



National Public Education Campaign



For national, regional and state media relations efforts



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Introduction



You have been asked to consider serving as a spokesperson for the media campaign to educate the public on the benefits of pavement preservation. Thank you for taking time to review the **Spokesperson Training Guide**, developed to help ensure a consistent message is delivered to media that cover transportation infrastructure news and will influence public education on the topic of pavement preservation.

The campaign is being launched on the national, regional and state levels to educate key target audiences who make decisions that impact highway, road and bridge

construction, maintenance and preservation.

The following guide is designed to help campaign leaders **maximize opportunities** to educate the media and **gain visibility** for the pavement preservation approach. Because a clear, consistent message is critical to obtaining media coverage, all designated spokespersons, as well as anyone speaking informally on the issue, need to deliver the same message. The precise wording may vary somewhat from spokesperson to spokesperson, however, the message should be essentially the same.



The Spokesperson Training Guide will help campaign leaders maximize opportunities to educate the media and gain visibility.



Establishing campaign credibility

Convincing the media to pay attention to the pavement preservation campaign will be an uphill battle dependent on the credibility of the organization, its message and its spokespeople. The media's first responsibility is to screen out unreliable sources of information or those with self-serving agendas. Although there is no doubt the pavement preservation campaign warrants national attention and has a valid message of importance to public officials and taxpayers across the country, the campaign cannot afford missteps as

it begins to communicate with the media.

Although the campaign may be led by a variety of groups working together, they need to work under **one umbrella organization and present a unified face in all public and media communication.**

For example, a spokesperson may work for and represent one of the campaign stakeholders, but if speaking for the campaign, he or she should be identified as "John Smith, spokesperson for the National Center for Pavement Preservation."



The campaign's message must be clear and spokespeople should be perceived as authorities on the issue.



Understanding today's media

As we rely on the media to cover and report the pavement preservation message, we need to **understand the climate** within which reporters and editors operate and work to meet their needs and deadlines. The more we can serve as a resource that helps the media deliver accurate, relevant information, the more easily will we be able to get our message out.

News staffs and news space shrink

Newsrooms aren't what they were 20 years ago. The size of news staffs has diminished markedly as each media outlet tries to operate within severe budget cutbacks. The handful of reporters and editors who remain at print and broadcast media outlets are left with the responsibility for turning out factually accurate, balanced content. Under difficult time constraints, they attempt to gain in-depth knowledge of the topic and industry and present opposing views.

That fact that many reporters are often young and inexperienced hasn't changed. **The more complex the issues, the greater will be the challenge to attain accuracy in news reporting.**

News cycle much quicker

Technology bombards reporters and editors with by-the-second newswire

reports, email alerts and urgent faxes – which are in addition to the phone calls from anyone who wants to suggest a story idea or complain about yesterday's news coverage. **Print reporters, who in the past might have had the luxury of covering one "beat" or news area exclusively, now spread themselves over several and try not to sacrifice quality in the process.** When they do, they risk losing readers, who now have many other choices for keeping up with the news.

Competition drives news decisions

Newspaper editors are making constant judgments about what will still be "news" when the paper arrives on the doorstep the next morning. If the story breaks at 2 p.m. and is on the Internet by 2:05, on radio by 2:30 and TV news at 6 p.m., should the paper include it in tomorrow's edition? Newspaper readership has been on the decline each year, along with advertising revenue. **The need for newsrooms to do more with less will continue.**





Working effectively with reporters/editors

Proactive approach essential

More than ever, reporters and editors appreciate help from news sources for story suggestions and background information. They no longer have sufficient time or staff to investigate story ideas or conduct extensive research. The change in how the media operates presents both a challenge and an opportunity for organizations that need to educate the public on issues.

Connecting with the media is a challenge, given reporters' and editors' time constraints and inability to cover every worthwhile story. The media's lack of time, however, provides an opportunity to bring stories to their attention that they might otherwise not discover. When the stories are newsworthy and relevant to the particular media outlet's focus, editors and reporters are grateful for the assistance.

Outside experts provide valuable insight

Although they will continue to be selective, the media gatekeepers have become more willing to allow reliable news sources to assist in the news-gathering process. They are more open to story ideas and more likely to review background information offered by outside sources. Many are even using photos, illustrations or video from outside sources, which was universally taboo in the past.

Creating a give-and-take relationship with the media is possible when would-be news sources recognize the media's challenges and strive to help meet them. Building strong relationships with key media outlets can pay valuable dividends, but does require an investment of time and resources.





What the media want

1. News as they define it
2. A credible news source they can trust
3. A source who responds in time to meet their deadlines
4. Answers to their questions: Not "No Comment"
5. For radio: a spokesperson who can summarize and speak in "sound bites"
6. For TV: a visual background, preferably with action
7. A quick, smooth response to questions and answers in complete sentences (*Not a lot of reporter prodding required*)
8. Layperson terminology that doesn't require translation
9. A contact person who really is available and accessible
10. To know when they've made a mistake and a chance to make it right.



The media needs a source they can trust, who will answer questions and respond in time to meet their deadlines.



Understanding what's "newsworthy"

As much as we might like to control the media and determine which issues will make headlines from day to day, that authority and "gate keeping" role rests solely in the hands of newspaper editors and broadcast news directors. Unfortunately, as media outlets struggle to remain viable in a new era of ever-increasing information sources, the definition of "newsworthiness" becomes more narrow and can vary markedly from newspaper to magazine to broadcast station. Issues that contain a controversial or sensational element may make the grade even though they don't meet the criteria in other ways.

Our role, as business people and representatives of our industry, needs to be that of **resource** to those decision makers who deem one issue "newsworthy" and another one not. Media people in such positions of influence, however, often gauge their decisions about which issues warrant coverage on the information provided by industry experts and credible sources. They take into consideration their particular audience's interests, geography and perhaps political makeup.

Measures of newsworthiness:

- Size of population/Number of people impacted by the issue
- Current or potential impact on the economy or jobs
- Controversial or polarizing element
- Sensational aspect
- Local impact on a community

An issue that gets a lot of play in an urban news market, for example, may matter little in a rural community and vice versa. Media gatekeepers also consider the scope of an issue, how many people it potentially impacts and the long-term effect it may have on a population or community. A television station may cover an issue because it has visual appeal, while a newspaper ignores it completely.

In other words, the fact that we believe, as pavement preservation advocates, that pavement preservation should be a top media issue deserving of major media coverage will not necessarily guarantee the issue receives attention. To convince the media that pavement preservation is worthy of coverage, we need to make a convincing case that it impacts the broad population, the economy, jobs, the environment, etc. It is truly an issue in "the public's interest."



Speaking in the public interest

Unlike so many issues that affect only narrow segments of the population, sustainable highways and bridges truly impact quality of life for all Americans. Certain industries, such as trucking or tourism, may rely more on our transportation infrastructure than others, but it's safe to say that nearly every industry has a stake in the surface quality and longevity of roads, highways and interstates.

The fact that sustainable highways are an obvious necessity for all types of commerce and thus jobs, makes the campaign message an easier sell, as long as spokespeople effectively connect the dots. It will be relatively easy to make the case for good roads. **What will be more difficult is explaining why the pavement preservation approach is in the public's best interest.**

The pavement preservation philosophy asks the public to forgo short-term gain (new roads or reconstructed roads) and instead accept short-term pain (spend money on treatment for roads that don't seem to need it).

When asked to fund long-term gain (longer-lasting roads that cost less), the request is often met with opposition. The campaign's challenge will be to convince the public and public officials to forgo a certain percentage of reconstruction (short-term gain) in order to be able to fund necessary maintenance and treatment (short-term pain and long-term gain).

As spokespeople communicate with the media, they should emphasize why **pavement preservation benefits the larger population** or community in terms of tax savings, public safety, environmental conservation, etc.



As spokespeople communicate with the media, they should emphasize why pavement preservation benefits the larger population.



Delivering the Pavement Preservation message

Overall

Our nation's highways and bridges are facing serious deterioration and we can't afford to rebuild them all. Funding problems are due to ill-advised policies that are primarily reactive, rather than proactive.

Highways and bridges must be protected and maintained to ensure the economic strength of our country, individual states and local municipalities.

The current "worst first" spending approach is bankrupting state and local budgets and debilitating roads and bridges. Short-term policies need to be replaced with sustaining long-term approaches involving asset management and pavement preservation.

Highway and bridge maintenance has largely been an afterthought, rather than a planned budgeted expense. Inattention to preservation has skyrocketed the need for reconstruction.

A Pavement Preservation program consists of three components: preventive maintenance, minor rehabilitation (non structural) and some routine maintenance activities.

Sub-Messages

Cost savings – Pavement preservation stretches the

transportation infrastructure budget and extends the remaining service life of roads and bridges.

Economic competitiveness –

Preserving the highway system is vital to our country's future. Commerce depends on a viable infrastructure. Spending money to keep good roads in good condition is the most cost-effective way to save America's highways.

Safety – Proper preservation treatments create safer roads and reduce accidents.

Employment – Taking a proactive preservation approach to sustaining our infrastructure creates more employment in the road construction industry than does the reactive "worst first" reconstruction approach.

Sustainability/Conservation – A proactive preservation approach causes less environmental destruction, fewer CO₂ emissions and significantly less waste of non-renewable resources.

Traffic Congestion – A preservation approach is significantly less disruptive to the flow of commerce and commuters. Motorists experience far less frustration and loss of time due to road construction.



Media questions/ Mock interview

1. Pavement preservation seems to advocate for letting our roads deteriorate even more. Why would we want to create more potholes than we already have?
2. If pavement preservation is the right approach, why hasn't it been done all along?
3. Our (city, county, state) is already losing business because of our bad roads. How can we afford to neglect some roads and drive more businesses away?
4. It's obvious that our roads are in a crisis state, but won't a pavement preservation approach take longer to bring them back than just rebuilding them?
5. If we as a (city, county, state) adopt a "pavement preservation philosophy" how long will it take to reverse our funding problems so that we can afford to do regular maintenance? When will we see a return on our investment?
6. Is it possible that some government officials favor reconstruction because it makes political sense to do so? Perhaps the companies that rebuild roads are influencing those decisions?
7. The miles of roads and bridges in the US have quadrupled (?) over the past 50 years when the highway system was developed. Doesn't that mean that every year we should be increasing our budgets in order to take care of them?
8. If our roads and bridges were built 60 or 70 years ago, isn't it about time to rebuild anyway?
9. Can you quantify how much cheaper it is in the long run to preserve pavement as opposed to entirely resurfacing a road?
10. Who stands to gain from a pavement preservation approach? Does it drive construction business to one segment of the industry over another?





The "quotability" quotient: Crafting the sound bite

Whether it's print or broadcast media, the reporter is looking for a good quote, a statement that sums up the story in a nutshell and helps the reader or viewer get the point.

Spokespeople for the pavement preservation campaign need to use or develop short "sound bites" that get the reporter's attention and therefore have a better chance of making it into the published or broadcast story.

For television and radio especially, short concise statements are essential. Assume the story will be short and your comments may be edited down to about 18 seconds or less. In most interviews, your task will not be to tell the entire pavement preservation story, but to draw attention to the issue and generate more interest in it.

Quotes to consider:

"Roads don't need to be rebuilt as often as we're rebuilding them. When we don't fill the cracks, for example, we are accelerating decay."

"The 'worst first' approach isn't working. In fact, it's bankrupting us."

"A sound highway investment policy starts with keeping our good roads good. Once we take care of that

responsibility we can use the remaining budget to rebuild those that have exceeded their service life."

"We're practicing unplanned obsolescence. When we don't budget for road and bridge maintenance, we're treating them like disposable commodities, but they are extremely expensive to replace."

"All roads will eventually need to be rebuilt, but when regular maintenance and necessary treatments are skipped, we are accelerating deterioration and jeopardizing public safety in the process."

"If we expect this country to continue to be a world power, a strong transportation infrastructure is critical. We neglect our roads and bridges today and we will pay six times as much to fix them tomorrow."





Spokesperson checklist

1. Prepared -- You have taken the time to discern the interview direction and know how you will respond to all anticipated questions. You have identified the left-field questions and are ready to answer or deflect those as well. You have prepared one “key message” which you will be certain to convey, no matter the direction of the questions. You have practiced out loud and are certain it represents the position of your organization positively and accurately. If you are truly prepared according to the above criteria, give yourself **10 points**.

2. Credible – You have developed a style that conveys honesty, trust and believability. When you speak, people who don’t know you will tend to take what you say at “face value.” **Nine points.**

3. Calm – You have developed the ability to relax and control your nerves prior to an interview. Although you may be prepared and credible, it’s easy to blow the interview by allowing insecurities to visibly surface. Stumbling, stammering, nervous movements, etc. tell viewers that you may have something to hide, even though you’re telling the absolute truth. It’s normal to be nervous about a media interview, but you don’t have to show it. **Eight points** if you can perform well under pressure.

4. Confident – You are able to take your calm demeanor to the next

level and express your positive take on the issues at hand. You are able to convey conviction and faith in your organization and reassure viewers about uncertainties. Your confidence tends to dispel doubts and hesitation. **Seven points.**

5. Concise – You are able to organize your message into appropriate sound bites that don’t bore the viewer with too much detail or unimportant facts. You stick to the issue and don’t veer off on tangents. **Six points.**

6. Friendly/Likable -- Viewers tend to trust you because you exude an appropriate level of warmth and concern for other people. You seem approachable, a person who would take the time to answer their questions, if asked. **Four points.**

7. Understandable – You have taken the trouble to translate your message into laymen’s terms that the general public will be able to understand. You have left the industry jargon back at the office and replaced it with general but accurate terminology. **Three points.**

8. Accessible – You are readily available and help the interviewer meet the deadline, once you are totally prepared, that is. **Two points.**



9. Quotable – You can deliver that short sound bite that is too irresistible for the reporter to ignore. A memorable, on-point comment is your goal. To achieve the honor badge of “quotability,” your comment should be fairly original, perhaps colorful or with an astute analogy that illustrates a key point cleverly. If you’ve mastered the quotable quote for most interviews, give yourself **one more point**.

10. Expert in your field – You know your subject inside and out and are ready to answer even the most complex questions in excruciating detail. Although reporters occasionally request such an in-depth interview, in most cases they only have time for the immediate issue at hand. They’d prefer you don’t overwhelm them with your incredible learning and expertise. **Zero points**.

Score Results

1 to 20 points: You may be taking a risk representing your organization without sufficient experience. Identify the areas where you need improvement and seek help through internal or outside training.

21-30 points – You have developed some adequate interview skills that will allow you to tackle “friendly” interviews on non-controversial or complex topics. Determine where you can improve and whether you need help to make yourself a better spokesperson for your organization.

31 to 40 points – You have a high level of capability, which may only need a little more practice and attention to weaknesses to take it to the next level. Take some low-risk opportunities to speak on behalf of your organization, especially when question-and-answer formats are possible. Ask for feedback from trusted colleagues. Before taking on a high-risk interview, take advantage of a mock interview training session and be sure you’re the best person for the job.

41 to 50 points – Your organization is fortunate to have you as its media representative. You probably do well on camera, even in crisis situations when the questions are difficult and the reputation of the organization is at stake. Congratulations on honing your spokesperson abilities to such a proficient level.



Media interview checklist

Before you start answering questions, ask a few of your own:

Who is conducting the interview?

Know the reporter's interview style and the kind of stories he or she usually covers. (A public relations professional can often provide insight, based on past experience with the reporter, editor or columnist.)

What is the focus of the

interview? Ask what the reporter trying to accomplish with the particular piece. Consider whether the focus is appropriate or whether you can guide the reporter to a more interesting and helpful angle.

What is the deadline? In most cases, you don't need to respond on the spot. Make the timeframe work for you. Find out when the reporter needs a response and when the story is scheduled for publication or to air. Buy some time for preparation, as long as it's not at the reporter's expense.

What is the best location for the

interview? If it's a live, rather than a telephone interview, assess the pros and cons of having it on **your turf or theirs**. If yours, consider the setting carefully. The right location can help the reporter learn more about your organization. For TV, offer an interesting background if possible.

What are your key messages?

If you could ensure that readers, listeners or viewers came away with only **three key points**, what would they be?





Interview guidelines

- **Identify your audience.** (It's not the reporter.)
- **What is your communication's goal?** Remember your airtime is limited. Stick to key messages.
- Speak in terms of **benefits** to the audience.
- Get to your **key message** quickly. Make your point and support it with details.
- **Keep it simple.** Avoid jargon. Speak directly to your audience in terms they can understand and relate to.
- **Stick to the subject** of the interview.
- **Repeat your key messages.** Remember your interview will be edited to fit into the news format. Provide the news editor ample opportunity to air your key message.
- **Don't exaggerate** or stretch the facts.
- **Anticipate the most likely questions.** Mentally structure effective answers.
- **Practice answers to tough questions,** especially those that may cause you to be defensive.
- **When asked a negative question** or one containing offensive language, don't repeat the question or language.



Identify your audience and communication goal. Get to your key message quickly.



Fine-tuning spokesperson capabilities

Consider every media interview an opportunity to reach an important broadcast or print audience with the campaign's message. Before agreeing to media interviews, however, consider several factors and make an informed decision, perhaps in concert with a PR professional or campaign colleagues.

- Is the interview in the best interest of the organization?
- Is it good timing in terms of the campaign?
- Are you the best person to do the interview or would another spokesperson be more appropriate in terms of the focus or topic?
- Do you have the necessary knowledge and expertise to answer the expected and unexpected questions?
- Will you have adequate time to prepare and rehearse?

Types of media interviews

Interviews may be either **scheduled** (planned days or weeks in advance) or **spontaneous** (requested on-site at an event or with little or no warning).

Advance Notice

An advance-notice interview may allow days, weeks or a few hours notice. Determine during the initial contact precisely what the reporter is seeking.

Assuming you are the right person for the interview, try to get as much information as possible from the reporter about the focus of the interview. You may also be able to discover any bias the reporter has about the subject matter. If time allows, review the reporter's recent stories to gain an idea of his or her knowledge base or specific bias.

Mutually agree on the time and the place of the interview. Allow yourself adequate time both before and after the interview. You need to be in a proper frame of mind going in with as few mental distractions as possible.

If time allows, prepare a list of questions you can expect to be asked. Involve knowledgeable colleagues in brainstorming potential questions. What about that tough question you hope won't be asked? Assume it will be one of the first and be ready for it.

Research any data or facts you might need and practice



incorporating them into your answers. Have a colleague fire the tough questions at you. Record your responses if possible, play them back and critique your answers. Using several people to fire questions at you will produce a surprising variety of questions.

Once you are comfortable with the facts and reasonably confident of your ability, you are ready for the interview.

Spontaneous

A spontaneous interview often occurs as a follow-up to a newsworthy event. You may be approached on-site or contacted and interviewed over the telephone following a news event.

Have a fact sheet or backgrounder available and provide it to the reporter. Review it with the reporter briefly if there's time. If not, reference it after the interview to encourage the reporter to review it.

Before granting the interview, ask the reporter the nature of the information he or she is seeking. Based on the answer, you can determine whether you have the expertise and authority to proceed with the interview. If you want to recommend another spokesperson, assist the reporter in reaching that person as quickly as possible.

Don't feel obligated to respond to a reporter's questions the instant a microphone or camera is set up. Take time to collect your thoughts. Tell the reporter you need to make a quick phone call or, if it's a telephone interview, that you'll call back in a few minutes. Use the time to think about what you'll say and how you'll say it.



Consider every media interview an opportunity to deliver the campaign's message to an important broadcast or print audience.



Projecting confidence in TV interviews

1. Carry your three key points on a business size card in your pocket. Study them beforehand until you can see them in your mind's eye.

2. Smile, take a good deep breath and relax. Strive to look pleasant and relaxed. Unless you're in the midst of a crisis, you should not look stern or too severe.

3. Greet your interviewer with a firm handshake (but don't be a "crusher"). Use your title when you introduce yourself; it helps establish your credibility right from the start.

4. Stand and/or sit up straight with shoulders back and chin up.

5. Practice good eye contact. Look directly into the eyes of your interviewer, but don't stare.

6. Use both hands for easy, relaxed gestures that convey animation and energy.

7. Maintain positive thoughts. Focus on the positive opportunity the interview offers to educate and enlighten. Expect it to go well.

8. Never admit that you are nervous. (*It serves no positive purpose.*)

9. Remember that most stand-up TV interviews only use a very small portion of what is actually recorded, usually **10 seconds or less.**

10. Be your own pep coach. Before you begin, remind yourself: You look great, you know your stuff and this interview is going to be one to look back on with satisfaction.

11. Be sure to leave the reporter with your business card. It provides him or her with the correct spelling of your name, your title and contact information.

11. Send ahead or bring any informational materials, such as brochure or fact sheet, that would help the reporter with the story. Background materials help ensure accuracy.





Dressing for TV interviews

Men

Dress to represent your profession at its best. If you're being interviewed in your office, dress as you normally would for a day of work. For an on-site interview, such as a highway or bridge construction site, dress for the environment and weather conditions.

For in-studio interviews, classic style projects the most credibility and authority. Suits carry more authority than sports coats and sport coats carry more authority than a shirt and tie.

Darker colors convey greatest authority, although black is too somber.

When asked by a television reporter for a spontaneous interview, take a moment to check your appearance. Straighten your tie and suit and remove sunglasses or other paraphernalia from your person.



Classic style projects the most credibility and authority.



Dressing for TV interviews

Women

Dress to represent your profession at its best. If you're being interviewed in your office, dress as you normally would for a day of work. For an on-site interview, such as a highway or bridge construction site, dress for the environment and weather conditions.

Women have slightly more latitude with color and style than men, but a conservative approach is still best.

For in-studio interviews, a well-fitting suit gives the most professional look. A jacket or blazer with coordinating skirt or pants works well also.

How you look should not distract viewers, but rather confirm your credibility as a spokesperson. Showing cleavage or bare arms is not appropriate. Hair, makeup and jewelry should be understated and blend with the total look.

Wear colors that flatter you; however, darker colors convey more authority. Pastels tend to diminish authority.

When asked by a television reporter for a spontaneous interview, take a moment to check your appearance. Remove sunglasses, handbags or other paraphernalia from your person.

Everyone

Turn off your cell phone. You don't want it going off on camera.



How you look should not distract viewers, but rather confirm your credibility as a spokesperson.



Media coverage tracking

One of the challenges of a national campaign is to track media coverage and continue to build our database of informed reporters and editors and supportive articles and editorials. Campaign spokespeople can assist in the task by alerting campaign coordinators when interviews are scheduled or have been conducted.

Although print news coverage is relatively easy to find and add to our media coverage list thanks to Internet archives, broadcast interviews sometimes present a greater challenge. Radio and TV

interviews are often deleted from stations' websites within days or weeks of the interview, making it imperative to obtain transcripts, audio or video as soon as possible.

Alerting campaign coordinators in advance of an interview also allows our public relations team to offer assistance to spokespeople, with recent data or other information that may be helpful.



Tracking media coverage helps build the database of supportive articles, editorials and media.



Spokesperson Training Guide



For more information, please visit www.pavementpreservation.org and click on Campaign Toolkit (You will need an access code to obtain campaign materials.)

For additional information or resources, please contact:
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