

PRB

INFORM  
EMPOWER  
ADVANCE

# Using the Media to Communicate Demographic Research Results

D'Vera Cohn

Senior Writer, Pew Research Center

# The Mind-Set of Journalists

- Curious, but not necessarily expert in any topic or good at math
- Deadline-driven; pace is increasing
- Favor themes of conflict and change
- Like milestones and anniversaries
- Crave certainty; often uncomfortable with “may” or “could” or margins of error

# Prepare Yourself

- Think ahead: Which interviews will you take or reject?
- Journalists want to hear about your findings first, not your methods
- Write a limited number of talking points summarizing your main findings or views
- Talking points should use everyday language and avoid technical terms

# Guidelines for Talking Points

- Metaphors or images can help translate complex points into lay language
- Use few statistics and put them in context
- Convey authority and ease
- Set a goal of 25 words or less for each main point
- Talking points can be in a press release

# If a Journalist Contacts You...

- Respond rapidly, even if you cannot do the interview right away
- Check the journalist's work to help you assess how to respond
- What does the journalist want – one statistic, one quote, a lengthy interview?
- How will the interview be conducted – phone, e-mail, in person or something else?

# Before You Begin The Interview...

- “Tell me what you are writing about.” They should be able to do so in a sentence or two (much like your talking point)
- Their description will guide your response
- Think about building a relationship with the journalist even if you cannot help on this interview

# During The Interview

- A favorite question: “What surprised you?”  
What it means: “What is the most interesting thing you can tell me?”
- Sometimes you can respond to a question by reframing it
- As the interview ends, they may say: “Is there anything I haven’t asked you?”

# Navigating Potential Obstacles

- Assume that anything you say could be quoted, so set ground rules early for sensitive topics
- Be certain about your uncertainty – don't let yourself express stronger views than you hold
- Watch for cues about a premise that you don't share; reject it gracefully or back out of the interview



# Interview Wrap-Up and Follow-Up

- Don't expect to review what they write before it is published
- You can ask for your quotes to be read back to you
- Provide off-hours contact information in case of questions by editors or chart-makers
- What if the story includes an error?

# Journalism Is Changing

- Print audience declining, online audience rising
- Variety of new “platforms,” such as blogs, video interviews and social media
- Nonstop deadlines
- Track your media presence
- New opportunities