Establishing a working relationship with reporters will help you tell your success stories and share your innovative work beyond your department or institution. Realize that if you are not telling your story, you are allowing someone else to define it for you. Working with the press can also allow you to inform the dialogue on educator preparation generally.

**When a Journalist Calls You**

**Connect With Your Communications Office**

Before you agree to speak on the record, ask the reporter if they have contacted your institution’s communications office. You want to be sure to follow proper protocol and to help reporters understand the process when seeking a source.

While not all reporters are eager to work through an institution’s communications office (which often slows down the process), it can help you learn the ropes if you are a novice in working with the press. The staff in your communications office are trained on how to work with media outlets and can help you in establishing and managing these relationships.

**Define the Terms**

Each time you speak to a reporter, you should determine up front what the terms of the conversation will be. You cannot go back and change the conditions after you have said something.

* **On the record** means your name and title can be used with your quote, perhaps as an official representative of your department or institution.
* **On background** means you will not be named but could possibly be quoted as a “person close to the issue” or an “advocate on this issue.”
* **Off the record** means you will be neither named nor quoted.
* **On deep background** means you are speaking off the record to help contextualize, clarify, or explain something connected to the article.

**Respect Deadlines**

If a reporter contacts you asking for comments or information on a particular issue, try to respond in a timely manner. If they have a request that will take you time to gather information, it is entirely appropriate to ask their timeframe and let them know whether you can meet their deadline. It’s also OK to say you can’t meet their deadline – it’s better that you provide accurate and reliable information instead of scrambling and offering inaccurate information.

If you know someone better versed in the topic, suggest that person or office to the reporter. The more reliable you are viewed as a source of information, the more likely it is that the reporter will reach out to you in the future.

**Keep it Professional**

No matter how well you may get along with a reporter, remember that they are not your confidant, and you are both professionals with a job to do. Trust your contact as you would any other professional, and understand that anything you say to them could be quoted, unless you clearly specify otherwise beforehand.

**When You Want to Call a Journalist**

**Work with your Campus Communications Office**

In addition to the reasons cited above, the communications office will be able to help you identify reporters likely to be interested in your issue and can assist with crafting your story proposal.

**Pitch Your Story**

Reporters won’t write a story just because you want them to; you have to be able to convince them of its relevance. To do so, it helps to think like a journalist. Think about your answers to these guiding questions for journalists from Poynter:

* What piques your curiosity about the story?
* What’s new about the story, and why do you want to tell it now?
* Why will the reader or viewer care about the story?
* How can we tell this story digitally?
* What questions will you need to ask to get this story, and what sources will you need to consult?
* How much time will you need to produce the story, and how much space/time do you think the story deserves?

Keep in mind that journalists often cover multiple areas and might not have much background in education. Be prepared to provide a clear, concise description of the necessary context for your issue. Avoid the temptation to share all you know about the topic.

Before you launch into your specific pitch, reach out to the reporter via e-mail to introduce yourself, share your contact information, and list your areas of expertise and topics for which you could serve as a resource for the reporter.

**Send a Press Release**

If your department or institution’s communication office has developed a press release, you can simply e-mail it to your journalist contact. Even if he or she is already on the distribution list, you can resend it to highlight key information and to help reinforce your relationship with the reporter. Offer to provide any follow-up information that may help in writing a story.