



Virginia Individual Development
Accounts Program

Invest in your future

Media Relations Tips

In general

- Calls from the media should be answered promptly. This may be your opportunity to promote VIDA and your organization, don't lose it by failing to return calls quickly.
- When considering submitting a press release, be prepared to have a VIDA saver or graduate who is willing, and prepared, to be interviewed by the reporter as an example of the program's success.
- Your spokesperson may be the agency's director, or program director. In either case, see tips on preparing the spokesperson below.

Preparing the spokesperson

- A good spokesperson should be:
 - a. Comfortable and confident in front of a camera and reporters;
 - b. Skilled at focusing on the positives and reiterating key talking points about the program you are promoting;
 - c. Able to speak understandably without using jargon;
 - d. Respectful of the job duties of the reporter;
 - e. Knowledgeable about the organization;
 - f. Able to establish credibility with the media, having a sincere, calm, straightforward and believable demeanor; and be
 - g. Accessible to the media.
- It is important to rehearse possible questions and review statewide and local facts and figures about the program prior to the interview.
- Make sure the spokesperson is familiar with the VIDA graduate or participant that may be used as a success example for the story, and is able to talk candidly about their success and dedication.



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Interview Tips

There are many ways to answer reporter questions, many of which depend on the type of media with which you are dealing. Here are some tips.

Newspaper interviews -

- A newspaper reporter may have more room for quotes and explanations in their story. Provide clear answers, and use generalities over detailed specifics if you think it may confuse the reader. You can always provide the reporter with eligibility guidelines later to use as a sidebar.
- Remain friendly, calm and confident.
- If you don't know the answer to the question, simply state "I will have to check that out, I will get back to you shortly."
- Anticipate questions and prepare responses, have your talking points and statistics nearby.

Live television or radio interviews -

- Keep in mind that during live interviews you may only have 30 seconds or only a few minutes for your segment – you can find out beforehand. Make sure to be prepared for the interview – consider taking along a copy of your talking points with you in case you are asked for the phone number to contact or eligibility requirements. Anticipate questions and have responses prepared.
- Make sure that you answer questions in a concise and consistent manner; keeping in mind that you have a short amount of time to get the messages out and only one shot at doing so.
- Television may only amplify any fidgeting or uneasiness you may feel. Make sure to stand firm and still, speak loudly and clearly, and establish eye contact from time to time.
- Remain friendly, calm and confident.
- If you don't know the answer to the question, simply state "I will have to check that out, I will get back to you shortly."

Taped interviews –

- In this case the reporter has the power of the editing bay. Choose your words carefully so they cannot be taken out of context, and try to make short statements.



- Answer questions asked as clearly as possible, keeping in mind the average news sound-byte is less than eight seconds.
- Anticipate questions and prepare responses.
- Remain friendly, calm and confident.
- If it is a taped television interview, remember that television will amplify any fidgeting or uneasiness you may feel. Make sure to stand firm and still, speak loudly and clearly, and establish eye contact from time to time.
- If you don't know the answer to the question, simply state "I will have to check that out, I will get back to you shortly."

Phone interviews –

- Just because the reporter is on the line does not mean you have to grant the interview immediately. Find out their deadline, schedule a time to call them back, and take time to prepare. Saying this politely and taking into account the reporter deadline will be all it takes to keep everyone happy.

Tips for getting your success in the paper

Weekly papers

- Be aware of what day your newspaper comes out, and try not to schedule big news events for the day before, when the paper is being typeset, printed and readied for delivery.
- Stay in contact with your local reporters and editors. Try to establish relationships with them so they will know who you are when you send them news.

Daily Papers

- Larger papers have more reporters assigned to specific areas, or beats. Try to find the reporter who most closely covers the type of story you are pitching – for example education, real estate, or business reporters depending on the VIDA goal you may be focused on.
- Stay in contact with your local reporters and editors. Try to establish relationships with them so they will know who you are when you send them news.



Wire Services

- Consider pitching your event to your local Associated Press bureau contact – a successful pitch could land your story in many newspapers around the region.

Television

- Most reporters are “general assignment.” If you have not yet established a relationship with a reporter, you might first contact the assignment editor at the news desk to pitch your event or story.
- Realize that if a television reporter is coming out to interview you or a VIDA participant, they will likely need to be back in the studio at least two-to-three hours before the story runs to write and edit. Keep this in mind as you schedule interviews.
- Also consider researching the possibility of having your spokesperson featured on your local news morning or lunchtime news programs. Often these have time slots available for interviews with local organization leaders to talk about community programs and events such as VIDA.

Radio

- Radio may best be used for your purposes during the morning “drive-time” shows. Consider researching the possibility of having your spokesperson featured on the morning radio talk show, where many times slots are available for interviews with local organization leaders to talk about community programs and events such as VIDA.
- Consider targeting a radio station you think most appeals to the VIDA target audience.

