always on
Earned Media

- Press releases
- Exclusives
- Op-ed columns
- Letters to the editor
- Editorial board meetings
- Press events
- Press conference calls
- Digital content
- PSAs
NACo Media Relations: A Guide for Counties

• Developed to assist county officials in strengthening communications skills and improve local media coverage
• NACo has other resources available, including media relations workshops, webinars and “take home” news releases to report on NACo activities
National Association of Counties

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