National Park Service
Guide to Public Affairs

September 2010

National Park Service Public Affairs Guide

David Barna, Chief
National Park Service
Office of Communications and Public Affairs
1849 C Street Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20240

Edited by
Jeffrey Olson

Designed by
Jeffrey Olson and Jody Lyle

Contributing editors
Rick Lewis
Katherine Kirby

Special contributions by
Holly Bundock, Pacific West Region
John Quinley, Alaska Region
Patty Rooney, Midwest Region
Joanne Blacoe, Northeast Region
James Doyle and Rick Frost, Intermountain Region
Roberta D'Amico, National Interagency Fire

Photographic contributions by
Rick Lewis
Tami Heilemann
Terry Adams
Scott Gediman
Tina Boehle
Mike Litterst
Alexandra Picavet
Kari Cobb
Erik Skindrud
Jeffrey Olson

Table of Contents

Welcome to the National Park Service Public Affairs Guide. If you think it looks a lot like the Superintendent's Guide to Public Affairs, you're right.

Even though the word "superintendent" disappeared from the title, we're still thinking about you. We considered writing an entire pull-out section because we realize national park superintendents wear many hats, including the public affairs hat.

Try as we might, we couldn't reduce public affairs to a few pages.

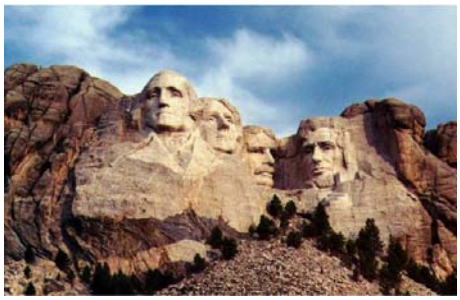
We realize yours is a busy day so treat this guide as a resource. Please read section 1 and share the entire guide with those employees you count on to develop relationships with the media, write news releases and plan special events.

Thank you,
The Editors

1 Public Affairs in the National Park Service

It's been nearly seven generations since Americans invented national parks. Their passion for parks, their loyalty to their favorite parks, could by now be genetic. Even if it's not part of American DNA, those of us in the National Park Service certainly benefit from public support.

And we need all the support we can get, for a couple of reasons.



Mt. Rushmore National Memorial

The first reason is that national parks compete for visitors with video games, movies, shopping malls, major league sports, amusement parks and the Internet.

The second, and more important reason to cultivate public support for national parks, is to accomplish our mission. Congress and President Woodrow Wilson in 1916 created the National Park Service. Their challenge was to provide for the enjoyment of these historic, physical, historic and cultural landscapes today but also to conserve them – to leave them unimpaired – so that future generations may enjoy them.

How do we meet that challenge? How do we encourage public enjoyment yet preserve the treasures for future generations? It isn't easy and we are often reminded by conflicting comments from visitors to members of Congress and other elected officials. We are reminded of competing interests by the media reports on people's decreasing contact with nature and increasing contact with living room furniture and electronic "stimulation."

National Park Service public affairs professionals are here to help with a mission map of sorts: advice and counsel, and useful communication tools, so park managers and other staff can promote enjoyment of parks and at the same time generate support for preservation decisions that may draw cheers, jeers and the occasional lawsuit.

How we do it

Among their duties, NPS employees working in public affairs connect superintendents and other managers with the public. We do it through regular media contacts and work with interest groups. We check the pulse of public interest by reading newspapers, magazines and other periodicals – often on-line. We listen to radio news reports and watch television news outlets. We read blogs to see what others say about national parks and the people charged with their care. We seek information on trends. We listen in on conversations at the shopping mall, the grocery store, barber and beauty shops – wherever people gather to talk about their lives.

Public affairs people, like the reporters, editors, producers and bloggers they work with in the media, are curious about the world around them. Their connections to the world outside the National Park Service are valuable as the park management team develops strategy options on a variety of issues. Public affairs professionals will help guide the rest of the management team about those issues from internal and external communications perspectives.

Assateague Island National Seashore

Work with media will have many common elements regardless of location. Market size will change, but television stations still need pictures and print reporters still need a good story line. Conversely, carrying the park's message into the community — and carrying the community's message back to the park — is likely to vary depending on location.

Your park public affairs program should examine how your community works and explore ways to reach the audience you need to reach. Visit the local newspaper's editorial board and call on other media outlets, too. Attend town hall meetings, host a booth at the county fair, go to service club meetings and events, be a part of city government, engage the local chamber of commerce and tourism association, provide park rangers for school programs.

Not every public affairs person will do all of the above described tasks and many will have other duties not mentioned. You'll see an overlap with the work of park interpreters, concessions staff and law enforcement rangers.

Here's the take-home lesson: a well-crafted public affairs program is much more than media work and answering phone calls. Who does the work and what you call it is less important than the result.

In reality, most parks do not have an in-house public affairs staff. Some parks have a public information officer. Most parks rely on regional or cluster level help. The park public information officer (PIO) typically conveys information to the public and responds to general media and questions from the public. The park PIO has less time for policy formulation and counsel for management. In many parks, the PIO job is a collateral duty.

Public Affairs Competencies

There are seven broad competencies ideally present in the public affairs field. The degree to which a PIO should be expected to have them depends on level of expertise or grade level. Here are the key points in each area:

Ben Franklin and NPS Public Affaris Chief David Barna.

Advise Management. The basic level public information officer is not expected to counsel or advise managers. At an intermediate level, PIOs should be able to identify constituency groups and other sources of information and determine which communication methods are appropriate for the task at hand. At advanced levels, public affairs professionals assess likely public reaction prior to a National Park Service action, provide candid advice to management and recognize sensitive situations where management should intervene.

Communication Skills. This is the ability to write, speak and listen in a variety of situations. Those at a basic level should have knowledge of public speaking principles, be able to locate accurate data, present issues clearly, understand National Park Service operations and understand news, feature and editorial writing. At an intermediate level, a person shows improved writing skills, the ability to present complex topics to groups, deal diplomatically with moderately controversial subjects and draw appropriate conclusions from complex data. The advanced public affairs officer, public affairs specialist or public information officer understands and articulates National Park Service and Department of Interior policy, trains others to make high quality presentations, establishes working relationships with diverse groups, defends bureau policy in the face of heavy criticism in unstructured settings and counsels management.

Media Relations. At the basic level, a public information officer holds a college degree in English, communication, journalism or has otherwise gained experience in the field of public affairs. Additionally, the PIO writes news releases and feature stories on non-controversial subjects and conducts simple interviews. Job skills have developed at the intermediate level so that the PIO coaches or trains people prior to interviews, plans news conferences and conducts interviews with print and broadcast media - including those interviews in controversial or crisis situations. At an advanced level, the PIO has established rapport with key media representatives, is skilled in representing controversial National Park Service policies or situations to national media, in large group settings and in press conferences. The advanced PIO has the ability to work with media without first consulting with management.

Information Flow. In support of the National Park Service mission, public information and public affairs professionals collect and distribute news clips, maintain two-way communication between management and employees and communicate with external groups. At a basic level, this requires distribution of clips, understanding audiovisual and multimedia presentations and understanding the goals of constituent groups. At an intermediate level, the professional assembles multi-media presentations, has skills to explain the National Park Service mission to park partners, assembles and maintains briefing papers and is skilled in communicating management issues to park staff in a timely and accurate fashion. An advanced level professional designs and develops multimedia presentations, establishes and maintains good relationships with park partners in routine and controversial situations, recognizes potential problems with partners and advises management on solutions and develops communications and public affairs strategies.

Press Conference atop Main Interior Building in Washington, D.C.

Special Events/Protocol. High profile events put parks in the media spotlight and are opportunities for us to share National Park Service messages. Public affairs professionals help shape these events to the bureau's best advantage. At a basic level, the public affairs professional has knowledge of the fundamentals of event planning, explains the theme of a special event to park staff and media and publicizes special events. At an intermediate level, the public affairs professional leads the event planning committee, understands the public relations planning needs for events, helps organize park management and staff in a crisis and writes basic speeches for park management. At the advanced level, the public affairs professional is also skilled in acquisition of special event sponsors and writes clear statements for park management for speeches or in times of crisis.

Writing and Editorial Services. The Public Affairs Office is often the repair shop for communications developed elsewhere. That means basic level public affairs professionals possess knowledge of grammar, writing styles and spelling. At an intermediate level, the public affairs professional writes well-organized speeches, researches and writes for a variety of publications, drafts Congressional correspondence and assembles and maintains briefing papers. An advanced level professional writes clearly for management during times of crisis, produces summaries of briefing statements on controversial or complex issues and confidently edits the writing of others in management.

Freedom of Information Act. Depending on the structure of your park, public affairs may or may not handle the Freedom of Information Act requests. Regardless of who handles the formal paperwork an understanding of the principles of the act are essential. A basic level public information person understands the spirit and general provisions of the law and is able to search files to locate information. An intermediate level public affairs professional drafts FOIA response letters and understands the act well enough to recommend whether or not documents should be considered for withholding. Advanced level professionals develop the justification for withholding documents or advocate for their release.

What the Service Needs From a PIO

The simple rule here is No Surprises. When significant incidents or controversial issues arise, especially those that will subject the National Park Service or the Department of the Interior to public scrutiny, make sure your actions and statements are coordinated with your superintendent. He or she is responsible to communicate issue details to the regional director who in turn is in contact with national leadership.

From the public affairs perspective, sooner is better when it comes to identifying controversial issues and moving them up the chain of command..


Public Information Officer Scott Gediman at Yosemite National Park with members of the media.

So what does park management, the region, WASO need from a PIO? Here are six key items:

A quick briefing statement on the situation. This document provides consistent information to those involved with the issue. This is especially important when numbers are involved. Date the briefing statement so everyone knows if they've got the latest information. When time is of the essence, don't worry about format over pertinent facts and figures.

News clips. National and regional leadership rarely see your local newspaper but they can see it on-line or read a digital news clip. If there's a significant story or editorial in the hometown paper, make sure the regional public affairs office sees a copy which will be forwarded to WASO Public Affairs. It's important to know how different stories play across the country in order to assess public interest and perception. If digital clips are unavailable please make sure the region gets a copy and one is faxed to WASO Public Affairs at 202-219-0910.

Photographs or video. Sometimes even a thousand words won't make the same impression as a photograph or video clip. Increasingly, your local newspaper reporter is required to provide video to accompany the on-line story. These video clips can be captured for the park media coverage files, and shared with the region and WASO public affairs offices when needed.

Let the public affairs offices know what's coming and ask their advice and counsel. Public affairs professionals at the region and Washington office often bring a wider view in the planning process. They may have already dealt with your hot issue in another park or region of the country. They have reporter and producer contacts you may find useful and can be called on for "another set of eyes" when it comes to thinking through the public relations side of an issue.

Submit stories to internal publications. The WASO Office of Communications and Public Affairs is responsible for gathering news and information for the NPS section of *People Land & Water*, the official on-line newspaper of the U.S. Department of the Interior. The National Park Service also provides content to the *Arrowhead* newsletter, which is published by the Employee and Alumni Association of the National Park Service. Both *People Land & Water* and the *Arrowhead* provide a collation of news from around the Service — not assigned stories, but items that people and parks want to share. Your park's contributions are not just nice to have, they are a vital part of both publications. Together they form an excellent means of communicating internal news across the country. The *Arrowhead* publishes news of interest to the Service, awards, employee moves, employee and retiree deaths, births, weddings, and retirements. It recognizes significant park events, and covers a variety of items that a Service personnel and retirees might enjoy. Contributions are best sent by e-mail to Rick Lewis in this

office rick_lewis@nps.gov. The Morning Ranger Report, distributed by e-mail, is a better place to submit news about rescues, car clouts, fires and other calamities

Highlights are items of interest that happen in your park that might not generate news coverage, but are worth knowing about and worth telling others about. Examples include upcoming dedications or community events, milestones such as your one millionth visitor, opening of key park facilities or partnership agreements.

The region and Washington public affairs office can use this information in several ways. One is to prevent those surprises (you know the kind, when the Secretary of Interior's sister's neighbor turns out to be the mayor who cut the ribbon.) These events are also used in speeches. They can be used in discussions with members of Congress if something good or bad happened in their home district.

Regions have different procedures, but whether the word comes over the phone, via e-mail or fax, the point is that you should not keep good or bad news to yourself. This advice goes not only for passing the word up and down the command chain, but should be followed inside the park or regional office.

Often there are good deeds or interesting activities (or just lessons to be learned) from work done right down the hall. A good park public affairs program will develop ways to pass those highlights around within the organization. The methods can take many forms — e-mail or a newsletter that goes to all employees, bulletin boards, employee recognition events. The form is less important than the substance.

2 Communications Planning: A Strategic Approach

A strategic communications plan will help us help people discover the depth and breadth of the NPS mission which is set out eloquently in the Organic Act of 1916. We employ various communication strategies to provide useful, timely, high quality information which will help people understand the mission as more than parks and camping, and *will* invite them to be our partners in stewardship.

Cape Disappointment at Lewis and Clark National Historical Park.

Based on this broad goal of fostering public understanding and support for the National Park Service, a strategic approach to communication provides the overarching context, the big picture, from which we tailor communication plans for specific internal and external audiences, based on regular and unexpected park events and issues.

Take the time to build a strategic communication plan and you create the opportunity to think about goals, messages, audiences and methods BEFORE an event as opposed to reacting to a directive to "pull together a press conference for tomorrow afternoon."

The strategic communication plan is a comfort when public affairs staffers get the order to produce that press conference on short notice but it applies to daily chores, too. From the plan flows a guide for daily park communication activities all the way up to a special or VIP event and crisis communication.

A strategic communication plan takes advantage of a strong "company brand." The NPS arrowhead, the green and gray clad park ranger and the flat hat are readily identifiable icons. The brand also includes identifiable slogans (Experience Your America!) and key messages.

A solid communication plan is flexible and requires evaluation as it is employed. The evaluation process will help gauge how successful you are in helping people discover and understand the National Park Service mission and become partners in that mission.

Evaluation has several components. Analyze media coverage. Listen to friends groups, partners, concessioners and critics. You'll identify messages that work and learn why others failed. You'll

be able to adjust communication strategies in the midst of a lengthy effort, such as a general management plan, or better address the next park event or other communication opportunity.

The Centennial Initiative

Key communication messages coalesced in 2006 as NPS staff created a 10-year plan for celebration of the 2016 Centennial of the National Park Service. A Secretary of the Interior report to the President in May 2007 titled *"The Future of America's National Parks"* outlined broad centennial themes, specific performance goals and potential actions and examples based on stewardship, environmental leadership, recreational experience, education and professional excellence.

A catalog of memorable stewardship jingles is wonderful but of limited use without substantive knowledge of your intended audience. We renewed efforts to identify the National Park Service audience with a nationwide series of listening sessions held in *advance* of the Secretary's report. Audience research continues through a national survey in the NPS social science office in 2008-09 and through Centennial Challenge projects funded for 2009.

Each of the 391 units of the National Park Service as well as trails in the National Trails System, have a Centennial emphasis and many received Centennial Challenge funds for projects in 2008-09. These projects and programs require communication strategies, audience research and evaluation of internal and external communications.

The National Park Service Audience

Communication, media and marketing plans identify key groups and individuals we wish to receive National Park Service messages. This is our target audience. Skilled public affairs professionals know target audiences. They begin with the media because of its wide reach into the rest of our target audience.

NPS Superintendent Chip Jenkins at a public event along the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail.

Our target audience is large, and diverse. *Director's Order #75A, Civic Engagement and Public Involvement* identifies our audience: "…all of the individuals, organizations and other entities who have an interest in or knowledge about, are served by, or serve in, the parks and programs administered by the National Park Service. They include (but are not limited to) recreational user groups, the tourism industry, Tribes and Alaska Natives, environmental leaders, members of the media, permit holders, concessioners, property owners within a park, members of gateway communities, and special interest groups. The public also includes all visitors — domestic and international; those who come in person and

those who access our information on the World Wide Web; those who do not actually visit, but value, the national parks; and those who participate and collaborate with the National Park Service on a longer-term basis."

The principles developed in this guide to working with the media can serve as a guide for contact with most of the National Park Service audiences including partner organizations, members of Congress, state and local governments, other federal agencies, special interest groups, foreign dignitaries, businesses and National Park Service employees.

Answering media questions.

The National Park Service audience includes friends groups, as well as groups who do not agree with bureau practices. Both can affect the way the National Park Service is treated by the media and viewed by park visitors.

Our audience members come from many cultures and walks of life and our relationships with them vary. Their needs and concerns are diverse, too. How do we address them? We do research and we listen. One of the keys to reach people is to get to know them. Communication is more effective when you understand one another.

Working with the National Park Service Audience

A public affairs strategy is more than media interviews, speeches, FOIAs and public meetings. Our park messages will be lost if people have an underlying negative attitude about a park or the National Park Service. Consider this: automobile manufacturers spend millions of dollars to convince you to buy their newest car. But all of their best work can be for naught if the salesperson is rude.

Explaining forest fires to visitors.

At a park, public inquiries are frequently treated as interruptions in an otherwise organized day. Don't let that be the case in your park, or you may find you've lost more friends than you've gained. The keys to responding to public questions are well-known: be courteous and provide informative answers. This needs to happen whether the requests come over the phone, by mail, in person or by e-mail. We offer these recommendations:

Phone contacts

Most people prefer to speak with another human being but accept voicemail as a reality of today's world. Still, there's no reason to consign otherwise nice people to a never-ending chain of "choices" usually referred to as "voicemail hell."

Listen to your park voicemail system as if you were a first-time caller. Can you always get to a real person quickly? Is your menu of choices reasonable? Can a person for whom English is a second language (more than a third of the U.S. population in many instances) understand the choices or find a non-English set of instructions? If you're transferred to an extension that doesn't provide necessary information, can you get back to a real person?

Form letters

Many inquiries ask the same question, and we appropriately use a form letter to respond. Read some of yours as if you just received a form answer. Are you satisfied? Do we confuse or intimidate with jargon, technical terms, abbreviations or condescending remarks?

A hint: The National Park Service has many talented writers; some may be hiding in plain sight at your park or office. Put their talents to use, even if the form letter topic isn't in their realm of expertise.

Personal contacts

Look at how we greet visitors in person — if you knew nothing about Old House National Historic Site, would you be satisfied after your visit? Do we volunteer answers to these kinds of questions: Where is my fee money going? Where's the bathroom? Where should I park? What should I be sure to see?

We'll preface this paragraph with "Yes, we know money is tight." Having said that, does your average visitor ever see or talk with a person in a NPS uniform other than at the fee collection station? Do we have contractors or volunteers in places where we should more appropriately have the green and gray? Have you been creative enough to try to make this happen?

NPS Ranger Trent Redfield and visitors.

A well-rounded public affairs program has a lot to do with how symbols, images, resources, facts and feelings relate to one another. Perception is reality. The National Park Service uniform is a powerful symbol of people who do good things. If your park's only uniformed presence collects money or issues tickets, we tarnish the value of the NPS Arrowhead and our mission with the impression that we care more about money and rules than we care about visitors and resources.

For further information on strategic communication plans, contact your region or WASO public affairs offices.

3 News and the Media

The term news media refers to all types of news-gathering organizations and their employees, but you'll hear other terms — press, journalists, reporters — used almost interchangeably. Here's a tip: no news organization cares about the label as much as the content. If you issue a news release or hold a news conference, you must have real news. If you have no news this time, you'll have no news coverage next time.

Who's who and what they do

There are three traditional media — print (newspapers, magazines and trade publications,) radio and television. The newest medium, the Internet, combines aspects of all three and introduces bloggers or citizen journalists. Because each medium has its own strengths and weaknesses in terms of the kinds of stories it tells and the kinds of audiences it attracts, each has its own needs.

We read newspapers, magazines and other periodicals. Newspaper editors and reporters want information that can be presented well in print accompanied by visual elements such as charts, graphics and photographs. The print media can handle many more details than broadcasters, although the trend at many newspapers is to run shorter stories than in the past.

Radio, outside of top-of-the-hour headlines, often includes considerable depth. Therefore, radio news reporters and producers want a variety of voices and sounds and are able to cover quite complicated stories.

We watch television for color, movement, sound, and brief news stories. TV news people want pictures with action and a pithy story.

The Internet is a mixed bag. Most traditional media have on-line versions of their newspaper, magazine, television or radio station. Larger media outlets separate their traditional newsrooms from the on-line newsrooms and often include content from new and emerging news services outside of traditions such as the Associated Press.

Internet media provide still pictures, sound and video and they "publish" as quickly as their reporters, editors, photographers, videographers and graphics people can pull a story together. They often publish before traditional "top of the hour" radio broadcasts and their "virtual" stories appear as quickly as any network television newsbreak.

Bloggers are the newest journalists. And not everyone is convinced they're real journalists. Often referred to as citizen journalists, they started to appear in numbers in 2007, particularly as the race for the Presidency heated up. The "regular" media and the people they follow are still, to some extent, trying to figure out which bloggers are real citizen journalists likely to be around for the long run, and which ones are the "pretenders."

Print

Newspapers

Newspapers are the medium the National Park Service staff deals with most frequently. Newspaper reporters are generally assigned to "beats" or news tracks such as business, the environment or congressional affairs. The National Park Service and national park issues may surface on these, and many more news beats.

Reporters from local newspapers are your bread and butter. They will cover small stories and bigger stories—do not ignore them when the national newspapers come calling. Smart big city media types look to local reporters as sources much as they look to you as a source for a parks story.

Newspapers can develop detailed stories but their news operations are increasingly 24/7 to compete with radio, television and on-line media. Some other tips:

- Newspaper reporters usually have the simplest logistical requirements and little technical equipment—usually a pen and paper. However, many newspaper reporters are also sent out with video cameras to gather interviews and visuals for the on-line version of the newspaper or magazine.
- Newspapers usually appreciate charts, graphs and photographs to illustrate stories and to help audiences understand concepts.
- Newspapers become historical record once they are published.
- Newspapers are also more likely than radio or television to publish corrections to errors.

Opportunities at newspapers also include letters to the editor and opinion and editorial pieces.

Magazines

Magazines have similar needs to newspapers although their deadlines may be much farther out. They like photography, graphics and maps to illustrate stories.

Trade Publications

The outlets have similar needs as newspapers and magazines but they have a relatively narrow focus when it comes to issues.

Radio

Words and sound are basic building blocks for radio news. Reporters and producers provide straight information but help the listener visualize the story with the judicious use of background sound. Radio reporters will collect natural park sounds as background for interviews and their "voiceovers" that are part of the story. Natural sounds include happy visitors, a snippet from an interpretive talk, the sounds of power tools behind description of construction of the new visitor center, or the crackle of fire or sirens as firefighters head for a blaze in the woods. Radio reporters use these and other sounds to paint pictures. They are the radio equivalent of a photographer's work.

Radio is a resurgent media for many reasons, including the demands of the 24/7 news deadlines. Radio with a couple of still photos fits nicely on Internet sites. Radio reporters and producers have far fewer logistical needs than television. Radio reaches many diverse audiences. Radio is the most accessible for public service announcements.

Radio Interviews

Keep these tips in mind when preparing for a radio interview: Have a clear message in hand and be brief. While radio interviews, particularly on public radio, tend to be longer than television stories, short "sound bites" are still appropriate. Avoid long strings of numbers. Listeners drift off. Weave statistics into the story/interview.

Many radio interviews take place over the phone. Don't use your speakerphone. The sound quality is poor and background noise is a problem. Avoid portable or cellular phones for the audio quality reason.

Radio interviews via telephone — whether live or taped — are often comfortable because you can spread notes across your desk. Don't get too comfortable and ramble but be natural enough so you don't sound like you're reading a news release.

With in-person interviews, the reporter will decide where the microphone is located. You only need to concentrate on clear, concise communication.

Television

Television is the most powerful communications tool when it comes to lasting impressions and big audiences.

No matter the story or message, television likely has more impact than radio, print or the internet. Conversely, no medium can make you look as bad if you're not prepared for the harsh reality of the lens. (Think about all those sweaty, nervous people you've seen on CBS's "60 Minutes" over the years.)

Fortunately, most television news crews have a special affection for national parks. We have the stories, the pictures and the people that make good television. You will usually find yourself in friendly company.

Dealing with electronic media, as opposed to the pencil press, requires some change in your thinking and planning. Print reporters are interested in details and substance. Electronic media want good video, first and foremost, and just highlights of a particular story.

Here are some quick tips on how to work with television. We'll also include some general advice about video production.

Think Visually

Television news is driven by action and emotion-provoking video images. They will cover your "talking head" news conference or interview but they will want other pictures (or B-roll, as editors call it) to illustrate the park, issue or problem. Where do you get B-roll? If you don't have any, consider contracting an outside videographer to shoot some for you. Your staff can suggest a list of great site visuals the contract videographer can pursue. Make sure you receive professional quality digital video.

Whether it's breaking news, an interview or a news conference, have locations and images in mind to illustrate what you are talking about. Suggest places to capture video and explain why they are good places. Treat the reporter, producer and crew professionally and politely.

Television logistical needs

For special events and news conferences, give some extra thought to visual images. Outdoor locations generally are best, with a park-like background. Visitor centers, historic structures or even entrance signs are also good backgrounds. Crews don't often have time to scout locations. Your knowledge of the park will help them do a better job.

Television crews need extra time to set up equipment. Provide them a power source, if possible. Keep a couple of outdoor extension cords handy. Check with maintenance to make sure plugging in one more tape recorder doesn't plunge the visitor center into darkness.

At a press conference, reserve a section for television cameras. Pick a position that puts natural light on the podium and speaker. If several camera crews are expected, rent a multiple connection or "mult-box," a device that lets camera operators connect their audio cables to the main sound system.

Let the news crews park their trucks as close to the action as possible. Don't suggest any five-mile hikes — the gear gets very heavy. If parking is limited, have trucks come early and unload, and then return after the event. Depending on the distance and type of equipment used, media crews may need to make long cable runs away from the main event. They'll need to provide cable troughs or similar safety measures if there is pedestrian traffic in the area.

Television Interviews

Wear your uniform to present a professional, official and authoritative image. Wear your flat hat if you're outside but if the camera operator or reporter asks you to remove your hat because of lighting conditions, hold it in front of you while you speak. They can take other "cutaway" shots of you out in the park, with your flat hat in place, to use as a visual cover for other quotes you may have in the story. Take off the shades, especially those mirrored sunglasses. Be engaged. Smile when it's appropriate. The camera operator will tell you where to look, but generally you'll be looking at the reporter.

Pay attention to the background. If possible, you should pick the interview site. Is your office tidy and professional? The same image considerations should be made outside. Don't set up an interview only to have a smoke-belching park dump truck rumble by in the background. Pick a background that projects park qualities and is relevant to the story.

Take time before the interview to go over the main ideas you want to convey. This will help you stay on message during the interview. Speak in complete sentences and keep your answers short. This is no time for a long explanation. In a five-minute interview, you might get 10 seconds of actual air time. Still, don't just give "yes" or "no" answers. Add some detail but when you've made your point, stop talking. Let the reporter fill the silence with another question.

Be yourself. Think of the interview as a conversation between you and the reporter. Fake expertise or sophistication will be painfully apparent when you watch yourself on the tube. The camera loves people who are natural and open.

Most stations don't want to commit to the time and expense of sending you a copy of the story. Find out when the story will run and record it.

Television news deadlines

Unless you're in the middle of breaking news, television crews rarely appear before 10 a.m. or stay past 2 p.m. because they must assemble and edit stories for the early newscasts (which start as early as 5 p.m. local time.) Give stations as much notice as you can. They plan days ahead,

except for breaking news. Call the assignment editor initially, then fax whatever written material you have.

Handouts and fact sheets

Most television news reporters cover many beats: a fire, the school board, city commission and your park … on the same day. When they arrive at the park, it's important to hand them a fact sheet to help them put the story together. Include background on the issue and basic information about the park: acreage, visitation, and the names and titles of people they will interview. Some reporters may still get it wrong – maybe they call us the U.S. National Parks Department or butcher the park name. But you've done what you can with a fact sheet.

Technical standards

Television stations have technical broadcast standards which is a polite way of saying that they're probably not interested in the footage you've taken with the park's VHS camera. Sure, if it's something spectacular like a bear attack or a dramatic rescue, they'll want to take a look. But don't attempt to build a library of stock footage with inexpensive and unsophisticated equipment.

The rise in popularity of podcasts has parks thinking seriously about video. Please don't attempt to make your own podcast, public service announcements or video news releases without the right equipment and adequate know-how. Unless you have experience as a writer, editor, videographer and video editor, the effort will look amateurish.

If you do videotape an event, compose your shots carefully and hold them for seven to 10 seconds before training the camera elsewhere. Do not zoom or pan unless absolutely necessary, then do so very slowly. Try to shoot on manual focus if you can. A camera on auto focus will continually adjust on the closest object, and the result will be irritating. Remember, the camera microphone will pick up all ambient sound, including your comments.

With the growth of cable television, there's a much bigger market for travelogues. The Travel Channel's "America's National Parks" series is a good example. Don't be shy about calling producers — cable or broadcast — to pitch an idea for a feature.
If you have a good idea for a PSA or a small video project, ask one of your local stations if they'd do it as a community service. Or you might offer it as a class project for television communications students at a local college. There are many good freelance producers who work inexpensively.

For big video projects, you should go through the Harpers Ferry Center. Your regional public affairs office can give you the details.

The Internet

Remember life before the Internet? A highly unscientific poll conducted in the Washington Public Affairs Office settled on 1993 as B.I. (Before Internet.)

Today, the Internet or "Web," continues to evolve. It has expanded into virtually every aspect of life. Its latest trick was to jump off the desk top to telephones, televisions, automobiles and other appliances too numerous to name.

The National Park Service Internet site, www.nps.gov is one of the busiest federal websites. In addition to nps.gov, NPSdigest (www.npsdigest.gov) offers the public a scaled-back version of InsideNPS, the National Park Service intranet site that many of us turn to as the bureau's "daily newspaper."

It is clear that www.nps.gov and new Internet communication tools change the way we conduct business. Today, visitors can plan every aspect of a park visit – from simple information such as hours, maps, closures, directions and services to more extensive information on the park's features and characteristics. A well designed web presence assists the park and increases visitor satisfaction long before they actually visit.

The newer tools like Twitter, RSS, Google Maps, Facebook, MySpace, Flickr, Getty Publications and YouTube are social network sites available to everyone. The National Park Service can use them to visit with different audiences. They allow and encourage people to post their favorite park photos; write songs about parks and park rangers (and perform and post them on YouTube) and "chat" about park issues and the things they like and dislike about the NPS.

The Department of the Interior internet security policies currently block employee access to all of the above Internet communication and social network sites except Google and RSS feeds. Until DOI security policies change, public affairs professionals will have to make arrangements with friends groups to use these increasingly useful tools and social network sites.

The www.nps.gov web site has undergone a number of changes in recent years. In 2005, the NPS began implementation of a Content Management System (CMS) which allows parks and program offices considerable flexibility in content development while it retains a standard design.

Building Relationships with the Media – including bloggers

The key to relationships with the media is to be engaged before members of the media are camped at your doorstep to report on "bad" news.

Tip: one of your first duties at your park is to introduce yourself to local reporters. Don't forget to meet the editor and the editorial page editor. And find the "institutional memory" at each media outlet.

Offer a tour of your facilities. In many gateway communities, the media will want to interview the new superintendent as soon as possible. Tell them what you do so they know your area of expertise for future contacts and make yourself available for future news stories.
Citizen journalists and bloggers can be as important as traditional media. People with an interest in your park, national parks and the National Park Service in general, follow issues that affect parks. They find people with similar interests and concerns at local coffee shops, grocery stores and through on-line social networks. They have plenty to say about national parks. When an issue reaches critical mass in the community or on social networks it spills into the traditional media. Know what your park community is talking about downtown and on-line. It's a good indicator of issues that matter. It's up to you to follow issues, be informed and ready to engage supporters and critics.

When it comes to media calls, respond as soon as you can. Provide information in a timely fashion. Ask about deadlines – when the information is needed for editing, print or digital publication. Be professional and proactive. When you respect reporters and their deadlines, they will respect you.

If you're new to media relations, watch how reporters and editors do their jobs. It's a great way to understand what they do and how you might work well with them.

4 Shaping the Message

Media outlets – newspapers, magazines, radio, television and their on-line counterparts and competitors – are under tremendous pressure to make a profit. They have down-sized in order to remain profitable in the face of declining advertising revenues during the Recession of 2008-09. As a result, there are thousands fewer reporters, editors and photographers working in the media with no apparent decrease in public demand for news reports.

The media, by necessity, is re-inventing itself. This new model of journalism includes citizen journalists and bloggers. Much like the old model, reporters and editors will be open to our messages when they are thoughtful, informative, contain real news and are presented in a form the media are accustomed to producing themselves: a news release that reads like a news story. Audio and video news media will be open to our messages, too, when we present our message to fit and enhance their formats.

Pitching Stories to Reporters

Reporters don't automatically write stories about national parks on a slow news day — they write about the weather. They will write about national parks – slow news day or not – when you give them a good story.

When you have real news, prepare a media release with separate background material and sources. Call the local media outlets to tell them what you've got coming. Then send the release. Hold the additional background and sources.

In small markets, a follow up call is a good idea. In major metropolitan news markets it can be a mixed bag. Some big media outlets despise follow-up calls, with others it's appropriate.

If you're not in a big media market, you'll soon develop a relationship with individual media and reporters and producers. You'll get beyond an anonymous relationship, and those reporters, editors and producers will look to you for good story ideas, quotes, anecdotes and the facts and figures to give their story depth. Be ready to pitch your ideas when there's an opening on that slow news day – or any other day for that matter.

When you're about to call the reporter, editor or producer, remember to:

- Let the reporter know why this story is worth covering and how it will be of interest to his or her audience. Television and newspaper reporters appreciate compelling images whereas radio news reporters want great sound and quotes.
- Be sure to let reporters know who will be available for interviews and when.
- Have a plan for what you want the story to be and where you want it to go before you call a reporter. Keep in mind that once the reporter is interested, the story will take on a life of its own and may very well head in a different direction than you had imagined.
- Have fact sheets and an executive summary available for large documents. Write down key facts — especially numbers and statements that need to be carefully worded — to help you organize your thoughts. Putting information in writing also gives you a record of what you've said, and — assuming you can find the paper or computer file — might come in handy for future interviews.

Writing for the media

Newspapers and wire services have a writing style that's different from the government. The National Park Service adheres to this writing style, known as Associated Press or AP Style, for written materials distributed to the media. The *AP Stylebook* is available in bookstores or online, for a fee, at http://www.apstylebook.com/. The National Park Service also provides some free guidance at http://www.nps.gov/hfc/pdf/hfc-style-guide-2007.pdf including:

Use the full proper name of a person, or of a thing, only once. For instance, Superintendent Jane Smith on first reference and Smith on subsequent references. Write out Kenai Fjords National Park on first reference, and "the park" or "Kenai Fjords" on second references. Don't use our four-letter park code such as KEFJ, YELL or WASO. The public doesn't know what they mean and most publications use few acronyms, codes or abbreviations. The most common are FBI or AFL-CIO. Tip: if an abbreviation needs to be explained, don't use it.

Most publications do not use courtesy titles. You shouldn't either. So it's Horace Albright on first reference, and Albright (not Mr. Albright) on subsequent references. The exception is when saying Miss, Mr., or Mrs. (Ms. only if that is the known preference of the subject) will prevent confusion when several people have the same last name.

If you need to identify a medical doctor, then "Dr." is appropriate. Folks with PhDs don't get to use Dr. (although you may want to note that a person has an advanced degree if it's relevant to the story).

Formal titles are capitalized (Superintendent Andy Rooney), **but lower case if they follow the name** (Andy Rooney, superintendent). Titles are lower case if used without a name (The superintendent will speak at noon.)

Spell out numbers nine and below and use numerals for numbers 10 or greater. Ages are always numerals.

Don't say 11 a.m. in the morning. When else could it be? It's either 11 a.m. (best) or 11 o'clock in the morning (not as good.) To avoid confusion, use noon and midnight and not 12 a.m. or 12 p.m. Publications of general interest don't use military time.

News Releases

First, make sure you're the right person to put out the news release. Is this park level news? Is the subject matter something more appropriate for the regional director to release? Should this come from the National Park Service director?

With that question answered, remember that newspaper and magazine editors and broadcast assignment editors are offered far more news releases than they can print or broadcast. They can be quick to hit the "delete" button or dump the paper news release into the recycle bin next to their fax machine. Understand how to avoid the death of a news release.

Key elements

Newsworthiness. If the release is not news, it's bad news for you and the life expectancy of your release.

Audience. Don't send a release of purely local interest to a distant media outlet. A journal of historical research won't care about new traffic patterns at the park.

Good Writing. You get a gold star if your latest news release escapes the recycle bin. A great release may receive a light editing touch. A good release is headed for rewrite, usually to conform to that media outlet's style and story length requirements. Copy editors and reporters on rewrite don't mind if your composition isn't a prize winner, but they do mind not getting all the facts.

The first paragraph, or lead, contains the attention-getter piece of news. A great lead makes impact with the fewest number of words possible. Ten to 15 words is good lead sentence. A sentence of 30 or more words is not a lead. Better to break it up into two sentences.

If there's no drama to lead with, don't exaggerate. Be straight forward. Many of the media releases we prepare are about important but non-controversial topics.

And don't try to cram the entire who, what, when, where, why and how into the lead sentence.

TIP: Write your lead sentence then read it aloud. If you run out of breath trying to read it, it's too long.

Here's a three-sentence lead …

Come celebrate Hispanic and Southwest Indian culture this Sunday during the Coronado International Historical Pageant. The event is free and open to the public. Hours are 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Coronado National Memorial in Hereford.

This is a routine lead. It answers all the important questions: **who, what, why, where** and **when** but we break it up into three sentences because of the amount of information.

Here's another example of dealing with lots of information:

WRONG: Three mountaineers, two from California and one from England, were killed in separate avalanches on Denali Tuesday night, while three others from France were injured and rescued by the National Park Service after a third incident this morning, mountain rescue rangers at Denali National Park and Preserve reported.

Whew! Just try reading the preceding graph aloud, with one breath, and you'll see you're in trouble. The next version is better:

BETTER: Avalanches on Denali late Tuesday and early Wednesday left three climbers dead and three more injured but safe with rescuers.

The first of three avalanches happened about 8 p.m. on the mountain's Orient Express route and claimed the lives of two California climbers. Just 30 minutes later, a nearby avalanche killed a climber from England.

The third slide injured three French mountaineers early this morning. The trio survived a 120-foot fall at Denali Pass. They were rescued by a National Park Service crew about 9 this morning.

When there are too many related facts, you need to break information out piece by piece. It won't win any writing awards, but you will win friends among journalists by being clear about what happened in each instance. While the fictional example is from climbing, any park with widespread flooding, multiple fires or simultaneous law enforcement troubles will recognize the pattern.

TIPS: Write in the active voice: kill every –ing word possible; keep the use of articles (a, an, the) to a minimum. Stick to the news with a key supporting message or two.

Art. High quality photographs, charts, graphs and video will interest an editor. Offer what you have and let editors know about story art opportunities their staff people can pursue.

News Release Template and Distribution

The National Park Service uses a standard news release template that is available on the NPS Graphic Identity Program website at http://www.graphics.nps.gov/default.htm. From the homepage, click on "templates" then "office forms."

The standard template is attractive and provides a strong agency identity. It incorporates standard news release elements such as a banner/header, agency contact information, date, headline, body text, and footer. But, there are a few things that you need to know about its use.

The template utilizes the same two fonts used by the Service in all design products: NPS Rawlinson and Frutiger. It is important to know, that many people outside the agency do not have these fonts on their computer. If you were to send your news release electronically as a Word document, it is possible that it would appear like gibberish for some recipients. Reporters have told us, pointedly, they expect us to get them a press release they can read.

So, there is an easy solution.

First, prepare your release using the standard template so that hard copies look appropriate for faxing, posting on bulletin boards, and possibly uploading on webpages.

Next, to distribute via email, cut and paste the text of your release into the email message and change the font to something common, like Times New Roman or Arial. Address the message to your media list and, voila, everyone will read the text perfectly. This practice of inserting your text into an email message also helps people who read your messages on a blackberry, or other similar device.

If you want or need to attach the news release as a separate document to your email, convert it to a PDF so that all formatting and fonts are preserved. This is useful if you share your news releases with community groups or businesses who often print out our information to post in public places. The PDF will provide a document that looks professional even if the recipient does not have our fonts.

Finally, while you're faxing, posting, and emailing, don't forget to provide your news release on the park webpage, too. Parks do this in a variety of different ways including posting PDFs, creating a new webpage, or adding the text to a running blog.

The NPS content management system (CMS) that governs our website (www.nps.gov) offers the ability to setup RSS feeds so that people can subscribe to your news releases. If you are interested in doing this, there are instructions in the CMS Manual found on InsideNPS at http://inside.nps.gov/waso/custompages.cfm?prg=236&id=7333&lv=3&pgid=2902.

See an example of a one-page news release on the next page.

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Office of Communications
and Public Affairs

1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240
202-208-6843 phone
202-219-0910 fax

National Park Service News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – January 27, 2009
Contact: David Barna (202) 208-6843
Gerry Gaumer (202) 208-6843

Celebrate the Bicentennial of the birth of Abraham Lincoln at America's National Parks

WASHINGTON – This year marks the Bicentennial of the birth of Abraham Lincoln. He was born on February 12, 1809 in relative obscurity in central Kentucky. He is arguably the most important President in the history of this nation by virtue of the crisis of disunion that faced him when he took office as the 16th President of the United States on March 4, 1861.

The National Park Service preserves and manages several areas that are directly and indirectly related to the life and Presidency of Abraham Lincoln: Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site in Hodgenville, Kentucky, Lincoln Home National Historic Site in Springfield, Illinois, Ford's Theatre National Historic Site in Washington, D.C, and Mount Rushmore National Monument in South Dakota.

"During this Bicentennial year of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, I invite everyone to visit one of the national park sites that preserves and commemorates the life and achievements of this great President," said Dan Wenk, acting director of the National Park Service. "As a nation we celebrate the birth and achievements of this great American because of what he means to the nation, to the world, and to the many individuals that his life has inspired."

The National Park Service has a web site that helps provide a better understanding and appreciation for Abraham Lincoln. Please log on to the *Celebrate the Bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's Birth* website at: http://www.nps.gov/pub_aff/lincoln200/index.html, to learn of the many special places managed by the National Park Service that commemorates the life of Abraham Lincoln. In addition to a list of national park sites, the web site includes information and web links to books, photographs and documents related to Abraham Lincoln, as well as a link to the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission.

Many events are planned throughout the nation in 2009 that will provide opportunities to celebrate the Bicentennial of the birth of Abraham Lincoln. A visit to one of the National Park Service sites offers a great opportunity to learn and reflect about a man who served his country as president and gave his "last full measure of devotion" to preserve the United States.

-NPS-

Media Advisories

The media advisory provides a brief, orderly, one-step communication tool for the public affairs officer who needs to reach the mass media with a set of instructions.

TIP: Give the media — and yourselves — as much lead time as possible.

The media advisory does not tell a full story but "advises" the media a news event is forthcoming. This is information to help assignment editors, photo editors, producers and reporters plan their work schedule.

The media advisory includes the who, what, when, where, why and how of information necessary to encourage the media to attend the event. It also includes logistical information such as any necessary event credentials, placement of live broadcast trucks, availability of camera platforms and camera placement (particularly if Secret Service sweeps are mandated,) mult boxes, lights, pool coverage, schedules for placement of cables, directions to the event and where to park.

The format of a media advisory is similar to that of a news release. Here are several well-tried suggestions:

Page Format. The top of the page should follow the same format as a news release letterhead. It should note clearly and immediately that the document is a media advisory and should list the date and contact name and number for members of the media to contact for follow-up information. That contact should be the public affairs officer or the key person assigned to handle media arrangements.

Summarize key points. List clearly the date, time, place and key participants identified by full name, title and role in the program, if needed, and other relevant information. Remember to include a brief description of the event.

Media availability. If any participant or a "behind the scenes" person would make a good interview and/or be available for media interview, include instructions on how interviews can be arranged. Generally, a schedule is established. The statement may read something like: "Reporters who wish to interview John Doe, concerning the development of the dinosaur exhibit, should contact Betty Smith for arrangements by November 1 at 555-555-1212." Or, if not in wide demand, include this kind of statement: "John Doe, National Park Service scientist who headed the development of the dinosaur exhibit, will be available for interviews prior to and following the 10 a.m. ceremony."

TIP: advance interviews are a good way to bring *advance* attention and increase attendance at your event.

Special photo or video. Alert the media to any special photo or video opportunities so they can be prepared with the appropriate equipment.

Credentials. When media credentials are required, include information on what kind of credentials will be honored for the press area and/or if special credentials will be issued, include the information on how to apply and the deadline for application for these special credentials.

Example: White House, U.S. Capitol, State Department or Metropolitan Press credentials will be honored for the lighting of the National Christmas Tree. For those not holding any of these credentials, please submit in writing on your company's letterhead, the name and position, date of birth, place of birth, social security number by FAX to 555-555-1212 not later than 5 p.m. Dec. 1, 1869.

In addition to distribution to regular media outlets, always provide the advisory to wire services for inclusion on their "Daybook," which lists all news events on a given day and is provided to all news outlets which subscribe to the wire service. It is a valuable tool in assuring that word about the event reaches all media in the geographic area.

See an example of a media advisory on the next page.

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Office of Communications
and Public Affairs

1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240
202-208-6843 phone
202-219-0910 fax

National Park Service Media Advisory

FOR PLANNING PURPOSES ONLY, NOT FOR RELEASE
Today's Date: April 3, 2009
Contact: David Barna or Kathy Kupper (202) 208-6843

Lincoln Bicentennial: NPS Director will tour Appomattox Courthouse to mark end of Civil War

WASHINGTON – Acting National Park Service Director Dan Wenk will join members of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission next Thursday at Appomattox Courthouse National Historical Park in Virginia to mark the 134th anniversary of the end of the Civil War.

WHO: Acting National Park Service Director Dan Wenk
Members of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission
Local elected officials

WHAT: Ceremonies to mark the April 9, 1865, end of the Civil War.

WHEN: Thursday, April 9, 2009 at 10:00 A.M.

WHERE: Appomattox Courthouse National Historical Park

- Parking available at the park; please follow directions from park rangers who will be directing traffic.
-

Appomattox Courthouse National Historical Park encompasses approximately 1800 acres of rolling hills in rural central Virginia. The site includes the McLean home where Gen. Robert E. Lee and Gen. U.S. Grant signed document to end the war, and the village of Appomattox Court House, Virginia, the former county seat for Appomattox County.

INTERVIEWS/PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES: Acting Director Wenk will be available for one-on-one media interviews on-site after the ceremony. Appomattox Court House and the park make compelling backdrops for photography.

Letters to the Editor and Op-ed Pieces

In addition to letters to the editor, most newspapers and many other publications print longer articles. Whether they're labeled "Guest Editorial" or "Guest Column" they are generally called op-ed pieces (they traditionally appear OPposite the EDitorial page.)


LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Successful Aid Starts With Security

Thank You, 'Santa Paws'

Disinformation on the War in Ossetia

A Bailout for Charities

Opinion or editorial page editors reserve more space for letters and less space for submitted op-ed pieces. Regardless of name and placement, they offer a chance to thoughtfully explain topics the news editor might not consider Page 1A material.

If the editorial page editor offers you a guest column or op-ed piece, put your best writers to work on it. Again, be clear if this is an official National Park Service position or an opinion you hold as a private citizen. If you represent the bureau you are required to clear the column with the Washington public affairs office.

Writing tip: make your point quickly. Even leisurely Sunday readers may move on to the next page if your column is, well, dull.

Most newspapers and many other publications print editorials to express the official view of the publication. This is the part of the paper that is meant to be biased. Effective editorials take a strong stand on issues. How the editor (or group of editors) reaches the official opinion varies. Some topics are universal: honor veterans on Veterans Day, encourage people to vote.

At other times, editorial boards will invite contrasting voices to lay out their side of an issue. These are excellent opportunities to help inform readers and influence public opinion. Come to the editorial board armed with facts and a clear understanding of the National Park Service position. These are not sessions in which personal and agency views should be mixed.

Too often we wait until mid-crisis to meet writers. Going to editorial boards (and other forums, such as community groups) before there is a controversial issue should be part of your public affairs program.

Public Service Announcements

Although they haven't been required by law for some time, radio and television stations still broadcast a few public service announcements or public calendar items for non-profit groups and government agencies.

This can be a good way of getting publicity for an event. But before you go to the work of putting together PSAs, make sure the stations will use them. Advance publicity is not easy to get. Typical PSAs are 30 seconds or less. Write it as you would speak it — in 30 seconds you'll say about 80 words.

Check with stations on how far in advance they want to receive PSA copy; five weeks is a typical lead time. Also chat with the person who's in charge of PSAs. Most stations receive far more copy than they can use. A personal contact can help your item reach the airwaves.

PSA copy must be clearly marked with start and stop dates. This tells the announcers when the message is timely, and, with luck, the station will pull the announcement at the right time.

You will almost always produce a timed script rather than an actual audio tape. The latter are expensive to produce, and you probably don't have the equipment to do it right.

If you do want to produce a major PSA campaign, contact the regional or the Washington public affairs office. The Department has audio and video production capability and contracting expertise. This is a good instance to not re-invent the wheel.

Community Access Television

Most municipalities now have community access television stations. This is not PBS but true non-commercial, local television paid for by local taxes (usually paid by cable television franchise fees.) It features government meetings, and locally-generated programs. These stations rarely have enough programming to fill air time. They look for 30- and 60-minute programs but also for short pieces, from public service announcements to content that is just a few minutes in length. This is an ideal place for park video podcasts or other video programs that are valuable to educate the gateway community about park information, business and issues.

Speeches

Speechwriting is not press release writing nor is it news writing. For starters, the topic must be suited to audience and the speaker. Unlike a newspaper essay or brochure, the audience can't just decide to put it away (although they might drift off in the back row). The purpose of a speech is to deliver information to your audience, confirm their positive feelings about national parks and the National Park Service, cultivate those feelings in fence-sitters and critics, persuade them to share your point of view and convince them to take action. Delivery enhances content.

When writing a speech, it is essential to remember the audience. Ask yourself these basic questions before you get started:

- Who will be in the audience?
- How large will it be?
- Are these friends groups, or otherwise?
- How much do they know about the National Park Service?

You also must know the appropriate format of the speech, such as a keynote address, an introduction, a toast, a dedication before you get started. Know the key messages you want to communicate and the goals you want to accomplish.

Once you have this information, you are ready to write. The basic structure of a speech begins with an introduction, followed by the body of the speech and the conclusion. In short, tell the audience what you're going to tell them, tell them and then tell them what you just told them.
It's essential to keep in mind the audience does not have the chance to re-read a passage that was not clearly understood. The speaker must make allowances for this.

The two principal devices used by speechwriters are pauses and repetition. Speeches employ "heavy" punctuation. This extensive use of punctuation signals the speaker when to pause and for how long. These pauses let the audience catch up — giving a little extra time to absorb what's been said, and to set them up for what comes next. Repetition is still a key to successful speeches. Remember, the audience lacks a text and must absorb the message purely from what is heard. So repeat key elements, varying the phrasing, but repeating the message.

Also, because the audience is working without a script, detailed information can fail to impress.

Wrong: "Backwater National Monument had 489,143 recreational visits for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1996, according to our latest statistics."

Better: "Nearly half of a million people visit Backwater every year; that's almost the whole population of Wyoming coming to your park."

The hazards in giving a speech are similar to those in giving an interview — things like careful pronunciation and carefully formulated thoughts are essential.

The speaker has some advantages not available to the interview subject. A scheduled speaking engagement affords the opportunity to review a speech text and to practice giving the speech aloud with the clock running. That last bit of advice should not be considered optional — always read a speech aloud before delivering it to an audience.

A writing tip: In speechwriting, a double-spaced page of average size print will take about two and a half minutes to deliver. Therefore, a 20-minute speech requires about eight pages. For delivering the speech, you may want to boost the type size for easier reading. Always number the pages.

5 Photography

Good graphic elements, including photographs, are in high demand, especially among smaller publications. Larger publications may use your photographs but more often send their own photographer. Broadcasters may be interested. Filmmaker Ken Burns makes great use of still photos in his award-winning films. Broadcasters know the technique and may also use your photographs as a point of reference and a place to send their camera crew to capture moving video.

February 16, 2009, and National Park Service Ranger Peter Burgess sets a wreath inside the Lincoln Memorial on the 200th anniversary of the 16th President's birth.

You can attach low resolution photographs with every release you email to the media. You can also add an "Editor's Note" at the end of the news release describing high resolution still photos and video available at the park's web site.

Media outlets will also visit photography social network sites like Flickr, and they still use stock photo agencies.

When it comes to park-provided photographs, quality should be your guide – a muddy or blurry picture will hurt interest in your story. The minimum resolution for digital images for print is 300 pixels per inch with an image size about 5 inches by 7 inches. Internet photos are 72 pixels per inch. This means making a low-resolution copy of your high quality image. Ask your web master for help in this area.

Photo geeks, like the ones who edited this guide, also speak of dots per inch, or DPI. We will, however, stick to pixels per inch, PPI. Follow this link to a full discussion of PPI and DPI: http://www.rideau-info.com/photos/mythdpi.html

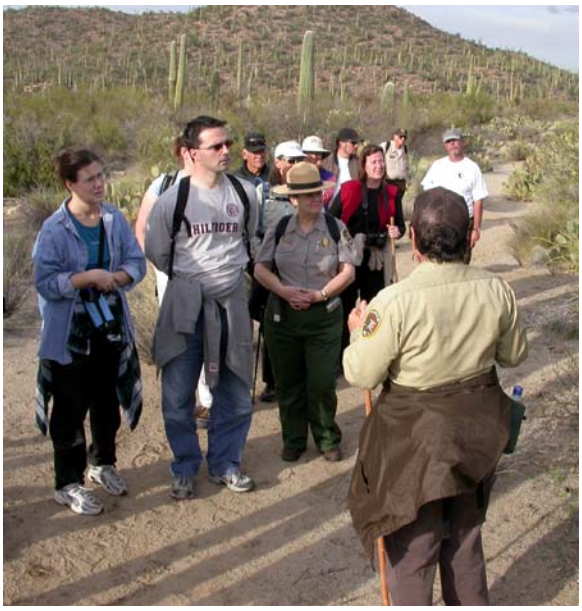
Every publication on the planet uses pictures of people shaking hands. Every publication on the planet would NOT use pictures of people shaking hands if they had better images from which to choose. If you have a check presentation or a groundbreaking, think of a better photo opportunity than a line of people holding a giant check or each of them turning dirt with gold-painted shovels.

People in photographs

There were more than 275 million visits to national parks in 2008. These are visits by people but you'd never know it judging from many of the photographs turned in by National Park Service

photographers. We see stunning landscapes from NPS photographers but aside from the occasional beauty shot we need to show people enjoying national parks if we expect to be able to educate the public about the fact that parks exist for their preservation AND enjoyment.

So what's the problem? Simply stated, photographing people in national park landscapes is a lot of work. Most National Park Service photographers have many other duties that take away from the time necessary to find and capture great people pictures.



A volunteer leads a sunset tour at Saguaro National Park.

People in park photos can be a sensitive topic, especially when it involves children. Here are some tips from a long-time newspaper photographer, now with the National Park Service.

Shoot photos first and ask questions later. National parks are public places where a lot of people are taking a lot of pictures. Personal privacy expectations are limited when a person enters a public space.

So, when you see a good "people in the park" photo, shoot it. Then approach the subjects of the picture. Be thoughtful. Your conversation should begin with something like this. 'Hello, I'm Peter Parker with the National Park Service. I was taking pictures of Ranger Bob's talk along the trail. You and your family seem to be having a great time and you are in some of my pictures. Would it be OK with you if we used the photo in a park newsletter or brochure?'

If the people in your picture say yes, take down their names and contact information. Offer them your contact information and double check their information to make sure you've spelled everyone's name correctly. As a courtesy, when you believe you have an exceptional photo, you may want to send them an email with a low resolution copy of the photo and a thank you note.

There may be an instance when you approach the subjects of your picture and they make it clear they don't want to be in a park publication. Let it go at that. Delete the photo. Get on with your day. There are many more people having fun in the park who will be willing to be in a National Park Service photo.

There is a National Park Service model release form in this chapter. Keep a few copies in your camera bag. They may come in handy when you work with school groups where teachers are required to have signed releases from parents so that students may take part in the field trip and related activities such as a park photo.

NPS Employees in Photographs
Whether it's a maintenance uniform or Class A, if you wear a uniform as part of your National Park Service job, wear it in photos. Wear the complete uniform according to uniform standards. If you, in the course of your NPS job, wear a hardhat and safety glasses, make sure you wear them in a photo. These things contribute to your safety and you are also a role model for safety equipment and clothing.

Don't wear sunglasses in the photos. Put them away until the photographer leaves.

Now that you're thinking images, what format should you pursue? A few suggestions:

Photo archive. Keep a file of images to help you work with many media outlets, especially smaller publishers. You do not need to have copies of every picture in the park's collection ready to give out — a representative sample of the key resources, including NPS personnel working with visitors, is what's needed. We recommend having quality photos available on the park web page or as hand outs on CD. Digital photographs of NPS sites are also available on the NPS Digital Image Archives website located at www.nps.gov/pub_aff/imagebase.html. Several parks also maintain their own photo archives.

A related heads-up: pictures or video taken by government employees on the job are public domain. With very few exceptions, the public has the right to have copies. Once we give copies out, the public can (but shouldn't) sell them, publish them on the Internet, or whatever — again, almost without restriction.

Photographs are not snapshots. Should you be tempted at the last minute, don't, we repeat don't use prints from instant cameras. Your office should have a digital camera with fresh batteries. Even modest point-and-shoot digicams can produce high quality images. Use a camera with about 5 megapixels and set it to the highest picture quality and resolution settings. If you don't have much camera experience, set the controls to automatic and keep the sun behind you.

Lower Falls, Yellowstone National Park.

If the park has a collection of high quality prints and slides and hasn't converted them to a digital format, please do. These are great projects for volunteers. It requires a flat bed scanner for prints

and a slide scanner for slides and negatives although many new flatbed scanners also scan slides and negatives.

Timeliness is important. Digital images can be distributed shortly after the media event via electronic mail or posted on the park's web page for the media to download.

Photography also means videography.

Television will accept video in a variety of formats. But they'll really appreciate High Definition (HD) and other professional formats such as Beta SP, mini DV. The emergence of inexpensive and rather high quality HD video cameras means we should be using the new video tools. After all, we care for the nation's iconic landscapes. It is our responsibility to provide images that illustrate their beauty and importance. If you're using the old VHS tape format please stop. Along with the images, don't forget to type up a shot list or other description of the video, including the identification of people in the video and a note about what is going on.

Consult Rick Lewis or Jody Lyle in this office for guidance on video camera quality standards. When you upgrade your video camera, get a solid tri-pod if you don't already have one. Use it. Shaky, hand held video is a temptation to let quality slide. Please shoot enough video at the beginning and the end of a shot or video clip so that more precise edits can be made later.

When practicable, media want a tape of your video. Because a television show in New York may want video from Alaska on short notice, they may be willing to download it from an FTP site or have a local station send it to them by satellite uplink. If feasible and financially practical it's a great way to distribute "B-roll" video, video news releases, or broadcast an event live or on tape delay.

Remember that unless your incident is spectacularly newsworthy or timing means you have the only video, most television outlets want to shoot their own video. The park video is, however, important for the park's historic record and future in-house uses.

Photo Captions

National Park Service Ranger Brandon Bies, with media photographers and World War II veterans on February 23, 2009, at the U.S. Marine Corps Memorial in Arlington, Virginia, for the 64th anniversary of a flag-raising event on Mt. Suribachi during the battle for the island of Iwo Jima.

Write complete captions for every photo or video sequence distributed. Remember these points when writing a caption:

- Never write a caption without seeing the picture.
- Use complete names, spelled correctly.
- List names in an identifiable order (left to right, top to bottom, etc.)
- Fully identify the location and the time the picture was taken.
- Ask yourself, “Does it fully identify what’s going on?”
- List a contact phone number on your caption. The news release and picture are likely to lead separate lives.
- Photoshop and other photo editing software programs provide means for recording caption information. For Photoshop, go to the edit tab and click on file info.
- Place caption information in easily accessible format when you post photos on the park web site.

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Park Service Release Form

I hereby grant the National Park Service, or its authorized representatives and contractors, the right to make visual recordings, audio recordings, still images, and/or to otherwise capture material of me and any minor child under my control at the time the material is collected.

I hereby agree that the material will become the property of the National Park Service and will not be returned. As such, I agree that the National Park Service and its assigns have the right to reproduce, prepare derivative works of, distribute or display and use these materials in whole or in part, for government and non-government purposes, in any manner or media (whether now existing or created in the future), in perpetuity, and in all languages throughout the world. Use of this material shall include, but not be limited to, audiovisual programs; museum exhibits; websites; publications; product artwork; and project publicity. Additionally, I waive the right to inspect or approve any use of the material and any right to royalties or other compensation arising or related to the use of the material.

I hereby hold harmless and release and forever discharge the National Park Service from all claims, demands, and causes of action which I, my heirs, representatives, executors, administrators, or any other persons acting on my behalf or on behalf of my estate have or may have by reason of this authorization.

I am 18 years of age or older and am competent to contract in my own name. I have read this release before signing below and I fully understand the contents, meaning and impact of this release. I agree to indemnify and hold the Government harmless for any and all losses, claims, expenses, suits, costs, demands and damages or liabilities on account of personal injury, death, or property damages of any nature whatsoever and by whomsoever made, arising out of the activities associated with the project in which I am taking part.

Description of Material: _____

Signature/Date: _____

Printed Name_____

Address: _____

City: _____State: _____Zip Code: _____

Phone (please include area code):_____

Organization/Group Name (if applicable):_____

If the person signing is under age 18, there must be consent by a parent or guardian, as follows:
I hereby certify that I am the parent or guardian of _____, named above, and do hereby give consent without reservation to the foregoing on behalf of this person.

Parent or Guardian's Signature/Date_____

Parent or Guardian's Printed Signature_____

For NPS/Contractor Administrative Use Only:

Park	Project	Location	Date	Contractor	NPS COR

Privacy Act Statement: This information is provided to comply with the Privacy Act (PL 93-579). 5 U.S.C. 301 and 7 CFR 260 authorizing acceptance of the information requested on this form. The data you furnish will be used only to provide the National Park Service with contact information pertaining to this release form.

NPS Release Form 09/12/2008

6 Interviews

Park officials are interviewed, with varying degrees of frequency — and success. The advice below works for any medium, but interview gaffs are particularly noticeable on television.

Basics

Know Your Subject! Know Your Subject! Know Your Subject!

Reporters are rarely specialists. Good ones will do some research before an interview, but even those will have little knowledge of park operations or the reasons a particular park exists. You, on the other hand, have only superficial knowledge of their trade. It is your job to make certain the reporter understands what you are talking about.

If you know the focus of the interview in advance, jot three or four bullet statements on a card to focus on the main points you want to make. Have your message firmly in mind. It reduces nervousness and keeps your responses succinct. Make a transition or "bridge" back to your main points whenever possible.

You may hear terms such as "off the record," "on background," and "not for attribution." These are used to describe an interview, or portion of an interview, where the information given will not appear in print, or will not be attributed to an individual.

When a reporter wants to go off the record, don't. If you are not prepared to see EVERYTHING YOU SAY in print or on television, or hear it on radio, don't say it. Stick to facts and figures you know. Again, the surest way to avoid being quoted about something you don't want on the public record is to avoid saying it.

Don't do interviews for an ego massage. During an interview, your job is to explain park programs, policies, and plans. Unless you are the subject of a personal profile —which sometimes happens with new personnel in key assignments or those departing such positions — your preference in china patterns or love for baseball trivia is not appropriate. Your role is spokesperson for the park and for the National Park Service. It doesn't even matter if your name appears in the finished story.

Be truthful. Manufactured facts give the media two stories instead of one. Their first story is the truth. The second is your effort to avoid the truth. The second may become bigger than the first. One poorly understood fact is that the public and the media do understand human frailty. They don't expect you to be perfect. An admission of error is rarely important news — unless it is preceded by a denial of error.

If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Even experts need to refresh their memories. But get the answer as soon as possible. If circumstances permit, get your staff to come

up with an answer, while you continue the interview. Don't be afraid to refer questions about other bureaus, neighboring parks or the regional office to appropriate public affairs offices. Only answer those questions within the scope of your position.

Every reporter has a deadline for the story you're involved in. The daily media, especially on fast-breaking stories, have immediate deadlines because of the 24/7 web version of the publication. If a broadcast reporter must file a story at 4 p.m. to get on the 6 O'clock news, don't delay the interview until 3:30. The reporter needs time to return to the station, edit tape, and sometimes check details with you by phone. You can't do a thorough job when you don't have enough time; why expect a reporter to do so?

Even magazines have deadlines. Just because a story won't be published for six weeks, don't assume the reporter has six weeks to write it. Magazines often stop taking material weeks before the publication date. The rest of the time is taken up by printing, layout, design, and editing — all beyond the reporter's control.

Do's and Don'ts

Tell the truth
This is the first rule for every one of us who speak on behalf of the National Park Service.

For the philosophers who ask, 'What is truth?' here's the translation: the first rule for every one of us who speak on behalf of the National Park Service is to present accurate facts, figures and statements.

Rarely will reporters try to trick or trap you. Their credibility is tied to their by-line in print and online or their performance on radio or television. They want to get the story right because failing to do so makes them look bad. They don't want to antagonize you because they know they probably will have to deal with you on some future story.

The record is clear: most "misquotes" are the result of one of two failures on the part of the person interviewed. It is not a misquotation if you regret what you said once you saw it in print. It is not misrepresentation if you failed to explain your point clearly, and left the reporter to make an erroneous interpretation of what you meant.

Don't let the reporter form your words for you. If the reporter says something like, "Then what you mean is…" pay attention! You are about to hear how you'll be quoted unless you correct any mistake in the statement that follows.

Likewise, if an interviewer tries to cut off your answer, be assertive! Say that you'd like to finish your answer before moving to the next question.

On rare occasions you'll face a hostile interview. Your only option is to play ball and practice some damage control. If you can show a good reporter that he or she might be misinterpreting the facts or be missing the facts entirely, he or she might adjust the conclusions. This isn't guaranteed. If you know a hostile story is in the works, practice fielding tough questions. Someone on the staff can take the role as the reporter.

Do stop talking once you have answered the question, even if there is an awkward silence. This is how reporters will get you to offer more information than you had planned. Just smile politely and wait for the next question.

Don't repeat a hostile question. While you might not make lemonade out of lemons, you can move toward a positive response. For example:
Reporter: "Sally, your campground staff is ignoring safe water rules and letting people get sick and maybe die, aren't they?

WRONG: "No, we're not ignoring safe drinking water standards in our campgrounds, and I don't think anybody is going to die."

BETTER: "We're very concerned about public health. Our campground water supply is safe. We test it daily, and we've begun an investigation into what else might be causing the illnesses we've had reported."

Acknowledge serious issues. If a question is loaded, answer the question you want to be asked. Keep your message simple. (Given the complex resource and people management issues with which you deal, that's not always going to be easy.) Keep coming back to your message.

Don't overreach in trying to spin a bad situation. Better to admit mistakes and take action to correct them. You'll get points for credibility and candor.

Reporters are professionals, even if some are inexperienced. You were once an inexperienced professional. Keep appointments or provide a solid explanation if you can't. Don't insult reporters. Don't talk down to them. Nobody likes such treatment. If they seek an appointment in advance, it is fair to ask what subjects they want to cover in the interview. That allows you time to prepare properly. It is not fair to ask that questions be submitted in advance.

Never argue with a reporter. It doesn't matter who wins, everybody looks bad.
Listen to the interviewer. You will not be able to answer intelligently unless you have fully listened to the question.

If you have a schedule to keep, remind them at the beginning how much time you have for them. That way, no one should be caught off guard when you say, "I'm sorry, but I have to leave now." Emergencies will be understood.

No Comment!

Q: A reporter asks a question and you say, "No comment." What is the reporter's reaction?

A: "Oh boy, I've struck a nerve. They're hiding something! I just know it! I'm going to find out and get a story on page 1 (or lead the 11 p.m. news) and …"

The terse "no comment," even when said with a smile, is not acceptable. It may just blow a small story out of proportion.

You can say: "It's not appropriate for me to comment because …" (Tell them why.)

Or you can say: "That's a good question. I don't know the answer but I will check and call you back." This is an appropriate response. It tells the reporter you want to help. Your responsibility is to follow through quickly – get the answer to the question and call the reporter.

Some questions are so obvious you should always have the answers. You still need to consider what those are. A few common questions:

- Why is this place a park? What are the reasons it was set aside?
- What are your responsibilities in the park?
- Where does this park rank in the National Park System? (acreage, visitation, annual budget, and other simple facts and figures)
- How does the park benefit the local community? The nation?
- What is there to do here?
- Where do visitors come from?
- What is the park's worst problem?

Many interviewers wrap up with an offer of "Anything else you'd like to say?" A quick glance at that little card you made – the one with important messages – will let you know what, if anything to add. If you hit all your main points during the interview, politely decline the offer and thank the reporter and photographer for coming. This is a nice opening if you really have more to say, but it's also a "fishing" strategy. Reporters and producers know that once a subject gets comfortable with the camera and the reporter they may just "let something slip."

It's more important to share the most important information early in the interview. If the reporter pays attention, those first answers can influence the rest of the interview.

Media Specifics

For a print media interview, learn about the publication's readership. Prepare accordingly. Newspapers and magazines have a great capacity for reporting detail. Know the details that are relevant. Make use of fact sheets or other written material that can provide the details of, say, budgets and staff levels. These can bog down an interview.

For a radio interview, remember that numbers are terrible. So are rambling answers. Be brief. Be to the point. If you have to think through an answer, do it before you start talking.

Appearance matters greatly for television interviews. If you have enough notice, wear your best, newest uniform. Makeup and jewelry should be kept to a minimum so they don't distract from your message. Just before the actual interview, visit a mirror and check yourself. Remember that gig line. Keep it straight. Otherwise, the rules are much like those for radio. Camera operators will often ask you to repeat an answer just so they can get a different angle. They also may ask for casual footage of you talking with the reporter. Remember, they are doing this for the picture, but the sound is on and anything you say could end up in the finished story.

Focus your eyes wherever the camera operator tells you. But do focus on something. An unfocused gaze or wandering eyes are quite noticeable to a viewer. Good posture is a must. Don't fidget or swivel in your chair. This will make you look, at best, uncomfortable and, at worst, evasive and unknowledgeable.

7 Staging a Special Event

In the life of every park comes a time when a ground breaking, dedication, news conference, big public meeting or other ceremony is held to which the public and "Very Important People" are invited. The event generally is held to bring public attention to a new facility, program, a policy change or plan that otherwise might not attract the immediate attention of the media and public. Money may control the size of the event. If it's not clear just why you're having an event then the first step needs to be a decision on the reason and theme of the event.

Public Meetings

As government becomes more transparent and we rely on partnerships and citizen participation, you'll find your park doing more public meetings.

Planning is essential. A checklist (use the Special Events sample in the Appendix) and timetable for the details should be devised to suit your park and revised as plans become more certain. They are the basic means to check and double check every facet of the program. You may want to find out from the public what to consider in a planning document for the park. Or you have the document fully prepared and need to get public comments.

Public meeting at Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

A news release speaking to these points is one way to solicit comment. Another way is to hold informal workshops, a more formal meeting or the most formal, a hearing. At a minimum, each of these should be advertised with a news release. If you are worried that your news release won't get used by media (remember, they're under no obligation to consider your event news) and want to guarantee the public notice is done, you may buy a display advertisement (instead of a legal ad; the latter usually in the classifieds and printed in tiny type). Consult with the regional public affairs office if you need advice on how this is done. Also consider other ways of reaching your audience — bulletin boards, friends groups, using local organization newsletters, on-line social networks and the park web pages.

A public workshop is an informal gathering, typically consisting of the park staff associated with the project and perhaps a specialist (say, a Denver Service Center planner) who talks one on one to whomever saunters by about their ideas.

A public meeting has an agenda. Usually it calls for a presentation of the document or topic by a NPS official, followed by comments from the press and public.

A more formal public hearing is one of the few times it may be prudent to hire a court reporter and where speaking guidelines ought to be established. For example, you might use an unbiased third party as a facilitator or "master of ceremonies." This might be a retired federal judge, or a local person with good skills in running a public meeting. If there are likely to be several people testifying, the MC should set a time limit for each speaker. Establish that elected officials speak first, followed by government agencies, followed by general public. Note that written testimony will be accepted. Make it clear that speakers should not feel compelled to read an entire written statement. Public hearings can be contentious and are certainly the most expensive to organize. It is generally the meeting of last resort, when your issues are too controversial and/or of interest to a large group. You may end up holding meetings in several locations. Refer to Chapter Two of the NPS Policies Manual for details on the planning process. The National Environmental Policy Act also spells out purpose. Expect press to be prepared to look for you or a subject matter specialist at the end of a meeting or during a break. Television might cover your meeting live, or plan to put a report on the late evening news. If you're running the meeting, designate a spokesperson to go on camera or work with print reporters.

News Conferences

News conferences provide the opportunity to bring the National Park Service message to a wide audience. The format increases the odds that all or many local media outlets will attend because none of them will want to miss a chance at news the others may cover. It's a time when reporters generally get to ask wide-ranging questions.

When to hold a news conference

Hold a news conference when you have actual news of interest to report to more than one audience. Reporters will not come to your next news conference if you do not have real news this time. If you can easily sum up your main points in a simple news release, do not hold a news conference.

What to do before scheduling a news conference

- Know who your spokesperson is going to be and what points they are going to make.
- Prepare responses to questions you expect to be asked, just as you would for an interview.
- Have your spokesperson practice for the news conference with public affairs staff playing roles as reporters.

- Choose your date, time and location carefully. Make sure there will not be any conflicting events that will draw the media attention away from your story. Due to media deadlines, mid-morning or early afternoon news conferences work best for reporters. The location must be easily accessible to the media and able to support their equipment but should also showcase the natural and cultural resources that make your park special.
- Invite the media. Be sure to remind them about the engagement the day before the news conference.
- Have media kits available for reporters shortly before the news conference begins.
- If necessary, have the necessary logistical equipment, such as mult-boxes or lighting platforms, ready before the news conference begins.


The news conference

- Keep track of the reporters in attendance. Use a sign-in sheet to get their contact information and add it to your media list.
- Keep statements short and to-the-point.
- Let reporters know how much time you have for questions.

After the news conference

Distribute any helpful background materials and follow up with any reporters who have asked for additional information.

Other Special Events

Date and place

As early as possible, select a date for the event. This should fit the schedule of the key speaker or participants. Reserve the location and make a tentative list of people to be invited as guests. Make sure your program date does not conflict with other events that might siphon off media or key guests.

Begin to outline a program, planning how you'll handle guests, who will be asked to speak, what if any entertainment needs to be arranged, and the logistics — things like hotel space, parking, and equipment rentals. This is also the time to plan for weather contingencies.

Even indoor events can be affected by weather. Are you planning to have people park on grass that could be soggy? Walk or stand outside through inclement weather?

Regional public affairs offices and special event or incident command teams can help plan and execute large events. Don't be afraid to ask. It's better to get more help than you need than to ask too late. Involve the WASO Legislative Affairs Office and your regional legislative affairs person if the event will (or should) involve members of Congress or local congressional staff.

Media Arrangements

For public events, issue radio public service announcements to be used up to the day of the event. Issue a general news release about two weeks before the event. This will alert the media and the public that an event has been scheduled. In some cases, you'll want to give more than two weeks notice. In rare cases when you're expecting a large media crowd, you'll want to put out media advisories dealing with equipment placement, credentials and other issues. About a week before an event, issue an editors advisory to local print and broadcast media describing the elements of the event that most merit media attention. This will provide the basic outline of the event and describe any special information such as media parking, satellite truck parking, availability of audio feeds and any special press conferences or press availabilities for the principal guests. A press kit should be prepared and given to those covering the event.

Invitations

Speakers and other VIPs deserve a special invitation with an RSVP. Make sure your invitation list is complete, but keep in mind the platform requirements and the length of the program. Only the very rare program will run more than 60 minutes. If your event warrants the appearance of the NPS Director, other members of the WASO Directorate, the Secretary or members of Congress, their letters of invitation should be coordinated through the regional public affairs office. Invitation letters should not only include the time, place and date of the event, but the role you want the invitee to play. Also include a description of the event, its significance, anticipated audience size, other speakers, media coverage and related events such as lunch, tours or receptions. If there's a meal, determine who is going to pay for it. Don't surprise your guests by hitting them up for $10 at the start of the buffet line!

Protocol

Protocol often dictates who will be the master of ceremonies. Generally it is the highest ranking National Park Service official. This is an important role and one that might not be determined until a few weeks or even a few days before the event. Speakers should be chosen for their relationship to the project, their position and their interest in the event. Also consider their ability to speak.

Make sure you have firm commitments from the speakers, then follow up to provide additional information such as the expected length of their speech, a topic, details of transportation, accommodations and any special needs. (Don't forget to find out if they will be accompanied by spouses, children or others who might need special seating or transportation.)

Prepare a scenario for the program and related events, keeping in mind that someone must be in charge of each aspect of the program. It doesn't need to be the same master of ceremonies, but someone must to be responsible for moving the crowd from the ribbon cutting to the tour to the food and so forth.

Prepare a detailed, timed script for the program. This will almost always be a work of fiction, but it helps keep everyone on track. This script is for the master of ceremonies and other park officials who have event management roles.

Be sure people are assigned to meet arriving guests. These escorts should be in uniform. It's our show, and we want to look our best. If you are short on staff, use volunteers to help direct traffic or seat other visitors.

Wyoming native and NBC television news correspondent Pete Williams was the emcee for this 2008 program at Grand Teton National Park. Other dignitaries include former Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks, John Turner, park superintendent Mary Gibson Scott, and NPS Intermountain Region Director Michael Snyder.

Always allow speakers time and a place to rest before they appear on stage, especially if they are traveling some distance. Let them know where the bathroom is if they need to freshen up or change clothes.

Always set aside a "green room" for speakers and platform guests to gather before they go on stage. Make sure they know to be at this location. A green room gives the event coordinator a sure way of knowing everyone has arrived and a place to inform guests of any last minute program changes. The green room could be the superintendent's office, a neighboring building, or even a quiet, roped-off area behind the platform.

The Platform

If anything can go wrong at a special event, it usually happens at the platform. In arranging for the platform, of course, you'll need a good idea of how many people it needs to handle. (The platform is used so the speaker can be seen by the audience. It could, in fact, be a stage or other prop to get the group up above the crowd.)

Platform groups tend to grow. A general rule is no more than 20 people. Work hard to keep the number down and find other ways to recognize "second tier" guests. Remember that each platform guest must be introduced. This takes time, even if not a lot is said about each person. Be sure lighting is adequate across the entire platform. If the event is outside, consider where the sun will be at the time of the event. Consider the speakers and the audience; neither wants to spend a half hour squinting.

If photographers or television crews will cover the event, make sure the lighting meets their needs, and they're not trying to add light stands at the last minute.

The **dais** (Day-iss) is the raised platform for guests. A **podium** is a smaller platform on which the speaker may stand. A **lectern** is a slant-topped desk, often equipped with a light, on which the speaker can rest his notes and a glass of water. The lectern may be on an open pedestal or be an enclosed stand. Part of your planning is to determine which of these items is required. Your choice will also affect the choice of a sound system. And those choices will affect media coverage as well.

A word of advice on sound systems. You may think your park owns an adequate system that's compatible with modern media needs and produces clear sound for a large outdoor crowd. Check if this is really true. You may find yourself breathing easier if you contract out the sound portion to a company that specializes in staging outdoor public events.

Special Needs

Plan for a special media section if you're expecting significant numbers of reporters or several television cameras. If you're unsure what the media needs, invite them to come out ahead of time and work with you on pool equipment, locations, utility needs and lighting.

You'll often need special items such as scissors, a shovel, ribbons, plaques, awards, bunting and other decorations. Get a list of these together well in advance of the event. We can all find scissors, but does your town sell red, white and blue flag bunting in January?

Make sure there are bathrooms nearby. If you're going to use the visitor center or campground restrooms, don't expect an extra 750 people to wait in line. Rent some portapotties. And get some plumbing near them so people can wash their hands. And towels to dry them. And a trash can.

If you've set up special parking arrangements, make sure you've set aside adequate space for handicapped parking. Consider if there is adequate accessibility. Wheelchairs, for instance, do not belong only on the back row. Make sure that medical attention is available. This means not

just a first aid kit, but room for an ambulance to get to the event. Outdoor events might benefit from a tent or canopy so that guests or visitors can be protected from hot sun, rain or other inhospitable conditions.

After the event

Have refreshments — just coffee and lemonade might be enough. Make certain that any perishable food can be properly stored. If your visiting VIPs decide at the last minute that they'd like a tour, make sure you have transportation or escorts available. Forward news clippings to your speakers, especially those from out of town who might not otherwise see the local paper. Always follow up with thank you letters to participants, volunteers and visiting NPS staff. After the last Dixie cups have been picked up, evaluate your efforts and ask what went right and what went wrong. Write up a simple report and offer it to other parks or the regional public affairs office. Your experiences, good and bad, may help other parks.

8 Stock Information Needs

Your shelves can hold a variety of information materials at the ready that will help you work with the media and other groups. Here are four we recommend having:

The Fact Sheet. A one-page sheet of basic information, formatted as a list of bullets. At a minimum, it will have the park's age, size, budget, visitation, staffing levels, contact name and number and brief descriptions of the primary natural and/or cultural features. If a particular program has substantial public interest, such as flood repair on the C& O Canal, a separate sheet may be needed.

The Media Kit. This package is put together for the media, generally for a specific event. It should include, at a minimum, a news release about the event, any fact sheets, the park brochure or park newspaper, background on speakers or program participants, and additional information reporters might need (a map with telephone and power outlets highlighted, for instance). Since having a reporter at the park to cover one event is a good chance to tell a broader story, this is a good vehicle to include recent news releases, story tips, materials on concession services and other partnerships.

The Information Packet. This differs from the media kit in that it is not developed for a specific event, and can be used for non-media recipients. These generally have more emphasis on visitor services, safety tips, accommodations, food service, partnerships, and community connections. They rarely have news releases or media-specific information.

These packets are great for tour leaders, VIP trips, community outreach, etc. These packets often contain briefing statements prepared by the park or regional office. There is a standard format (which seems to have slight evolutions from year to year), and you're encouraged to stick with the format du jour. Regardless of format, though, focus on what your visitor needs to know. Briefing statements tend to bog down in detail that is beyond the interest of the recipient.

An example of a fact sheet follows this page.

Economic Impact of the National Parks - 2007

Summary
The 2007 taxpayer investment of $2 billion in the National Park Service had an economic impact of $11 billion in gateway community economies. This included support of 213,000 jobs in those same communities.

Visitor Spending
The national park system received nearly 276 million visits in 2007. That visitation is a primary fuel source for the economic engines of communities that lie within 50 miles of a national park unit.

In 2007 there were 14 million overnight stays in parks. Visitors spend money on lodging, food, amusements, souvenirs, and fuel. Spending by visitors varied from $68 per day for backcountry campers to $291 per day for visitors staying in park lodges.

A typical non-local park visitor party on a day trip spends $71.

In total, park visitors spent $11.79 billion in the economies of communities within 50 miles of a park unit.

Visitor spending supported about 244,000 jobs in gateway communities. These jobs included:

56,000 jobs in the hotel sector
56,000 jobs in the restaurant sectors,
22,000 jobs in retail trade, and
22,000 jobs in the amusements sector.

Concessions
The NPS has nearly 600 concessioners at 120 different sites, providing visitors with lodging, transportation, food, shops, and other service. Concessioners employ over 25,000 people, grossed nearly $1 billion and paid the Federal Government $51 million concession fees.

Cooperating Associations
In addition, the NPS cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation. These non-profits operate educational bookstores in parks. More that 170 non-profit associations contribute time, expertise, and nearly $50 million annually to national parks across the country.

Construction
The NPS spends over $200 million annually on construction of facilities and roads. These funds support engineering and construction companies in the local communities.

NPS Payroll
Some $1.44 billion in National Park Service payroll and benefits supports 23,853 National Park Service jobs in communities within 50 miles of park units and National Park Service administrative units such as regional offices and centers.

Distributing Public Affairs Materials

The first rule of trash can avoidance is: Don't send trash to the media. The second rule is: Don't bury the media in a paper or email blizzard. Use news releases only when you have something worth taking an editor's time.

And who is the appropriate person to receive the news release? We'll assume that your audience is fairly local — that you're announcing new summer hours, not naming a new director.

Before you start a media list, do two things. First, make sure there isn't one already in the park — someone may have done the work for you. Second, check with your regional public affairs office. They often have media lists. Also, your local or state press club is likely to have a directory of publications and broadcasters. Many times these are commercially available.

If you are starting from scratch, and you don't already know, find out which newspapers are sold around your community. Include weeklies and "shoppers" if they run local news. Then turn on the radio and find out who's doing local news. Do the same for television, including cable stations and community access stations.

Next, compile a regional list. Make sure you've included the nearest wire service bureau offices, big city newspapers that might cover out of town issues (Denver papers for Rocky Mountain, San Francisco Bay area papers for Yosemite, etc.), regional magazines or specialty publications (military history publications for Civil War parks, for instance.)

Lastly, you'll want to have on hand the addresses for national or international media outlets that might have an interest. These might be national travel editors, magazines, or networks that you've worked with in the past or who have expressed an interest in your park.

You are likely to build up three "mailing" lists. The primary media list is an e-mail list. Reporters like to get information by e-mail. It's fast to send (and equally fast to delete). An e-mail release can be downloaded to a computer and saves the step of re-typing a fax or mail release. What's the downside of e-mail? Your park reporter may be off that day. Be sure to have a back up contact at each media outlet. Without a "return receipt" you're not sure anybody got it. Your second list will be fax numbers. Some reporters simply prefer getting information by fax. If you don't have a fax machine that allows you to program all of your common media phone numbers, make the investment. Put your regional public affairs officer on the fax list, too. They don't like surprises!

The old mail list, with postal addresses, may get a little use. If you choose to maintain one you will want a combination of a mailing list computer program, printer and mailing labels that work together; our only advice is to keep it simple.

Use the mail for less time-sensitive information (for instance, "Fall Museum Hours Begin Next Month").

Many parks put news releases on their web pages. The national public affairs office does this at the same time they email the release to reporters and editors. Use your web page to post news releases, photos, current park conditions, and other information. Keep your news releases on park web pages current. Old news releases should be archived or placed in such a manner so as not to imply that the park news release page has not been recently updated. If old releases are the first thing a user sees when accessing a park news release page it's unlikely that they'll return to that page as a source of current park information.

Let reporters, editors and producers know the information is on your web page by adding a note with your web address at the bottom of the release.

9 Crisis Communications

There's nothing like crisis and controversy to alter the life of a park and its employees, concessioners, contractors and visitors.

Crisis, tragedy and controversy are scary stuff. It's scary for any number of reasons but primarily because most people's lives involve a day-after-day *absence* of controversy, crisis or tragedy. Much as the automobile mechanic has tools to make repairs, communicators have tools to deal with crisis and controversy.

The first tool is the ability to keep cool.

It helps to remember that crisis communication is one piece of your overall strategic communications plan. When a crisis lands in the park, remember the mechanic. You just have to root around in your "tool box" for the crisis communication manual.

While your urge to panic slips away, take a breath and remember another advantage of your long term communications strategy. Crisis communication is still part of the overall goal to ensure that the public understands and supports what we do on their behalf.

Remember that perception is reality. *"We may have control of an incident operationally, but if we don't communicate effectively with the public, we may be perceived as being inept, ineffective or the cause of the incident."(Anonymous NPS employee)*

Timely response in a crisis

When controversial news happens in your park, you must work with facts and you must work quickly and efficiently. Rumor often outruns reality and you must overtake gossip. It's your job to get people – including reporters – back to the facts.

First: Designate one spokesperson.

Second: Your spokesperson must be fully informed and credible. He or she should be the quintessential "quick study." The spokesperson's qualities include the ability to retain detail and to react smoothly in pressure situations.

Third: Give your chosen spokesperson a chance to function in the role before disaster strikes. Emergencies are lousy training grounds.

Fourth: Make sure your employees know who the spokesperson is and that the spokesperson is the only one who speaks to the media or the public for the National Park Service. Your employees should know this from the day they start work at the park.

A single source of information is essential in an emergency. It sharply reduces the likelihood of conflicting or confusing "official" statements. The spokesperson is only as good as the information he or she gets. The public information officer is usually the most appropriate spokesperson. If you choose someone else, their information comes from the information officer, not the field staff at work on the problem. The information officer, in consultation with top management, knows what information should be released.

Initially, reporters will accept the fact that one person speaks for the National Park Service on this crisis. They will soon want to talk to the people involved with the crisis: the firefighters, the park ranger who discovered a tragic car wreck. They quickly want a story beyond basic facts. They want drama because their editors and producers want drama because drama draws viewers, advertisers and profits. It's really that simple.

The superintendent is responsible for management of a disaster situation. That may mean the activation of an incident command team from outside the park. In any case, the public information effort supports and explains the management program.

In many cases a reporter's first contact with a park comes during a crisis. There's nothing better than having a reporter who knows the turf. They learn it quickly in times of crisis. The reporter will be impressed, positively or negatively, depending on how we react to the crisis, and how we supply information. The alert spokesperson will cultivate these "new" reporters after the crisis has passed.

First word of disaster doesn't always come from us. When we are in a position to make first contact with the media, be sure to have enough information to convey the scope of the calamity. You'll have that information when you know what happened, who was affected, when it happened, how it happened, where it happened and if possible, why it happened. Reporters will also want to know the human and capital costs of the crisis.

Don't forget: Your crisis is a reporter's crisis, too. Reporters are under pressure to give clear, concise, up-to-the-minute reports. Regardless of the medium in which they work, reporters have deadlines.

Before a Crisis Develops

Let's back up a bit. Please get to know reporters before a crisis occurs. There is a tremendous advantage for you if you have a positive relationship with the media before times of crisis. When

difficult or bad things happen in your park, reporters will have previous positive experiences with you as a backdrop to going to work on a disaster or crisis. You've given them solid, accurate information in the past so you will be looked at as a trusted source.

If you are new to your park or office and haven't introduced yourself to the media yet, do so as soon as possible. Offer them a tour of the park or office facilities. Let reporters know your credentials – your background and current duties. If you haven't met reporters before the crisis you *will* have a relationship with them. You'll be the new guy or gal on the block, the untested and maybe the yet-to-be trusted source. This is territory you can easily avoid.

Tips to Remember When Preparing for a Crisis

Be the first and best source of information.

- You will have the first and maybe the only chance to define the issue and shape the message so the media understand the National Park Service side of any story.
- Good sources are always in short supply. They're invaluable in crisis because a reporter has time to interview only two or three people.
- Provide timely, accurate, consistent and complete information to all media.
- Identify unique story angles. If the incident is prolonged, media need new and different angles.

Work with the community to get important information out. Tools include:

- Visitor centers, web sites and e-mail.
- Community leadership, community meetings and tours.

Reporters look to other sources for information about the crisis.

- Victims tell compelling stories but may not be wholly accurate.
- Interest groups will have their point of view and agendas.
- Eyewitnesses may provide views similar to victim descriptions.
- Subject experts may have an agenda if tied to interest groups.
- Local residents may be friend or foe for reasons unrelated to the incident.
- People working on the incident who may not have the latest information.

Other ways the story might reach the media:

- Cellular and satellite phone calls from public,
- Eyewitness video and still images,

- Computer/e-mail links.

Establish media relationships

- Respond promptly. Old news is bad news.
- Lead them to good sources of information outside the NPS.
- Anticipate the hard questions. Anticipate incident information needs with general fact sheets, pictures, maps, etc.
- Structure your response.
- Know your messages.
- Put complex information and figures on paper.
- Talk to the reporter before the interview. Find out areas of interest, let them know what kinds of things you're prepared to talk about or unable to talk about (names of victims, for instance).
- Never go off the record.
- Your appearance and voice should reflect the seriousness of the situation, so be in full uniform or other proper attire.
- When you're done with your message, stop talking.
- "No comment" is not an answer.

Predictable Demands

Radio stations will want tape-recorded interviews. They can usually get these by phone.

Newspapers and wire services will want facts in depth. Television and still photographers will want to take pictures. Depending on the incident, maps are often very useful in communicating information.

The spokesperson can expect to spend a lot of time on the telephone. Especially at rural parks, most reporters will be too far away to cover an emergency in a timely manner, unless the emergency is expected to last for more than a day. In urban parks, news crews may arrive along with the first rangers.

The public information officer will need exclusive access to a telephone and a computer terminal with e-mail capability. (A fax and printer can be shared, but must be nearby.) He or she must be able to work away from the eager eyes and ears of reporters. He or she must have full access to the management team.

The media will need an "information central." If a couple of local reporters show up, "information central" might be as simple as a quiet corner of the visitor center. In a big event,

you may set up a formal briefing area. Regardless of the scale, there should be a space that allows reporters to work without interfering with either the emergency or operation of the park. Before any incident, know how and if you can provide reporters the basics: phones, good lighting, work tables, chairs and electrical outlets. It is our responsibility to tell reporters where they can find the nearest phone (because some parks do not have cellular access), where a satellite truck might get the best reception or where to find the best view, an electrical outlet, vending machines or the rest room. They are on our turf, doing a job that will help us if we help them do it right. The more complete their information, and the sooner it is available, the better they can inform the public.

In short, have a plan. Crises don't conveniently happen when the right people are at hand. Preparation can minimize problems when another person must step in (whether that is an acting superintendent or an acting media officer.) Make media training available to all employees who might have to work with the media before a crisis occurs.

Rescue in Rocky Mountain National Park.

Here are some commonly asked questions

- What happened?
- How did it happen?
- Where did it happen?
- When did it happen?
- Was anybody hurt? Killed?
- What happened to them?
- What are there names?
- Where are they now? Are they receiving treatment?
- Whose fault is it?
- What are you doing about it? What are you going to do?
- Was your facility damaged? How badly?
- Were other structures/areas damaged?
- Is it over? What else could go wrong?
- Has it happened before? When? Where?
- Why didn't you prevent it from happening again?
- Did you know it might happen again? Why didn't you warn people?
- How is this going to affect your park?
- What are you hiding?
- Who is going to fix it?
- Are other authorities involved?
- Could it have been worse? How?
- Could it happen again? Will it?

The Usual Sequence of Events

Incidents often follow the same sequence regardless of the nature of the crisis. Here's a typical sequence:

You recognize an event has happened.

Your public information officer gathers as much information as possible and heads to a computer for a 15-minute foray in creating a news release. This won't be fancy but it needs to be accurate. It needs to have the basics known at that point — who, what, when, where, why and how – if that information is available for release. It can acknowledge that more information will become available.

If some of the basics have been broadcast over park radios, the park is likely to receive inquiries before the release is complete. Have someone other than your PIO answer the calls only to collect phone and fax numbers. Using a list that's already created, the PIO or staff will fax the release to local media and whoever else has inquired in the time it has taken to prepare your basic release. Here are your most likely "customers:"

The Grand Teton National Park's Blacktail Fire of 2004 took a temporary turn toward where a U.S. Air Force plane was parked.Jackson Hole Airport, the only commercial airport in a national park,

Wire Services: The Associated Press (AP), Reuters and United Press International (UPI) reach almost all news media. Put their local bureaus at the top of your list since they reach the most people.

Radio Stations: They deal in instant news and are the quickest ways to spread news fast. Call the local ones. Call the all-news radio for your area first.

Newspapers: Reach the daily papers first, unless the weeklies are the closest media outlets.

Television: Local stations only. They'll feed to the network for a really good or really big event.

Internet: Work with the regional public affairs office to decide if the incident warrants attention on a regional or WASO public affairs home page. Follow established procedure to at least add it to your park's home page.

The first inquiries almost always come by phone. If the disaster is serious enough, the media will arrive in person. In between faxing the news release and the media arrival, figure out the best location for photographs and whether there is a need for a news conference. If the incident goes on long enough for the media to arrive, they'll want to get to the scene, especially the photographers. Don't be surprised — it's not ghoulish, it's their job.

For multi-day incidents, establish a briefing schedule so the incident managers can cover basic updates once for a group of reporters. Individual interviews with principal incident managers will also need scheduling.

After a long or serious incident, expect media post-mortems. As the incident winds down, think ahead about how the park will answer questions: why did this happen? Was there an adequate response? Will it happen again? Is the public safe?

Bringing Everyone Together

As noted, sometimes it is desirable to hold a news briefing rather than individually answer questions from several journalists. This is particularly true if you want to make available the incident commander or another top management person who has too many other responsibilities to conduct lots of individual interviews.

Pick a convenient place and time for this gathering. Spread the word. The wire services can distribute an "editors advisory" for you or post it on a "daybook." Also, notify the offices of the news organizations you know are covering by phone. Try to schedule the briefing so it meets the deadline needs of the greatest number of news outlets. Otherwise you're not helping the media or your park.

It's smart to make a separate, faxable, media advisory to announce this briefing. Make it clear that this is not a public meeting, but a news conference. Make sure all news releases or advisories on the event have a different and pertinent headline, release date, and if necessary, time.

At a news conference, hand out a news release shortly before the speaker begins. The information in the release will parallel the prepared statement you give at the start of the conference.

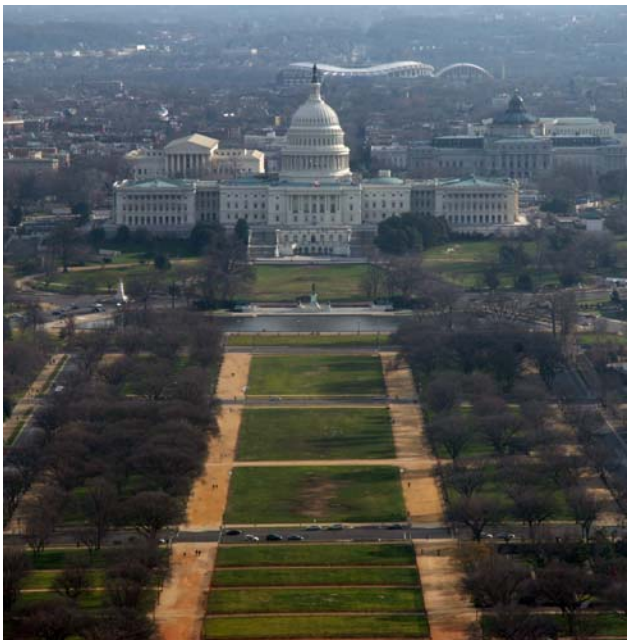
After giving a statement, you'll need to take questions from the media. You can have more than one speaker or subject matter expert on hand to answer questions, but keep the numbers small. You're adding confusion rather than value by having several speakers.

Have an exit strategy — know how much time you'll spend, and let the media know when it's over by saying "I'll take two more questions." Keep in mind the earlier advice for interviews; a news conference question session is simply a series of several short interviews. And like an interview with a single reporter, rehearsing the likely questions before the news conference will allow you to be more relaxed and credible.

Pooling

Sometimes it is impossible to transport all the media to the scene of a disaster or for reporters to get there on their own. Common practice in these cases is to establish a "pool." The reporters who get to go share their information and pictures with those who are left behind.

In certain instances, when the number who can be accommodated is small, the pool might be restricted to a television camera operator and a newspaper or wire service photographer. Usually the pool will include representatives from each type of media. Call the media together. Tell them there is a pool opportunity. Ask them to work out among themselves who will go and how they will share afterwards.



The media compete with one another. They don't like pools, and you will suffer if you have created an unnecessary pool situation. However, if there are no reasonable alternatives, they will understand your decision.

If you are stuck with selecting the pool representatives, go with the largest organizations on the theory they are better equipped to provide timely duplicates for the rest — but make sure they agree to do so! It is also advisable to select one representative from your local media who probably knows the park and its day to day workings. That way you cannot be criticized for ignoring your communities.

If transportation is required — beyond a roadblock or into the backcountry, for instance — consider who will do the transporting and what safety issues should be addressed. If we fly them in our helicopter (a contract ship, most likely), don't charge them for the ride. If there's time, tell reporters what safety gear or other items they need to bring — otherwise the park may need to come up with extra gear such as Nomex or hardhats.

Remember, too, most of the reporters have been to more catastrophes than you have — and maybe more than the emergency park crew. They do not want to be killed. They do want a story. They have state laws protecting them from being prohibited from going places to do a story. You do the National Park Service a disservice by unnecessarily restricting access.

You should give reporters warning of hazards they may encounter, and make sure they know of any protective equipment that may be required or recommended. When access restrictions are imposed, work to make sure the media understand that there are compelling reasons (such as a crime scene investigation or an air space closure to ensure the safety of aerial tankers during a fire.)

Public Information or Public Affairs?

You may think these words are used interchangeably, but they mean very different things. Anyone who can speak well in public and has a command of the local language can be a public information officer. This is a function of providing accurate, factual data and information to an inquirer. (For instance, if a park is located near the Mexican border, that park PIO ought to be able to speak English and Spanish or at least ought to know who to call upon to translate.)

The public information officers who work with incident management teams will not only be able to deliver those factual reports, but will be well-practiced in many of the logistical hurdles peculiar to working with media and getting information to local communities. This will include things like ordering new phone lines, finding supplies of fax machines, getting Nomex gear for visiting media, locating audio equipment for news conferences and meeting dozens of other special needs.

A public affairs officer is trained to provide the factual reports and can serve as the spokesperson for an incident, but is less likely to have current experience in doing many of the logistical tasks. Their jobs are less operational and more strategic. The public affairs officer is more likely to work with park or regional management to analyze public opinion, determine communication strategies, consider political implications of decisions and provide policy level advice to the superintendent and other senior management.

In a relatively straightforward incident, the public information officer will handle all the media and communications. In more complex and controversial incidents or events, the regional or Washington public affairs offices will be involved.

Credentials

Large, complicated events with multiple organizations and public information officers may push us to limit media activities and require the media to prove who they are. Think hard before requiring credentials other than the normal business identification that most legitimate news organizations issue. Doing your own credential work isn’t easy, can quickly cause more problems than it solves, and is not recommended.

You will see “credentials” on reporters attending cabinet level and Presidential news conferences and political conventions. These are the laminated cards on neck chains. These credentials are provided on a semi-permanent basis. A reporter is assigned a beat and the credential comes with the beat, not the incident.

If you do decide to issue park credentials, make sure you have staff support to prepare and distribute them, and make sure your staff knows what the credentials mean. Once you use them for an event, do not treat them casually. They are a sign that you trust and respect the media who wear them.

Photographs

Give newspaper and television photographers maximum cooperation. A nighttime network news piece is viewed by several million people — more people than we can ever reach with a single news release. We work hard to deliver our mission-based message. These folks can do it for us. Common sense dictates a few precautions: Only legitimate news photographers should be allowed in an emergency area and then only with an “escort.” This is not amateur hour! They know this, but they should not be allowed where they can interfere with remedial work or disturb evidence of a crime. Photographers want dramatic pictures but they don’t usually kill themselves to do it.

Just as it’s a good idea for superintendents and public information officers to get to know the local media before a crisis, it also makes sense for the park staff who will be on the front lines of an emergency to know how to deal with media. Reporters and photographers are in a competitive, deadline-driven world. Confrontations with rangers or others at an incident can turn ugly in a hurry, and the ill effects can last long after the incident.

When the response team practices the medical or logistical steps needed to respond to an incident, ask a public information officer or public affairs person to help by playing the role of reporter. Practice how you’ll respond to requests to get close to the action, interview survivors, fly in your helicopter, walk the fire line, or photograph the flood damage. Make sure the staff understands why you make the media-related decisions you make, and that you appreciate the consequences.

Incident Command Team

When the disaster is a big one, the superintendent may call in an Incident Command Team. If it is your own park-based IC team, make sure that it includes a public information officer. If the team is being called in from “away,” it is likely the team will have a public information officer but make sure; some “short” teams don’t. If the incident is at all likely to interest the outside world, we recommend a PIO.

Having an IC Team with a PIO from outside the park allows a park public information officer to:

- Continue his or her usual tasks — often the emergency does not affect the normal flow of visitors or park programs.

- Serve as a liaison between the team and the superintendent (such as attending the planning meetings, deciding who will do the television interview — remember, we like the NPS uniform out there on the news).
- Strategize with the superintendent on the public affairs aspects of the disaster (such as, can you use the disaster to tell other park messages and when and who notifies the Congressional delegations.)
- Provide support and local knowledge to the team information function (such as community relations, internal park communications).

The team information officers can take the burden of providing factual information to inquirers while park and regional management take on the more sensitive policy questions, both from the media and elected officials.

Spokesperson: Do This – Don't Do That

- **Don't delay.** Time is crucial to you and the media. Beat the rumors.
- **Don't speculate.** Speculation that proves wrong can be interpreted as a lie. The job is to reduce chaos and misinformation — not to contribute to it.
- **Don't keep secrets.** Where facts are known, tell them, unless you have a good reason not to. If there is reason to withhold facts, tell the reason.
- **Don't ad lib.** You may think there isn't time for a formal news release, but there must be time to organize coherent notes so you can tell the story correctly. Use these notes to make a statement and prepare a quick advisory to fax out.
- **Don't joke.** They fall flat. Morbid humor may relieve tension, but the official spokesperson must reflect the solemnity and severity of the situation. The friends and relatives of victims are rightfully intolerant of those who make light of their troubles. Jokes rarely translate well in print.
- **Don't neglect to follow up.** Note every question for which you have no immediate answer. Then, at the earliest opportunity, get the answer and give it to the reporter who asked.
- **Don't "stonewall."** "No comment," like "I take the Fifth Amendment," is perceived as an admission of guilt, even if unintended. Practice answers such as:
  "We won't know until the investigation is complete."
  "I would tell you if I knew, but I don't, so I'll have to get that for you."
  "Our policy prohibits release of the names of juvenile victims (or suspects)."
  "I am waiting for the answer to that myself — you'll get it as soon as I have it."
- **Don't release names of:**
  - A victim who is unconscious or dead and reasonable efforts to notify family or first of kin have not been made.
  - A victim of a sexual assault
  - A juvenile victim or suspect (Other government agencies managing situations adjacent to yours may not have this policy. Too bad. We don't release names until conditions are met. Refer them to the other agency if they push.)

    - A witness or victim whose condition or circumstances makes them likely victims of further crimes.
    - Personnel involved in an incident response who could be placed at risk of retaliation. (This is an area where the public's right to know gets balanced against an employee's safety.)
- **Don't give explicit details of extreme injuries or brutal fatalities.** The injured has clear privacy rights, and the deceased's family can legally be spared the graphic details making Page One. In most cases, the details are not pertinent to the actual news story. And until autopsies are done, the initial details reported at an incident may be wrong.
- Don't make ethnic or racial references unless they are essential to the incident. Always avoid slang.
- **Don't convict suspects.** Never say "John Jones set fire to the hotel, but we caught him." A better statement is: "We believe the hotel fire was caused by arson. We have a suspect, John Jones, in custody and are continuing our investigation." If formal charges have been brought, you can say: "John Jones has been charged with the crime of arson in the first degree in connection with the hotel fire. First degree arson is defined as..." Don't say, "John Jones has confessed." Rather, "John Jones has offered a confession and we are investigating (or, we have brought charges,) based on that." This is extremely important. Violation of this policy can jeopardize any expected legal case against John Jones.
- **Don't assign liability.** It is inappropriate to say either "the park failed to warn visitors of the danger," or "the visitors ignored the park's warnings." Why? Because such statements assign responsibility and liability. Like criminal charges, these are matters better left to formal investigative findings or courts of law.
- **Don't confirm or deny information released by other sources** unless you either confirm it with the source or determine if it is releasable by the NPS. Otherwise, you may compromise an investigation or other legal proceedings. These last three categories are chief reasons for the caution against speculating. Your job is to give facts. If facts must be determined by a formal process, then you don't have facts to give unless that process is complete.

10 Other Public Affairs Considerations

Personal Opinion and Freedom of Speech

All employees, of course, have a right to express their views. However, any view that a park superintendent or press officer expresses will commonly be interpreted as that of the National Park Service. Other employees may be in the same situation, especially if they identify themselves as park employees or residents. If the opinion expressed is not the official NPS position, you must take unambiguous steps to avoid it being interpreted that way. It's essential to take every precaution to separate personal and professional opinions when dealing with the media or in public situations. Your personal opinion is not appropriate to express from behind your office desk, in your uniform, on official stationery or when using your title to accompany your signature on a personal letter.

Protest on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

Park employees are allowed the same rights and opportunities as other members of the public to express their views within park areas. The NPS's general regulation governing the expression of views is found at 36 CFR 2.51. A closely related general regulation, governing the sale or distribution of printed matter, is found at 36 CFR 2.52. The superintendent must designate suitable locations within the park where assemblies, demonstrations, and other public expressions are allowed. Individuals and organizations that wish to exercise their rights must obtain from the park superintendent a permit to use those locations. Such activities which occur in parks subject to the National Capital Region's special demonstration and sales regulations are governed by 36 CFR 7.96(g) and (k). Once a superintendent has permitted or informally allowed a specific location to be utilized for the public expression of views, that location must always remain available for that purpose.

Restrictions on Paid Advertising

The National Park Service follows Department of the Interior guidance with regards to paid advertising, found in 470 DM 1:

It is not the general policy of the Department to use paid advertising in any publication in connection with its programs and activities, except where special legal requirements and authority exist. In the event that any bureau or office believes paid advertising is necessary because of the significant benefits it affords in enhancing public participation, prior approval must be obtained from the bureau public affairs office.

1. Procurement offices will not award a purchase order for paid advertising in any publication without written approval of the bureau public affairs office or Office of Communications (OCO).
2. No paid advertising will be approved or authorized without strong justification which supports a critical program or activity.
3. Bureau public affairs offices will determine when review is required by OCO. OCO can relieve the bureau public affairs office of approval authority upon discovery of inappropriate or improper justification.

Commercial Photography

The NPS is the beneficiary of a great deal of commercial photography. Coffee table books, television specials, websites, travelogues and magazines depict national parks. For the most part, this is done in a positive way and helps us convey to the public why parks are important. There is no way the NPS could ever afford to buy this good "advertising" message. So while our park resources are wonderful in their own right, virtue is not its own reward. The Service must tell its story through the media, and to a large degree this will be done by commercial photographers, video producers, television directors and website creators.

Detailed guidance for commercial photography and filming in national parks is contained in *Director's Order #53: Special Park Uses*. What follows are a few guiding excerpts:

- The NPS will not require a permit for still photographers, commercial or non-commercial, to go anywhere or to do anything that members of the public are generally allowed to go or do without a permit. This guidance, while issued by the Department of the Interior for still photographers, is generally applicable to videographers or cinematographers. Photographic coverage — still, video or film — of breaking news never requires a permit, but is subject to conditions necessary to protect park resources and values, and to protect public health and safety.
- In most cases, the NPS has no control over the final use of an image. In fact, the photographer may not know how the image taken in a park will be used. However, we can stipulate that there be no implied or explicit NPS endorsement of a product or service without our permission. Regulations and directives relating to use of the NPS Arrowhead Symbol include CFR 36 (Part 11) and NPS Special Directive 93-7.
- We can require filming permits with a variety of requirements (insurance, time and place, etc.) when we believe they are necessary to protect park resources and values, and we can deny commercial filming access if our conditions are not met. There are also instances where we can recover costs, such as overtime for a ranger escort. These topics are covered in considerable depth in *Director's Order #53: Special Park Uses*.

Freedom of Information Act

Freedom of Information laws have been updated with the OPEN Government Act of 2007. These changes were effective on Dec. 31, 2008.

The principle of the Freedom of Information Act is that citizens are entitled to know what their government is doing and can have access to documents explaining the actions of government. The Department of the Interior is very firm in support of both the letter and the spirit of the law. The web address for FOIA at the Department of the Interior is http://www.doi.gov/foia/

Freedom of Information Act requests should be coordinated with the NPS regional office's FOIA officer. In some cases, this is the public affairs officer. The regional director and solicitor must participate in any denial — full or partial — of a request. Similarly, delays in responding must be coordinated through the regional office and solicitor because requesters can treat delays as a denial and appeal your inaction to the Department.

Your regional FOIA officer has guidance on processing requests, as well as the most up-to-date opinions from the Solicitor's Office on how to handle certain requests.

Response time
You get 20 working days after receiving the request to reply. You are to supply the requested documents, or explain why you can't. In rare circumstances, you can take an additional 10 days to respond, but you must notify the requester of the delay and notify the regional FOIA officer.

Fees
The FOIA regulations contain a fee schedule. Be aware there are different fee schedules for commercial, media and private citizen requests. If a fee is going to exceed the amount a requester agreed to pay, you can ask for written confirmation that a requester will pay. Also, if a requester provides adequate justification, fees can be waived when the request is in the public interest. If the fee is less than $30, don't charge because it costs us at least $30 to process the check.

No new records need to be created
But, you may find it easier to produce a new answer tailored to the request than generate hundreds of pages of copying. Being practical is encouraged!

Formats
Amendments to the FOIA in 1996 allow the requester to dictate the form in which the documents are sent. For example, we may be asked to provide a database in Lotus 1-2-3 on a disk rather than handing over 200 pages of paper. If we don't keep a document in the requested format, we must put it in the requested format so long as it can be done with "reasonable effort."

E-mail/computer files
The 1996 amended law makes clear that electronic records are subject to FOIA requests, and that we need to indicate in electronic records where deletions have been made (just like we do with a

black marker pen on paper). We must also make reasonable efforts to search for records kept in an electronic form, including email messages.

The Web
The 1996 law plus use of common sense and our technical capabilities dictate that more information be readily available to the public. Efforts by many parks to put planning documents, research work and other documents on the Internet are a good start.

Privacy
While it seems that our privacy is routinely invaded by junk mail senders and others, we make serious efforts to protect individual privacy. We don't release Social Security numbers, driver's license numbers, credit card numbers, birth dates, medical records, home addresses or home phone numbers. People are entitled to know certain information about federal employees, though. These include present and former position descriptions and duty stations, dates of federal service, pay grade and step, and training received at federal expense. Consult with your FOIA officer for the full list.

A Public Affairs Component

In cases where your regional public affairs person is not the FOIA officer, you may need to make an extra contact. Why? It's because some FOIA requests are a good early indicator of where you'll have a significant media story or public involvement.

The vast majority of FOIA requests are mundane and don't involve media or a public interest group. They are filed for things like personnel records by people who didn't get hired. But some topics could be of broader interest — a newspaper seeking concession records, requests for several case incident records regarding a particular ranger district, or requests for travel records.

Who's asking and why must not influence our response; nevertheless, think about how they're likely to be used and give a heads up to the public affairs office if it seems like something that might result in further questions. (Remember the "No Surprises" request?)

11 Official Policies in Public Affairs

Release of Incident Information to News Media and the Public

News media take a particular interest in motor vehicle accidents and crime – even in national parks. The National Park Service has a policy in place to assist us when the media asks about accidents and crimes that we call incidents. Please read the section about releasable information.

The deputy director for operations transmitted the following memorandum to all regional directors and superintendents on Tuesday, June 13th.

Purpose

This memorandum provides National Park Service (NPS) employees with guidance and direction regarding the release of incident information to the news media and general public. It specifically addresses which types of information may be released during, and shortly after, the occurrence of an NPS incident. This memorandum will serve as an interim policy until the completion of Director's Order 75-B, Media Relations.

Policy

The NPS takes its responsibility to protect the personal privacy of its visitors and employees very seriously. At the same time, the importance of providing appropriate, legal, and adequate information to the news media and general public is critical. After recent consultation with the Solicitor's Office, a legal determination has been made that certain information regarding NPS incidents is releasable under specific circumstances.

The NPS will provide pertinent information to the news media and general public in accordance with applicable laws, policies, and regulations. The NPS recognizes the public's legal rights to obtain information about government operations and activities. These rights are outlined in the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552 and further influenced by provisions of the Privacy Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552a. Nothing in this memorandum changes existing NPS guidelines for processing FOIA requests or other information protected by the Privacy Act.

There are situations where it would be inappropriate to disclose information in the absence of a formal request. It is important for employees to exercise careful judgment in such instances and to request guidance from their FOIA/Privacy Act officer and/or the Solicitor's Office whenever questions about information release arise.

Responsibility

Regional Directors and Superintendents are responsible for ensuring that employees disseminating public information within their areas of responsibility are aware of the laws, policies, and regulations governing information release. When practicable, one person/office should be designated as the point of contact for the purposes of releasing information about NPS incidents.

Affirmative Incident Information Disclosures

Employees with personal knowledge of an incident (e.g., ranger that participates in a rescue effort; employee at the scene of a disaster, etc.) may disclose certain incident information as long as the information is not derived from a document or information contained in an official Privacy Act System of Records (e.g. official report). This information may be passed on to another

employee (e.g., public affairs officer or park spokesperson) for release and dissemination to the media and general public. Information released under these circumstances should take place as the incident is occurring or shortly thereafter.

Criminal Incident Considerations

Because of the unique sensitivities surrounding law enforcement investigations and criminal cases, information may not be releasable due to varying factors. Employees should also be aware that when criminal complaints or other documents are filed with a court of law, information within those complaints is normally public record. The media is aware of this and should be directed to the court to obtain the information from those documents.

Employees should ensure that they use caution when describing the circumstances relating to criminal cases. Anyone arrested for a criminal violation is innocent until proven guilty and all statements pertaining to a person's criminal activities should be prefaced with "alleged" unless a judge/jury has issued a guilty verdict on the criminal charge(s). At no time should witness information be given out. Questions about release of information regarding law enforcement investigations should be directed to the park or regional senior law enforcement officer.

Information Disclosures – Emergent Circumstances

Information may be released regarding any person (including juveniles) when the media/public's assistance is necessary to either: 1) locate the person or, 2) warn the public of possible danger (e.g., dangerous criminal). Under these circumstances, information regarding the person's name, age, appearance, clothing worn, location/time last seen, alleged criminal activity, etc., should be disseminated as quickly as possible.

Releasable/Non-releasable Information

After taking these considerations into account, the following types of information may be released. If there are doubts as to the releasability of the information, it should not be disseminated publicly.

Releasable Information

1. Names, ages, and hometowns of the individuals involved in the incident.
2. Relevant details pertaining to the incident.
3. Names of fatality victims whose next of kin have been notified, including juveniles.
4. Description of lost, stolen, or missing property.
5. Criminal charges if applicable.

Non-Releasable Information

1. Names of fatally or seriously injured victims whose next of kin have not been notified.
2. Names of juveniles charged with criminal offenses.
3. Names of victims of sexual assaults.
4. Names of people or witnesses who may become victims of crimes or retaliation in the future.
5. Information on incidents where criminal action is still under investigation and information released could hinder or adversely affect the investigation.
6. Investigative information that goes beyond general incident reporting.
7. Explicit details, including graphic photos or images of extreme injuries or brutal fatalities.
8. Home addresses, telephone numbers, and social security numbers.

More Information

---

http://inside.nps.gov/index.cfm?handler=viewprintheadline&type=Announcements&id=4544

-END-