

My Report

Last Modified: 09/30/2011

1. Are you a:

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Journalist	48	61%
2	Press Officer	28	35%
3	Other	10	13%

Other
Medical writer
Was a PIO, now freelancer
Internal university medical school-based science writer
freelance
Formerly both
semi-retired w/e
videographer
Communications Director

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	3
Total Responses	79

2. How long have you worked in this role?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Less than 5 years	16	20%
2	5-10 years	15	19%
3	10-15 years	14	18%
4	15-20 years	3	4%
5	20-25 years	11	14%
6	25-30 years	11	14%
7	More than 30 years	9	11%

More than 30 years

In my 30-plus year career, I have also worked as a health/science journalist and academic medical center press officer

(less than 5 as press officer)

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	7
Total Responses	79

3. What are your beat areas?

Text Response

Science, engineering, medical science, technology, inofrmatics

technology, earth science, physical science, envrionment

Medical science, environmental science, child development

science, environment, technology

Physics and materials science

Physical Science, Earth Science, Engineering, Anthropology, entomology

oncology

chemistry, interdisciplinary sciences

Earth and space science, climate change, primarily. Have covered lots of other areas from time to time.

Math, atmospheric sciences, computer sciences, psychology, botany, engineering, an arboretum, chemical and radiation safety, space science

science, medicine, health, environment

science, medicine, health, environment

molecular biology, oncology, biotechnology

all science, but trying to focus on physical sciences

biology - at the ecology/zoology end of things; space; psychology

Environment, most science (except physics/astronomy)

cancer research, astronomy, physics, mathematics

environment, alternative energy, marine science, chemistry, biology

I write about science and medicine for a consumer audience.

Biomedical sciences, lab life, science careers, health, pharmaceuticals

Computational science, technology, earth and climate science, biology, biomedicine, materials science.

astronomy, earth and planetary sciences, paleontology, social psychology, sociology

All science, engineering, medicine, environment

Higher education

Mostly health, medical, biomedical, health policy, natural history--biology

Science, Postal affairs currently. Previously consumer affairs, transportation.

Behavioral science, science education, and miscellaneous!

General science and biomedical research

medicine, lots of bio

science, technology, culture

Biology, Conservation, Space

community health, epidemiology, public health, nursing, nutrition, behavioral health, physical therapy, biology, chemistry, physics, environmental science, mathematics
Neuroscience, public health
Earth science
Science, medicine, public health
genetics, genomics, astronomy, medicine, biology, psychology, psychiatry, general science reporting
Basic biomedical research. Primary areas: blood clotting process, flu, tuberculosis, lung fibrosis, diabetes, mycobacteria, general lung disease.
space, basic science, engineering, political aspects of science
Social sciences, humanities, business
earth sciences, medicine, science policy, science communications, risk reporting, compliance
Global health, measuring of science productivity/effectiveness, systems and synthetic biology, speech recognition, artificial intelligence, aerospace
Biomedicine, marine biology, ecology
health sciences
general medicine, cancer, biotechnology, computational sciences, science policy and misc. science topics
Originally coastal and marine science and policy. Now broad range of university research.
physics, life sciences, and everything in between
energy industry news health communication
basic and translational research, health science
Life sciences, physical sciences, medical center, engineering, environment, and research fraud.
environmental health
transplant, anesthesiology, pharmacy, oncology, misc.
All biomedical science research encompassing university schools of nursing, pharmacy, dental medicine, medicine, rehabilitation science and public health.
energy, space, science in general
science, agriculture, climate change, crops, environmental quality, education
biology, chemistry, physics, geology
For my day job as a press officer I cover biology, particularly evolution (which is my scientific background). For my freelance work I cover basic science writ large. Recent stories have run the gambit from climate science, to kitchen chemistry, to sports medicine and artificial intelligence.
biology (esp cell biology, neuroscience, microbiology, molecular biology, marine biology) and ecosystems/climate science
Environmental science, Ocean science
Molecular biology, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, medicine
medical science, basic biological sciences, clinical research, public health research, professional

education of health professionals and scientists
All sciences --but stopped medicine 10 years ago when we finally got a medical reporter.
I'm a student, so my coverage is limited: healthcare and politics.
biomed, computational sciences
life sciences, neuroscience
I already completed this survey once but remembered something I wanted to say about what good PIOs do...see that question. (sorry!)
science presentations at different venues
Neuroscience and neurology
science, medicine, energy, environment
Basic research, medicine, environment, technology
Space/Astronomy; Physics; Chemistry
environment, natural resources, weather
general science, environmental science
Medicine, health,
life sciences, geosciences, physics, environmental sciences
space, astronomy, spaceflight, physics

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	75

4. Please identify the top three transgressions (sins) that science press officers can and do make.

Text Response

1. Not report the science/research finding accurately 2. Not report the implications of the science accurately, including extending the potential applications of the research beyond the finding itself (a successful mouse study of a cancer drug "points the exciting possibility of a cure for cancer"), and other hype aimed at creating excitement beyond the actual importance of the details of the finding. (This includes using words like "breakthrough," etc.) 3. Not allowing the researchers involved complete and final authority on approving the text of the release. It's their finding, their reputation at stake, their word on what it all means.

Issuing press releases on papers that have been out for weeks or (even) months, without identifying the publication date Dumbing down releases to the point that they're meaningless to journalists who know the field. Hyping mediocre results

not returning calls/emails

Not including contact info for scientists Not including contact info for themselves Not replying to phone calls or emails promptly

Using stupid email programs that spam reporters with irrelevant information/pitches Not getting back to a reporter in time to meet their deadline Sending out information about a new development to everyone on their email list - when a reporter you talk to regularly asked you about it the day before and you said nothing new was happening.

1. Writing really bad stories 2. Getting between reporters and the source 3. Not being time responsive

Refusing to let National lab scientists (about as taxpayer funded as you can get) provide comment for stories Not having a paper/supplementary material available when a press release has been written about the research Not returning calls/email in a timely manner

Not returning calls or e-mail queries promptly. Saying I don't know (regarding something he or she might be expected to know), without suggesting a place/person to get the answer. Writing overly long press releases, also press releases that begin with the name of the issuing institution ("Mega University scientists have discovered...").

Distributing news about collaborative research without contacting partner institutions. Working without skepticism. Letting researchers run away with a news release -- resulting in heavy jargon, buried ledes and maybe inappropriate assessment of significance.

1. Fail to take a journalistic approach to evaluating their news and sources and don't do their homework about the nature and context of the news within the field or larger scientific community. 2. Require their mediation or intervention between journalists and sources at their institution/organization. 3. Fail to create an open culture of communication within the institution.

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sit in on and control the interview promise to put me in contact with people then drop off the face of the earth promise photos and references and not send them before deadline

* writing articles instead of press releases -- interviewing outside sources and including those quotes in the press releases -- it automatically means responsible journalists cannot contact those same sources * distracting behavior during interviews -- it's distracting enough to have a press officer in an interview (though understandable that press officers want to sit in on interviews), but being distracting (bored, tired, smiling/nodding/frowning, drinking coffee, eating(!) -- especially if the interviewee can see the press officer) is a big sin made worse if the interviewee is being recorded on audio/video * not knowing their sources well enough so that they too are surprised by a big announcement, paper published, etc., and/or do not understand the science/discovery/innovation, etc.

Not returning calls/e-mails. Bugging me about press releases. Not respecting the almighty power of the deadline.

--Sending out a press release on a paper that was published weeks or months ago --Sending out a press release when the researchers are not available/willing to speak with the press --Nag. -- Be gimmicky in casting a story, stretching its implications/significance. --Insist on micromanaging the interaction.

1. Omission of the number of subjects and the confidence interval in a clinical study with promising results. To me, it makes a difference in how to interpret the commentary by the researcher. Is he talking about something seen in thousands of people, or in 3? 2. Writing up the finding as a news article with a lede, nut graph and colorful quotes. It reads like journalism, but I know that since it comes from the institution. This type of press release makes it more difficult to find an angle, or the importance of the finding, since the press officer's ideas are given prominence over a clear articulation of the research. 3. Writing an inaccurate but intriguing headline for a press release. It's frustrating to see that a "biomarker that hints at a new cancer therapy" is actually a protein that recently popped up in an assay from tumor tissue, not a verified target for a new drug.

Not responding to inquiries in a timely manner Using jargon in news releases

Some of my best -- and worst -- experiences have been with press officers for NIH and a few of the top medical schools and clinics in the country. The problem originates when I cannot communicate directly with the physician for some reason. --I once had a press officer arrange for a physician to answer some questions on some recent research she had published but she wanted to do it by e-mail. I couldn't talk to her. I didn't need her comments for about two weeks -- so a generous deadline I thought and I didn't anticipate any problem. As my deadline approached and I didn't hear anything, however, I tried to contact the press officer again to follow up, but she was unresponsive and no one in the press office seemed to know what was going on. After a couple of days and talking to the head of the department, I learned that the press officer I had talked to was on vacation and the physician who had indeed promised to get back to me was out on maternity leave. Her baby had been born and the doc was busier than she had expected to be. But she never let anyone in the press office know that she was not now going to respond to my questions and that I needed to interview someone else. --Another time, I wanted to interview a physician from a particular hospital to comment as an outside expert on particular research, but I could not catch the press officer on the phone so I left a voice mail and an e-mail, and attached the journal article that I needed the expert to comment on. My call and e-mail were ignored. I had no way to know if he/she was in the office and had received my

request and would be able to help me or not. It just takes five seconds to acknowledge an e-mail, so I find it annoying when I don't hear back and don't know what's going on. When my request continued to be ignored after a couple of days, I assumed that no action was being taken for some reason, so I turned to other resources and successfully interviewed someone else. Later, the press officer sent me comments from the first person I had tried to interview. -- While the above two instances are somewhat unusual, I do find that press officers are not good communicators in general. I don't know if they are overwhelmed with calls or what. Also, they seem to work solo and no one else knows what is going on. Not infrequently, when I call for status on something or other, I find the press officer is unavailable -- on vacation or in an all-day meeting or out sick -- and I don't know who is responsible for his/her work. It can be quite frustrating. I much prefer contacting MDs, PhDs, and other experts myself and arranging for interviews directly. Fortunately, I am able to do this most of the time.

1. Telling you they are giving you an "exclusive" story and then pitching it to others as well 2. Sending out too many and poorly written press releases 3. Asking to review copy or quotes

Hard to limit to three. Making promises you don't follow through on, especially telling us you will arrange an interview with the expert we've requested, then dropping the ball and not letting us know that you won't come through. I recently had to ask for a deadline extension because a government PIO had promised me she'd arrange an interview with an expert, then when that day came, she went AWOL. When I complained, I received a note from someone else in her office saying that they couldn't help me after all. If that's the case, tell me ASAP! Not responding to requests. Let me know if you're working on it, can/can't help, whether you can meet my deadline. Responding to requests long after my stated deadline. If you're not going to help me, don't pretend you care. Insisting on sitting in on the interview. When you do that, the audio quality sucks, you usually forget to hit mute and so I have to listen to you chewing your gum or moving papers around. The interview is inevitably stilted. Answering questions for the source (when you're sitting in on the interview). I need to quote the source, not you. Asking to know the "slant" of my story. It's fine for you to ask what I'm writing about, but it's not ok for you to ask about the angle or who else I'm quoting. Asking me to submit a format set of questions prior to the interview. It's fine to ask me the general focus of the interview, but don't ask to approve my questions. Insisting that I send a list of questions, and then when I do, sending me an email with unhelpful answers attributed to someone who isn't you. I can't use answers like this unless I've had personal contact. It's always obvious when you are answering on their behalf. Please don't waste our time. Telling me that I can find the information I'm looking for on your website, especially if your agency's website is hard to navigate. If I've asked for a specific statistic or piece of information, send me the URL.

Don't reply to me in time for my deadline. Write badly. Contact me about things I never write about.

a) failure to get back to me at all b) lack of professionalism c) asking me to meet for coffee but then having no stories that are really ready for reporting

I'll get back to you ... sometime, maybe automatically adding me to the mailing list for PR Possessive, paranoid, confrontational or parochial behavior (Gov PIO, esp Fed gov)

1. Putting out too many news releases (if this happens, we reporters start ignoring everything that comes our way). 2. Writing over the head of non-science journalists 3. Not giving reporters enough advance warning to properly work on big studies/news that will be coming out.

--teaching scientists to mistrust all reporters --greatly slowing down the reporting process by insisting they mediate all contact between scientists and reporters. --Trying overly hard to "manage the story" in terms of sources/questions/perspective instead of helping reporter get the information the reporter requests

1. Hype. 2 Suggesting we might want to do a story because it has already been done in some other publication. (Gee thanks I always wanted to be second) 3, Sending proposals to multiple people here without letting us know more than one is being pitched.

1. I have contacted press officers to request help in making contact with scientists at their university, and have either received no response or have received an initial response with a promise to help, and then no follow-up. The latter is especially annoying because it leaves me spinning my wheels when I could instead be moving ahead with my story independently. 2. On many occasions, press officers at government agencies have seemed to be intentionally blocking me from gaining access to scientists at that agency, even for stories that (I do not believe) are politically sensitive. 3. Occasionally I have given my card to a press officer at a meeting, and they've asked what kind of stories I am most interested; and soon I begin receiving large volume of press releases from them, not at all tailored to my area of interest. It's easy to just have gmail filter those messages so I never need see them; but of course that means that I also don't see the messages that do pertain to my interests.

Asking to sit in on a reporter's interview because the press officer "wants to learn about the topic, too. Fail to know how to reach the subject of a news release promptly for reporters on deadline. Sending out "embargoed" press releases to reporters who haven't agreed to observe the embargo. Not Science or Nature embargos...but just PIOs who want reporters to delay coverage to a particular time.

1) Fail to return phone calls/emails in a timely manner or at all. 2)Relying on a script; proving jargon-loaded content-free answers. 3) Pretending we're on the same team while selling a point of view.

Spam, unfamiliarity with publication, overhyping a finding or study

1) Sending out a press release and then disappearing from their desk for hours or days. 2) Trying to shield the scientists from reporters. 3) Making it difficult to get good images.

Not knowing enough about the story. Promoting a story at a time when the researchers aren't available for interviews. (Not that I'd ever do that intentionally! It happens when embargo dates coincide with previously-planned travel.) Sending too many non-personalized pitches that get ignored vs. not sending a release that the reporter would have wanted to see -- as a new press officer I have erred on both sides and haven't yet found the sweet spot.

putting too many boring titles into news releases, thus obscuring the news

Bogus headlines -- too clever, uninformative, opaque Telling me about material WAY outside my field Wasting paper on printed releases at meetings

- Responsiveness is of the essence, especially since the advent of the internet. It consistently amazes me how few academic press offices, especially in comparison to their corporate peers, understand this. That manifests itself in different ways: (A) I am SUPER SUPER clear about when my deadline is (it's often short). I should never get a next-day call, asking if I need someone, especially if I frantically called office line, cell, office manager, and emailed and made it clear each time when my deadline was. Sure, I work at a wire service and our deadlines are tighter than a newspaper's, but GOOD LORD. (B) "Oh, you should call our other school [eg, of Public

Health]." Why don't you take 5 seconds to see who it is I should be calling specifically and either give me the number or -- better! -- transfer me instead of trying to hang up? There are a lot of universities in the world. They all organize their press offices differently. I'm, as I said, usually under severe deadline pressure. Please, please help. (C) Why are you sending me press releases when the embargo on the study lifts? By then I've either written the study or I'm not going to. -- Let's be clear, for reasons of space, I'm not always going to write out the full name of your (for instance) cancer center -- I may just say something like "an oncologist affiliated with University of XX." Please don't yell at me about this. I know why you want your cancer center named. Believe me, I'm sympathetic. Sometimes I just don't make the final call, the editors and my word count do.

Failure to get back to a reporter in time for a deadline. Failure to respond at all. Extensive querying of the writer's bona fides, or demands for mythical assignment letters, which are a creation of press officers.

1. Producing news releases or articles that are too technical and full of scientific jargon for the average person to understand.
2. Overstating research results or potential research results in an attempt to make research sound important and be relevant to the average person.
3. Failing to communicate the ambiguity of research results, as well as the motivation, dedication, and passion of researchers.

- (1) sending out emails on a schedule (daily, weekly, etc) regardless of whether there is any real news to report, just because they have to show their boss they are doing something or whatever--what they are actually doing is training me to see their email address and delete their emails without reading them
- (2) sending me releases about awards or appointments that could not possibly be of any interest to me. The only award we are interested in is the MacArthur genius grants, Nobels, Lasker Prize, and the math one whose name escapes me at the moment
- (3) telling me about something I am interested in, but only after other media outlets have covered it...in other words, sending me an email noting that such-and-such research was recently featured in Wired, or Time, or where-ever as evidence that it is interesting.
- (4) insisting that a scientist get approval from the press office before talking...and then NOT ANSWERING THE PHONE OR RETURNING CALLS....so that I can literally have a scientist who wants to talk to me but is unable to because we are hopelessly waiting for the who-knows-where press officer to get back to us...and then my deadline passes.

- 1) Over-hyping results.
- 2) Not writing in an understandable manner -- using too much scientific jargon or not explaining scientific concepts to a lay audience.
- 3) Failing to put results in context.

Exaggerating the importance of specific discoveries. Incorporating self-serving institutional marketing goals into science reporting. Partnering with other organizations in an effort to standardize the information released about specific research. Stonewalling, withholding information, or obfuscation in times of negative research stories. Failure of transparency.

- 1) Willful misrepresentation. They are paid to only make their institutions look good. If that requires not being truthful, well...
- 2) Using past background in journalism to a) make more money and b) subvert journalism
- 3) Asking/demanding to know about story in order to be most helpful

1. They don't respond to your email or phone call, period.
2. Or they respond, after a delay, and say they are working on your request but they really aren't, because you don't hear anything from them for days or weeks or ever.
3. They sit in on the phone call with your source and try to control the interview if you ask about something potentially sensitive.

Shot-gunning releases to multiple media outlets without regard for the needs of the particular outlet Pushing poor-quality research Using too much science jargon

1) Insisting on listening in on phone interviews. 2) Insisting that faculty/staff at the institution get an interview "approved" through their office first. 3) Not returning calls/email promptly (ie within a couple of hours)

Assuming the reporter knows too much. Assuming the reporter knows too little. Not working with researcher to be comfortable with reporter's potential questions.

failing to return calls in a timely manner failing to put scientific findings in context

Not answering queries. Not answering queries by deadline. Not providing specific answers to queries.

not responding promptly to reporter inquiries; not understanding what they are promoting; not knowing their beat

Over-selling results: breakthrough, first of its kind, etc. Over-reporting incremental findings: another step that could someday lead to a possible therapy... Crappy ledes and cliché-riddled writing: unraveling clues, solving mysteries (retching noise)

Requiring a list of questions before scheduling an interview. Sometimes I am just poking around and don't have any specific questions, or I won't have them until the day of the interview, after I have done my research. But I need to schedule the interview way in advance because scientists' schedules are often busy. When sitting in on an interview, trying to take over the answers.

Ignoring my interview requests.

* not calling back - drives me crazy!!!

Failing to respond to inquiries. Insufficient understanding of their own pitch. Insufficient story elements -- no patient, no visuals, etc.

1. Not defining terms, using acronyms without spelling out. 2. Trying to be too cutesy and clever in press releases. Just present the facts, let the writers handle the clever ledes. 3. Sending out press releases for trivial, unimportant institutional events (promotions, awards) that are not newsworthy. Save the releases for real news -- if you're selective in what you send out, you'll get much more notice for the things you do send.

putting releases in attachments instead of body of email following releases with annoying phone calls to see if you got the release not giving scientific details

Hyping results, oversimplifying, pushing a non-story

-limiting access to sources -shadowing interviews or insisting on being present to control the message

1. Get the science wrong (very common). 2. Write about the science with poorly written copy.

Failing to accurately represent the work of the scientists they represent Failing to write for the person on the street Failing to develop strong relationships and rapport with both parties (the scientists and the public)

-Not knowing who they are pitching to -Sending a press release that lacks any news just b/c they are under pressure to send one out -Failing to place the story into context

--Over-hyping the findings of an incremental study --Not understanding the difference between relative and absolute risk --Letting the professor/researcher/physician dominate the editing process, producing "gobbledygook."

1) Focusing on the institution rather than on the topic of the research at the pressure of marketing offices. This parochialism is especially troublesome as science research is a multi-institutional collaboration. It must be weird for science journalists to get similar releases from a multitude of sources. 2) Conveying isolated findings from single papers rather than putting research in context, and issuing such releases even if they are not particularly newsworthy due to institutional pressure 3) Large imbalance few journalists and many PIOs. Must be a terrible glut of info coming out of institutions for science journalists to plow through.

1. Telephoning to tell you that they e-mailed a press release last week and telling you all about what's in it. 2. Writing press releases that are really long feature stories (usually with the news --if any -- in the 19th paragraph) 3. Pitching interviews and then saying they have to sit in on the conversation -- a time-wasting argument they're bound to lose

1. Misunderstand the need to talk with someone who is truly involved in the project, 2. Dismissive of my phone call and disregard to call back promptly, and, the worst-- 3. Directing me to their website for more information.

1. Insist on knowing slant/pitch of your story 2. Insist on being present at interviews 3. Fail to follow through on making contact with people at their institution

1. Completely ignoring a request. Or, sending an email to the scientist and assuming their job is done, even if the scientist never writes back--no follow up. 2. Not giving me what I ask for--eg I ask to interview scientist A, they tell me, "no, no, you want scientist B." (And then a couple of months later I see exactly the story I wanted to write, with quotes from scientist A, in the New York Times.) Or, offering a years-old press release instead of the interview I asked for. 3. Setting up an interview for ten minutes before my deadline (Of course, sometimes I lie about my deadlines to avoid this).

exaggerate the importance and significance of the discoveries and the investigators

1. Breaking an embargo (or facilitating an embargo break) 2. Failing to provide access to sources/interviews 3. Issuing a bad (misleading or incoherent) press release

At CDC, EPA headquarters (not in the regional offices in my experience) and at FDA, they make me feel like their job is to discourage me and to protect their scientists from having to deal with journalists. SEJ has had a lot of complaints about EPA.

Overuse of words/phrases such as: breakthrough, paradigm shift, holy grail, magic (silver) bullet, etc. Anecdotal ledes in news releases that a journalist would never use in a million years. Long-winded emails that "explain" the news contained in a news release and flat out begs "please run it."

Lying Obstructing Delaying

insisting on sitting in on interviews too many press releases about promotions of assistant deans pitching local stories to national reporters

Don't always get back to reporters before deadlines Don't anticipate the reporter's needs Can't get access to the people who reporter's want to interview

Highlighting work led by a different institution, leading to multiple releases on the same research Failing to follow up with promised materials, whether information, sources, text, quotes, etc Blind pitching without regard to journalists' interests and beats Promoting things that really aren't news (I know that makes four, but how do you choose among these?)

1) Putting my email on a general list to receive all press releases from the institution - i want

only releases that relate to my beat, or at least that relate to science. If they can't cut out the ones about a new scholarship grant for the history department, then I end up ignoring all releases from that institution. 2) Telling me they'll find me a source and then not hearing from them for over 5 hours. 3) Not making clear to their scientists that if they talk to me for an interview, it is not OK to say at the end of the interview that everything was off the record or on background. (This is annoying but legitimate if stated at the beginning of an interview. But totally infuriating if I've already conducted the interview only to learn I can't use it).

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	74

5. Please identify the top three transgressions journalists make when working with press officers.

Text Response

1. Assuming that the PIO is merely a gate-keeper and a roadblock, rather than a partner in gathering adequate information for the story. 2. Not adequately reviewing the release and other press materials provided by the PIO (assuming they lack value) and getting basic details wrong in the story. 3. Being lazy and not doing due diligence on the story and finding other, outside-the-institution sources, then blaming the institution for "not being honest" when other scientists are critical.

Last minute calls. Failing to identify deadlines.

Relying entirely on them for information and never talking to scientists Not seeing PIOs for the valuable resource they are Treating them like second-class citizens

Ignoring press officers due to bad impressions made previously (see above)

1. Calling and asking for an expert who will say exactly what you want them to say. i.e., I need someone to tell me this paper is wrong or aluminum causes Alzheimers. 2. Not doing their homework before they call. I want to talk to someone about how fracking is causing earthquakes in Pa. (when the earthquake was in Va, and we aren't having earthquakes in Pa.

Expecting that scientists at the press officer's institution understand how reporting/journalism work

Calling with a complicated query shortly before deadline (when it could have been done hours or even days earlier). Not identifying the institution that made the discovery, even after getting detailed info from the PIO ("Scientists have discovered..."). Interviewing a scientist for 30 minutes (arranged through a series of calls with a PIO), then using only a four-second sound bite, possibly not even identifying the interviewee or his institution. (Mainly a fault of TV.)

Demanding access to people on little or no notice. Presuming press officers play favorites (generally based on circulation and prestige).

1. Failing to build relationships that help to stay up to date on science news & issues of special interest to report.

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not giving sufficient deadline time not being clear about what kind of information they want not being flexible about when they can do interviews

I do not feel qualified to answer this question.

I don't know! Not being specific enough? Being an entitled jerk? Not saying thank you?

1. Not giving them credit for trying to help. I've been helped by many, many press officers who can get to a source when I can't. But I'm more likely to remember the ones who either ignored my emails or insisted on inappropriate terms, like asking to see copy before publication. 2. Thinking of them mostly as a hindrance, rather than a help.

Automatically assuming press officers are working against them, not with/for them Bypassing press officers and contacting researchers directly when press officers are listed as the primary

contact on a news release (There's a reason! Some researchers can be especially difficult to locate and/or work with. We're here to help you get your story.)

In a past life, I did work as the PIO in two organizations. The only difficulty I ever had working with reporters at that time was when they called at the very last minute and told me they were on deadline and needed whatever they needed within an hour or two. No matter what other obligations I had at the time, I was expected to drop everything, and tend to the reporter's request. I had to wonder why they had to wait until the very last minute to call me. Of course, reporters often are on a super short deadline themselves, so maybe their last minute call could not be avoided.

1. Calling at 5pm on a Friday with an urgent request 2. Being vague about what you need 3. Getting the facts or affiliations wrong

a) lack of professionalism and courtesy b) not showing up for appointments c) not being honest about what a story is about

too new as PIO to know

1. Not double-checking what we (journalists) are told by press officers.

--Being rude, dismissive, or unrealistic time-wise in explaining what they need --not being prepared for interview --Misrepresenting their intent

Can't think of any.

It's not that I think journalists don't make transgressions in working with press officers; I'm sure they do, and in fact I'm sure I have. But I don't know what they are!

Treating them contemptuously. Blaming them for problems out of their control. Failing to acknowledge their institutions when they are the source of a reporter's story.

1) Calling at the last screaming minute and then expecting everyone to hop and do one's bidding. 2) Being rude, imperious, demanding. 3) Expect press officers to do their reporting for them.

Expectation of providing all sources and info, lack of full disclosure on nature of story, not having done homework on what the salient facts and details of a story are

Expecting a particular researcher to be available immediately or within the next few hours. Contacting the researcher directly without copying the press officer in the email. (I can only help track the researcher down for you if I know you need the help. I may also have other experts who are a better or complementary fit for your request.) Quoting the press officer. (Doesn't happen too often, but horrifying when it does!)

1) Asking for the wrong experts to star in their creations....."I need a psychiatrist to interview about how depressed people are about the Red Sox" Really? Sure you can't make do with a bartender? 2) Saying you're going to do an article, then never doing it and refusing to respond to emails, messages, etc. Really, we just want to know that you're not interested so we can move on to our next media pal. 3) Assuming that the entire university is sitting at a desk, just hoping you will call. Some of our docs start in the OR at 5 a.m., then are with patients in clinic all day, and don't get to their emails or voice mails until late at night. If it's a real emergency, we will page them. But it would really, really help if you gave them a day or two to work an interview into their schedules.

Repeating releases uncritically Not doing their own research

Rudeness. Failure to search for info before querying.

1. Sadly, lately the biggest problem I've had with local journalists is getting them to mention the name of the institution I work for -- not just the doctor's name -- in their story (these were TV reporters). 2. Not doing their homework before they interview someone, even when I've provided background information. 3. Making the story fit their preconceptions, even if that's not the story (this doesn't happen very often, fortunately).

(1) not giving them enough time (can you find me a scientist to talk to me about such-and-such...in the next hour) (2) not doing any background research or basic homework and arriving on the scene totally clueless and asking questions that make the scientists cringe

1) Over-hyping results. In this case, pushing scientists to make speculation far beyond the paper's results. 2) Over simplifying results or conclusions. 3) Getting facts wrong -- not checking to make sure what they're writing is correct.

Failure to understanding the complexity of the story they are covering. Focusing too strongly on who is to blame in stories, rather than explaining the science. Seeking false balance in situations where it adds nothing to the story. Emphasizing the polarity of stories -- turning them into "he says/she says" stories. Laziness.

Not giving them their fair say.

Failing to examine the biases and assumptions they bring to their work Disrespecting the role of the press officer Failing to do background research so they can pose intelligent questions

Taking the story to a more general language level without confirming that the science is still correct. Assuming that preliminary findings are final. Extrapolating findings to broader statements.

calling last minute for interviews (but we understand!)

asking the same question to two agents in an organization. incorrect attribution attribution by name when discretion is preferable

taking an idea from a PIO and then not including the PIO's institution in the story; talking to a researcher extensively and then not including them in the story; not coming clean about story angle

Arrogant dismissal of university PIOs as merely flacks, shilling for a client who is trying to take advantage of them. Self-appointed keepers of the concept of "News" -- ie, if they don't write it, it can't be called news. Itchy Twitter fingers that shoot first, ask questions never.

Most journalists do a fine job. But a few do commit these transgressions: 1) Not being careful enough with statistics; 2) Citing a quote that doesn't represent what the spokesperson said in the interview; 3) Using the press officer's news material without giving credit to the organization.

Waiting until too close to deadline to ask for an interview.

ask for expert and then when called back, say they already found someone else

Failing to respond to pitches, or rejecting a good story idea because they did something vaguely similar 10 years ago. Expecting someone to call and/or make themselves available for live interview on extremely short notice (30 minutes or less, sometimes). Expecting busy hospital staff to put everything on hold because the producer doesn't like the correspondent's stand-up and wants her to do it 50 times.

Asking too open-ended questions -- wanting the press officer to do your homework about what to cover. Taking it personally if an institution gives an exclusive to a major outlet. Don't

let your hurt feelings get in the way of choices of what's worth covering. Taking up people's time with questions that can be readily answered by just looking at the website.

They don't send me a link to the clip. They don't use the name of our Scientific Society in the story. They should come back to me for help on future stories, but often don't.

not respecting embargo dates not saying who paid for research study (such as pharm paying for research on their drug) not learning the background of story and ramifications

Being dismissive, taking things out of context, not taking time to tell a story accurately.

-

1. Do not gather all the information they need to put the science into context. 2. Seek "sensational" stories.

-Rude, arrogant, holier-than-thou attitudes stink! -Lazy reporting that relies so much on me that I should get the byline (a blessing and a curse) -The first one counts for two -- cuz it really bugs me.

--Asking for exclusives on embargoed stories --Assuming they know the basics when they really don't --Not providing enough time to interview, prepare for a story

1) Calling at the end of the day with an immediate request for a source to interview on camera. 2) Already knowing what they want to prove without checking for evidence or debate, and asking for a source to say their hunch is correct. 3) Crowd journalism instead of pursuing uncovered but interesting topics.

Sins? NEVER!!

1. Not fully explaining who they'd really like to speak with, 2. Not informing the PIO of an impending deadline, and 3. Expressing impatience with someone trying to help.

1. calling too close to deadline 2. interviewing the PIO instead of a scientist 3. cold-calling scientists and letting/making them think their PIO has set them up

not being skeptical enough and not recognizing the limitations of the evidence and the research

1. Breaking an embargo 2. Trying to work around press officers 3. Requesting interviews with impossible deadlines (e.g., calling at 3 pm on a Friday for an interview by 5)

Acting as stenographers by including all or large chunks of news release copy in stories. Waiting until deadline to request information or an expert to interview. Not getting to know who the PIOs are at local and national before they need them.

Calling them when not necessary Using press release material verbatim Being content with canned quotations

1. newbies don't bother to educate themselves on the basics--info that is easily available on an organization's website. 2. expecting same-day answers to numerous & complex questions or (worse) policy-level questions that require coordination & discussion at the executive level. 3. asking for/expecting commentary from public employees on political (or politically sensitive) issues.

Don't allow enough time for press officer to gather information or to track down someone to interview After jumping through hoops to get reporters what they want, no attribution to organization is included in the story Or after getting boss to agree to interview, reporter backs out of the interview

Expecting the press officers to do their research for them ("any interesting research going on there at your massive publicly-funded institution?") Not following up with sources the PIO has lined up at the journalist's request Asking for large amounts of information then not using (or, often, acknowledging) any of it - PIOs are not meant to be reporters' gophers and they are busy people too

That's for them to tell me - but I'm curious to know!

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	65

6. How can science press officers best avoid making the kinds of mistakes that make journalists cringe?

Text Response

Always consider the reputation and credibility of the institution and the researchers to be far more valuable than short-term press coverage and act accordingly. Always try to provide adequate background of all issues directly related to the announced finding, including caveats regarding the implications of research that remains to be done. Always make sure that what you have written is accurate and clear.

Work with scientists to get releases out promptly, and chase down journals on publication dates (the journals may be part of the problem). Prepare specialist and non-specialist versions of press releases.

Be honest and forthcoming, deliver on your promise to help me, respect my deadline

Take the time to notice when a reporter requests information from you. Take down their name and contact information. Ask them what they are generally interested in. Ask them what kind of deadlines they have, timelines, story needs. Then notify them early on when there is a researcher/development you think they might care about.

1. Write your story as if you were working for a news outlet. 2. Don't do a story because you are told to if you think something is fishy 3. Don't try to control the news

Put themselves in the journalist's shoes instead of just thinking about the institution's message/goal-- it is a two way street

You have to actually like journalists and want to help them, rather than considering them ignorant nuisances. (This applies mainly in dealing with reporters who are not specialist science writers. Get to know reporters at meetings.

Write like a reporter.

1. Produce accurate news releases and story. 2. Identify and Include outside sources for perspective and context.

1. Produce accurate news releases and story. 2. Identify and Include outside sources for perspective and context.

don't promise what you can't deliver or have no intention of doing

* stop writing/producing whole stories, especially those laced with positive adjectives * get out of the way of the interview * know your sources/department/institution

Well, mostly I use press officers to find sources, and I want you to drop everything and respond immediately to my demand. Which frankly isn't very nice of me.

Can I say the things that press officers do that are great? --Help track down scientists (and in so doing reminding them that they have something of an institutional responsibility to respond, e.g. indicating that someone else at their institution is aware that the press would like to talk to them.) --Writing great press releases that sometimes cast a new paper in a more newsworthy light than, say, the journal's press release --Having papers, images at hand. -- Drop a note with a heads up on a paper with extra notice to give a leg up on a story.

1. Write up the finding in clear language, leading with an articulation of the finding, followed

by background. No flash. 2. Include messy statistics in the last graph. 3. Let the writer do his job.

Being responsive and easy to contact Learning as much as possible about the subjects and researchers within their beats

Press officers could be responsive and quickly acknowledge all requests, even if to say they cannot help for some reason. If the press office is large enough, perhaps two press officers could work as a team, copying the second press officer on all communications. They could arrange their schedule so one person is always on call. Thus, they could cover whatever came up with both being informed on whatever was going on. If the first officer is unavailable, therefore, I have the name of a second person I can contact if need be.

Approach the task/job from the journalist's perspective--a journalist needs to identify helpful, well-spoken sources who are experts on topic X in a hurry. They also might need to interview that person solely for informational or background purposes, so don't get annoyed when that hard-found source doesn't make it into the story. Your dedication to helping a journalist out will pay off in the long run with a good relationship so that they will remember you or your institution or expert the next time around. Anything you can do to make a journalist's job easier (i.e. put an engaging headline in the subject line of your PR email that makes them want to read it), will go a long way to fostering that relationship. If you want to pitch a story one-on-one, drop a quick email to set a time to talk on the phone (we get way more email than we could ever read). Make it very clear when something is exclusive and when it is not. Avoid sitting in on interviews when you can...it makes the journalist and sources edgy and then that makes for a not-so-great interview.

I love PIOs that are communicative and help me do my job. If you're helpful, I'll go out of my way to use sources from your institution.

Be responsive. Learn what interests a given journalist. Find a good editor before you put out a press release.

a) think like a journalist b) keep it simple -- short emails, no phone calls c) get to know your writers a bit. we're not all the same and have different interests and styles

answer the damn phone-email! make it easy to get images

Make sure all facts in any news releases are correct. Develop a good working relationship with local reporters.

--develop good relationships with the scientists and others you represent. Familiarize scientists with journalism vs. PR. Familiarize them with journalistic needs, and teach them how to be timely, clear, responsive and jargon-free in their explanations.

1. Don't claim it is the first, biggest, etc without absolute proof. 2. If you send a pitch to several people at an outlet list them all in the email. Otherwise it causes confusion and results in reporters competing with one another if it is a worthwhile story. Once they realize what happened they may stop fighting among themselves and turn on the press officer.

I don't know. I think some of the problems that I've identified are probably systemic and not within the control of individual press officers. But in general, the world of press officers is a bit of a mystery to me, and I don't know enough to say what the best practices are. I often feel that I probably could do a lot more to make good use of press officers' skills and access -- in developing story ideas, for example -- but I don't really know how to do that. I'm looking forward to this session!

Understand better what reporters do....and the pressures they are under.

Understand or endeavor to understand the constraints the reporter is working under. In universities and research institutions, and even at many hospitals, I work with many excellent press officers, and to me this seems to be their key trait. They pay attention to what I say I'm looking for and they deliver it without a sales pitch. And they're very smart and know a lot about what's going on in their institutions. Honestly, I am very often amazed at how many really good science press folks there are. Government is another story. I feel lucky if someone calls me back/returns my email. And contacting people in corporate PR is so predictably fruitless I hate to make the calls.

Make more targeted pitches and stop playing for the daily news cycle

Be near your phone for the first three hours after sending out a press release, make it easy for me to get in contact with the researchers, make it easy for me to find and use good images.

I eagerly await hearing the answers to this.

Be honest and modest. A press release should be like a resume -- aimed at getting an interview, not the job (getting its own words into print).

Please just recognize the world has changed; the pace has picked up.

Spend time with reporters, go to their meetings, and get a feel for how they work and what they need.

It helps if you've been a science journalist. Then you know what to avoid. Use common sense, place yourself in the journalist's shoes, and recognize that your goal -- promoting your research or institution -- is not the same as the journalist's goal -- to get a good story and inform the public. Have a cordial but professional relationship with journalists. Help the journalist as much as you can, and then step back.

Work in a newsroom or shadow a reporter for awhile. Build relationships with individual reporters to learn what kinds of stories would interest them, instead of relying on an email list of faceless reporters that you are constantly bombarding with emails and tips

Acting like a journalist. Have a healthy skepticism about every study you write about, and make sure you know both the innovations and the limits of the research. Don't be afraid to not promote a study that isn't ready for prime time.

Function more as in-house journalists rather than PR types. Train researchers on subtleties of the media world so they will better interact with reporters. Always check the validity of the claims that your institution's researchers make -- be aware that some scientists will fudge the facts. Never let administrators review stories before they are released to the public. Be responsive.

Make all humans (including journalists and editors who are not saints) more honest, which would mean not subject to career interests.

Just put us in touch with your source in a timely manner and let us do our job. If we need more information, we will ask you for it and be appreciative of your help.

Carefully researching the media outlets to which they send information Having an 'outside' person read the release to remove jargon Asking tougher questions of the researcher to determine the real newsworthiness of the scientific work

Treat your faculty/staff as grown ups. Prepare them ahead of time for an interview, if necessary and then trust them to conduct the interview without hand-holding. If you must set

guidelines for interviews, do it behind the scenes so it is not apparent to the journalist.

Understanding the impact of the decision -- answering the "So What?" question in the news release that the reporter may have in hand prior to the interview.

Imagine the journalist's point of view (blindspots)

Know the beat, know your people, and know how newsrooms function

See three transgressions discussion.

Be more flexible and realize that I'm not out to get you. I'm trying to understand the scientist's work.

Call back Only pitch stories that are worthy

By understanding what a journalist's life is like.

Walk in their shoes. Do some freelance writing so you understand the needs of the people you're dealing with.

ask read research learn join NASW

Be careful with the story. Don't overstate the facts. Make sure your experts are willing to talk to the press.

I confess I'm not sure how to answer this one. Should we worry that the tone of these survey questions might steer our intended audience - i.e., PIOs - away? I assume one hope for this panel is that PIOs will attend, and better understand where their efforts help or hinder journalists. But As a PIO I'm not sure I'd want to attend a discussion that consisted of a litany of the many ways I make my journalist colleagues cringe. The message I hear is: "Come, we'd like to enlighten you as to the many ways you offend us, in the hopes that you will stop being quite so unsavory to work with." This strikes me as particularly ironic in light of the fact that NASW is a professional society made up of people whose job it is to write with their audience in mind. Many of those sitting in the audience and replying to this survey will be PIOs (some of which will be former journalists, or freelancers in their spare time.) We're all well aware of the tensions between the two, and are busy trying to maintain our integrity and make sense of our new roles as more and more of our careers require us to play both roles. Help! Is this the tone we want to set?

1. Communicate more carefully with the journalists. 2. Communicate more carefully with the scientists.

I try to connect the journalist and the scientist, then get out of the way! Unless my assistance is requested further.

-Understand the story fully yourself, first, so that you can be of real help to the reporter. - Understand the reporter's reality -- in beat(s), in interest, etc -- but this means building a relationship that both PIO and reporter want (not always the case)

--Get a story in early to a reporter (trusted ones can be told of an unfolding event) --Do the math; understand the science --Don't rely on one researcher/doctor; do the homework needed to provide context

1) Ask science journalists what their pet peeves are, and try not to make these mistakes. I hope the results of this survey helps us PIOs in this regard. 2) Not sure how PIOs can best handle marketing, advancement (fund-raising) and administrative pressures from their institutions, donors and funding sources to try to place information that is not newsworthy. Would

appreciate advice on how PIOs might handle this. 3) Realize that science comes under the same watchdog scrutiny as business and other fields -- it is not immune from justifiable criticism. Such criticism might serve the public and help scientists do a better job.

Read Dennis Meredith's book and listen to him whenever possible.

1. Communicate any issues that may come up so journalists can expect a delay or choose to find their information elsewhere. 2. Take the time to contact researchers or scientists, instead of suggesting a journalist pull a quote from a press release or previously printing copy.

They must make clear to their bosses that they are unable to herd the cats: scientists will talk to reporters without checking with the PIO, and scientists will say things the bosses might wish they hadn't. Close herding should not be delegated to PIOs; if the bosses want to forbid disclosures, they should get the scientists to sign such a contract and tell them what will happen to them (not the PIO) if confidences are violated. Their own contacts should make clear the kind of dangers that they can help to avoid and the kinds of responses they expect bosses to make in the face of unanticipated disclosures.

Honestly, all it takes is a little competence. Respect what journalists do and what they need, and we'll respond in kind. And communication is important. If you received my email, let me know. If you're working on it, or having trouble reaching the right person, keep me posted. If you don't think you can help, tell me that so I can look elsewhere.

knowledge and skepticism

Use plain language in releases. Be as responsive and candid as possible when dealing with interview requests.

I don't know. Re EPA I'm hearing that what I've described above is agency policy.

Too many PIOs enter the field without an underpinning in journalism or public relations. They need to round out their education in both fields.

Be honest and helpful within the constraints of your position -- genuinely try to help journalists do solid reporting rather than try to steer them into writing uncritical puff pieces.

Raise the bar for excellence in writing & editing as well as fact-checking. Have a well-established internal process for technical review of content as well as high-quality writing. In my experience, this builds overall credibility of the press officers and their organization.

think about what the journalist needs first, and what the institution needs second.

Know the expectations of the reporters and try to anticipate their needs. Be very responsive and respectful of deadlines. Be honest and pay very close attention to details so that news releases are polished and in AP style.

Find genuinely good stories Research journalists before pitching Start early to work with press officers of collaborating institutions, journals, funding agencies, etc

Remember that, more likely than not, we are on tight deadlines, and speediness matters SO MUCH if they are working on getting information or sources for us.

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	72

7. Are press officers from a particular type of entity (university, government agency, hospital, foundation, etc) more or less prone to the kind of behavior likely to offend a journalist?

#	Question	More prone	Less Prone	Neither more nor less prone than press officers from any other type of institution	Responses	Mean
1	University	6	39	21	66	2.23
2	Government agency	35	11	18	64	1.73
3	Hospital	31	6	19	56	1.79
4	Foundation	17	13	30	60	2.22
5	Corporation	49	3	15	67	1.49
6	Other	6	4	1	11	1.55

Other
Advocacy group
Journal publisher
CDC
Scientific society
University-affiliated entity
non-profit/activism NGO
Don't know
Nonprofit
This can't be generalized -- in every category I've know the best and worst
NIH
research institution
Advocacy Group

Statistic	University	Government agency	Hospital	Foundation	Corporation	Other
Min Value	1	1	1	1	1	1
Max Value	3	3	3	3	3	3
Mean	2.23	1.73	1.79	2.22	1.49	1.55
Variance	0.36	0.77	0.86	0.75	0.71	0.73
Standard Deviation	0.60	0.88	0.93	0.87	0.84	0.85
Total Responses	66	64	56	60	67	13

8. Please provide an example of something good a press officer has done during a routine interaction.

Text Response

I usually go direct to the scientists in the fields I cover regularly.

Provided me with great artwork and a scientist's cellphone number

Called me up and said, "Hi, noticed your name on the press list for upcoming conference XYZ. A few people from my institution will be there that I think you should meet, because [insert relevant reason here.] Can you meet up for lunch?"

helped me track down a source and arrange an interview time, even after hours

Provided extra sources and background material, inside information on the reliability-credibility-quirks of a source.

provided a variety of photos, interview times, and back up material (Brooklyn Botanical Garden)

* met me on time; knew the material I wanted to cover and understood the habits of the source to schedule a time that the interviewee was most "on"; found a quiet place for the interview; brought in the interviewee on time; did not interrupt/distract the interviewee; when the interview neared the half-hour time point, did not begin to fidget; let the interviewee decide -- when I asked him after the scheduled half-hour -- if he could stay and answer a few more questions or needed to go (he stayed); did not identify which quotes the source made that she thought was best; and did not pry into the other sources for the story.

oops, I just provided that in the previous page. Didn't know there was more. Sorry.

A press officer from a major corporation helped me iron out fine details in a feature about a drug developed by the company. Press officers from the NCI regularly help me find sources, statistics and other data.

I don't remember the particular research I was working on but one interaction with an NIH officer recently was wonderful just because she would send me a short e-mail every so many hours as she made progress on whatever interview she was trying to arrange for me. It was just very fluid, organized, and friendly. She was terrific. I had a high comfort level working with her. Within a couple of days I was able to speak with the physician I needed to interview.

I always love it when a press officer mentions another story idea that I might be interested in based on the current request we're working on. That's golden to a freelancer, especially if it really fits their beat or publications. Knowing which publications take which types of stories is really valuable.

Provided me with useful (written) background material that I either didn't ask for or didn't know existed. Hooked me up with a difficult to reach person.

I actually like a bit of human interaction, chit-chat, as long as it doesn't get too personal. Acknowledging larger political news, the news cycle, the weather, budget issues, media news.

"If you don't reach prof X by 1 today, we have another person who would be a great interview" "I can page Dr. Z" and actually be in touch the same hour. (Hospital only)

Help set up a phone interview with a researcher who was traveling at the same time a new

report that person authored was coming out.

--Quickly sent me research articles and background info to help me get up to speed before the interview. Tracked down a needed scientist at home or on vacation so I could get the interview and make my deadline. Got me the contact info for a former post-doc who might be useful who had moved on to another institution; been honest, patient, and helpful in getting answers to follow-up questions.

Sharing information on ongoing research that can result in future stories, and sharing phone numbers of scientists.

A press officer who I know has taken a good deal of time to provide me with significant amounts of background information on a scientist whose work I was interested in, even though I did not have a specific assignment or even an angle figured out yet.

Refer to sources at other universities.

Warned me off talking to a particular person because they weren't right or wouldn't be helpful; provided access to researchers who could help

Responding quickly to my inquiry with more information than I asked for, having images ready to use on Flickr.

The press officers who know immediately what I'm asking for and can respond very quickly are easiest to work with. I also appreciate when press officers follow-up to make sure the doctor called.

Returned information or put me in contact with a source quickly.

Given me a tip about some info the press officer learned by interacting with the scientist that I would not have known otherwise, that led to a more productive interview

Gladly providing full answers to a questions that require that they dig around a little.

There are many cases where I've dealt with press officers from universities who follow through, as promised, on getting me a journal article PDF, or photos or multimedia material.

Repeat back to me what I am asking for, what my deadline is, what they are going to do to facilitate an interview, and by when. This instills confidence that we are on the same page, that the press officer knows what I am asking for and understands my deadline.

Insisted on a phone conversation when email would have been acceptable.

Arrange an interview at a time that works for my schedule.

A university press officer I know has helped me by reminding me of other sources at other institutions

After being directed to another office, the PIO confirmed that she would be able to help me and found the information I needed by the end of the day AND followed up to ensure I found what I was looking for.

Getting back to me quickly and offering documents I can use as resources as well as interviews. There are some great PIOs out there and I'm always pleased when I have a reason to call them, because I know it will be worthwhile.

There's a lovely woman at UCSF who always has a patient ready for any health stories. I don't even have to ask, she just says, "Do you want to speak with a patient? Here you go."

Press officers at various universities have just been incredibly responsive. Johns Hopkins,

University of Utah are good examples.

Referring me to a competing institution for the experts I needed for a story rather than saying "we don't have this expertise" and ending the conversation then and there.

Helping me find documents without my needing to resort to FOIA, for example.

A press officer went out of her way to get me a copy of an embargoed release ahead of time from another institution for me. Also, when there is a big news story, such as faster-than-light neutrinos or falling UARS satellite, for example, I love it when I get a quick email listing sources and contact info for experts at their institution prepared to speak about the subject. Saves me a lot of time!

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	37

9. If you are willing to share any anecdotes about the challenges and rewards of working with press officers, please share.(Names and institutional identities will be withheld.)

Text Response

Some press officers never return calls, but I've never had one return a call a month later, long after I've forgotten what I called them about (as has happened with scientists).

Bronx zoo helped me organize a behind the scenes day for Science Writers in New York, complete with meals, press packets, etc., then wend MIA when I tried to interview two of the scientists who took us on a tour of their research facility who needed their permission to speak with me (same publication that I'd written about Brooklyn Botanical Garden for mentioned above), so why go to all that trouble if they stonewalled any actual articles? The scientist at the Botanical Garden was happy to talk with me, provided great info and photos, the PIS was happy to facilitate.

My best relationships with PIOs are with those who understand what it's like to be a journalist, or better yet, a freelancer. They understand the demands of the job, the deadline urgency, and editorial PITAs. My worst story is when I was on a daily deadline for a story for Nature and a governmental agency PIO strung me along all day long, telling me I would get a key interview in time, yes, they were willing to talk to me, etc. Then at about 4:30pm Eastern time, told me flat out, sorry it's not going to happen, with no further explanation, leaving me no time to find a back-up source. My editor was thankfully understanding, but it could have been something that cost me a publication. (My editor also thought it was retaliation for a story that another journalist had recently broken about the same agency--not good to bring politics into play!!!)

I once emailed a press officer at Boeing to locate one of the company's scientists that I had difficulty reaching. When I got no reply, I called the press officer and left a voice mail. Again, no reply. I had the opposite experience with IBM. Very responsive, and they lined up great people. I am inclined to work with IBM again. Boeing? Not so much.

It's hardly an incident, but I seldom approach feds for info, they are so paranoid. Obama no improvement in this regard. With University PIOs, I usually try to go directly to the source; saves time, tho theoretically (and in some cases actually) the pio should save time.

I am continually surprised at how many people think that because a story has appeared in the NY Times or on a network the AP will want to do a followup. We expect to originate news that newspapers and broadcasters use, not follow them.

Recently a PR firm sent out a piece of news embargoed for Wednesday, with the offer to set up interviews with the primary scientist on Thursday, the day after. Tuesday would have been a far better day to be available!

Some press officers are particularly excellent at coordinating live interviews and visits. I am always, always grateful when a press officer can allow me to make the most of a trip for enterprise reporting.

Years ago, there was one press officer at a particular government agency (ok, it was NASA) who was immediately fired for giving an honest answer to a specific question, simply because the agency wanted to avoid any discussion of the issue.

I think my favorite is the PIO who set me up an interview with not one of the three scientists I asked for, but some other person not related to the study--and set it up for four days after my deadline. The worst is when PIOs block access--eg at a company, refusing to let me talk to a researcher.

At EPA, the person I've dealt with on several articles this year always wants to know my deadline, and even when it was 6 days after I contacted her, she made sure not to get me any information until my deadline was upon me.

In general I find that most press officers are great and enthusiastic and incredibly helpful. I appreciate their help immensely.

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	12

10. If you are willing to share any anecdotes about the challenges and rewards of working with journalists, please share.(Names and institutional identities will be withheld.)

Text Response

xxx

So a reporter called and asked for someone to talk about the connection between fracking and earthquakes. I asked if he meant the recent mandatory fracking ban in Arkansas. He said no, we had an earthquake here on Tuesday and I want to know if fracking caused this. I said, there was an earthquake in Virginia, we felt it here, but to my knowledge they aren't fracking in Virginia. No, we had an earthquake here on tuesday, I felt it, all the media are reporting it. I said, earthquakes occur where the earth actually moves past or over another piece of earth. That happened in a section of Virginia. The vibrations from that were felt in Canada and Michigan, but there wasn't an earthquake here. He said. I see what you are getting at, but.... I gave him a geologist and secretly hoped he did write the story so he'd be crucified. He did write it, and he did lead off with fracking, but he focused on Arkansa and did say that the Virginia earthquake had nothing to do with fracking. Do you homework, and if you don't, listen to what people are saying to you. Don't take your preconceived ideas, especially if you don't have any background in the area, and insist your correct.

I was shouted at and hung up on by a reporter who could not believe another writer had had produced a story about a researcher at our institution without the benefit of a news release. Money quote: "So you expect me to just talk to hundreds of scientists until I find one worth writing about?" It was still a great experience, thanks to the writer who got the story. She listened to the researcher's concerns about media coverage and patiently conducted her interviews and crafted a story that pleased our source -- not because it was a fawning or tilted in any direction, but because it was really good.

I don't want to turn this into a bitch session about reporters, as I know everyone has bad days. Unfortunately, the format of this session appears to aim to be a bitch session about press officers. Instead of calling this the "Seven Deadly Sins of Press Officers" how about something more neutral like how reporters and press officers can help each other out more? Contrary to popular belief, press officers are actually working to help reporters, not just their institutions. Yes, our institutions pay us, but for tax payer-funded institutions like mine, the ultimate client is the public and I consider it my duty to make sure everyone knows what's going on here. My goal is not to interfere, but to make interviews and other interactions the most productive possible for all parties involved.

Not a specific anecdote, but I have generally found that if you are helpful and go out of your way to help them get their story, they will be more receptive to story ideas and will come back to you when they need experts. This sounds obvious, but I've seen many instances where science officers, public information officers, and public relations representatives seemed to go out of their way to alienate journalists, being high-handed or complaining about every little thing.

I once dealt with a journalist who had questions about regulations governing organ donation. Her questions assumed the ethical rightness of one side of a very complicated and thorny issue. When I said that I would answer her question but first I wanted to give her some very

brief background on the controversy, she told me I could give her my "little PR speech" once I answered her questions. She had no interest in hearing about why the issue was controversial; she had already decided we were on the wrong side of the issue.

I was a journalist before I was a PIO, which I think is helpful for understanding the environment.

We put out a save-the-date media advisory to inform regional media that a major speaker was coming to our campus with -- as it turns out -- a bit too much detail on what she was coming here for. Local TV station's spastic web-guys did a Wikipedia search on a similar name, jumped to a completely erroneous conclusion, and posted an item to their site in under 20 minutes, without picking up the phone. Regional AP, seeing this alleged story, put it on the National Wire after failing to reach me by phone (I called back in under an hour). The regional "newspaper" repeated the half-assed Google search, saw that it was "true," also went to press. After I called and screamed, AP chased with a write-thru correction, but the incorrect story was already in dozens of outlets on the web. Local TV and newspaper guys -- who I also screamed at -- never understood what they had done wrong. No more save-the-date bulletins. They'll find out about stuff the morning it happens from now on.

I/we always appreciate accuracy, first and foremost.

Sometimes as a PIO I feel as if I bombard the news media with press releases, but there have been times when I've been asked, "Why didn't you send me a press release on this?" It seems as if the journalists want the opportunity to screen for what they might find news worthy. I won't mention the foundations, but I have been asked to place stories that are of no interest to the news media, and then had to file a report to the foundation that was funding the program about who in the media was contacted and why there was no coverage. I don't think funding of research should be tied to obtaining news media coverage. It should be done for the sake of discovering new knowledge or better ways of doing things or helping those in need, not for foundation publicity

This is not an anecdote, but as a PIO for an organization involved in scientific research, I tend to have more trouble working with other PIOs outside of my organization than I do with journalists. Often, where there is an opportunity to coordinate announcement of a new research project or finding, there is little effort to do so. Of course, a PIO's job is to promote the work of his/her organization, but in this business, I think a rising tide tends to lift all ships. When multiple organizations - government agencies, universities, non-profit foundations - are all clamoring about a new finding, it's often something newsworthy, and it's to the mutual benefit of all to have more than one voice trying to reach the press.

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	11