What do you do when the phone rings and it’s the media calling?

It’s Primary Day 2018, your busiest day of the year. An issue arises that draws media attention and public scrutiny, and suddenly a local reporter is on the phone looking to talk to you.

Would you rather...

A) Ignore the call and the reporter write whatever he/she feels like, without your input?

B) Answer the call right away without a plan to address it and just wing it?

C) Already have a process in place that shows you exactly what to do when a reporter calls?

(HINT: THE ANSWER IS C!!!!!!)
Don’t let this happen to you!

OVERVIEW

The top priority for ROVAC and its member registrars is to safeguard the integrity and security of our democratically held elections. This should also be the top talking point (aka Key Message) whenever ROVAC or an individual registrar communicates with the public through the media:

- “As the guardians of a fair, democratic electoral process, ROVAC and its members have the training, knowledge and experience to ensure every local, state and federal election is conducted with integrity and that every vote is counted properly.”
- If this lead message is properly delivered to the media (others more specific to certain issues will need to be crafted), ROVAC/registrars will be able to better control the narrative and accurately position themselves in the public eye.
- When it comes to public relations, we always want to be the ones defining ourselves, rather than being defined by an outside party.
VARIOUS TYPES OF COMMUNICATIONS SCENARIOS

There are three types of media/legislative communications inquiries registrars can expect to receive prior to, during and after local, state and federal elections:

- **Reporters/media on local issues** - Concerning an issue that has arisen locally (i.e. regarding ballots, polling place issues or locally reported improprieties).
- **Reporters/media on statewide issues** - Concerning larger, more statewide issues of concern (i.e. Election Day Registration, suspicion of voter fraud, issues with the SOTS office or general Election Day security questions).
- **Legislative issues** – These would refer to inquiries regarding legislative issues impacting the election process and/or ROVAC, including inquiries from the media, legislators or other officials.

RECOMMENDED POLICIES FOR MEDIA/LEGISLATIVE COMMUNICATIONS

**Local Issues**

During the course of Election Day or Primary Day, any number of issues could arise which attract the attention of the local media. The issues could include, among others:

- **Ballot availability issues**
- **Vote complaints**
- **Alleged violations by candidates/supporters at polls**
- **Public safety incidents (fire alarms, illness, emergency personnel called to scene)**

When and if issues like this (or others) occur, the key is to be prepared with protocols and processes on how to deal with media calls when they come in!
RECOMMENDED POLICIES FOR MEDIA/LEGISLATIVE COMMUNICATIONS (CON’T)

Local Issues

When these incidents occur and the media begins making inquiries, please be mindful of the following protocols.

- You are not obligated to respond to a reporter without examining the facts of an issue. It is acceptable to tell a reporter you need some time to respond and will get back to them in a reasonable timeframe – always ask for their deadline.

- Once contacted by a reporter and you know the topic and timeframe, it is imperative to act quickly to determine the facts of the issue. In addition to consulting your colleagues in local government, it may be helpful to involve Sue Larsen at ROVAC. This decision should be made locally.

Local Issues (con’t)

- Whether the decision is made to handle the issue locally or involve ROVAC, the priorities should be:
  - **What do you want to say?** – The top priority is creating talking points to accurately tell this story.
  - **Media Statement** – Next, use these talking points to create a media statement from the local registrar’s office, which will be the entirety of your comment to the media.
  - **While exceptions do apply, a written statement is the safest course of action, as it best controls the message.**
  - **Releasing to Media** – After the statement is finalized, it needs to be distributed to any reporters who seek a comment. You should also request that the statement be used in its entirety.
  - **Follow ups** – It’s important to check news stories/reports to ensure the issue was reported accurately.
RECOMMENDED POLICIES FOR MEDIA/LEGISLATIVE COMMUNICATIONS (CON’T)

Statewide Issues
In addition to local issues, there could be wider spread state-wide issues that arise on Election Day or Primary Day which local reporters decide to call and ask local registrars about. These could include:

- Accusations of voter fraud in Connecticut
- Problems with online registration
- Criticism of ROVAC by a 3rd party on Election Day or Primary Day

Much like with locally based issues, the key is to be prepared in advance!

For Statewide Issues
- Media inquiries should be referred to ROVAC and not handled locally. The call should go to ROVAC President Sue Larsen [sewl@sbcglobal.net, (860) 987-7781]. Sue will work with others in ROVAC leadership to formulate a response.
- This response will usually be in the form of a media statement rather than an interview with Melissa, although this can be determined on a case by case basis.

For Legislative Issues
- The first step is to refer to the ROVAC legislative agenda to fully understand ROVAC’s position on the issue.
- Legislative Committee Chair Tim DiCarlo [timd442@gmail.com, 1-203-510-8064] should be contacted for further guidance.
ALWAYS REMEMBER – BEST PRACTICES

COURTESY – Reporters have a tendency to be brusque and curt. Do not take this personally, remain courteous and friendly and be sure to ask them what their deadline is.

CONTROL – An issue is managed best when it is managed with control and with you telling the story the way you want it to be told. While time is of the essence, you are allowed the time needed to determine all the facts and to formulate a response. Establishing an agreed upon timeframe with the reporter will assist in your ability to have the right information for your response.

COMMUNICATE – Failure to communicate the story on your terms is akin to letting reporters write whatever they want to write. Conversely, communicating with concise, fact-based messages/talking points is the best way to ensure fair coverage and having the story told on your terms.

If done right, this could be you instead!
QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

➢ What can we discuss in more detail with you now?
➢ Are there any areas we didn’t cover?
➢ Are there concerns you have for the upcoming primary season that we should discuss further?

For additional questions beyond today, please feel free to reach out to:
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