

Winning the Question & Answer Segment

One of the best ways to handle questions is to make a list of 5 – 10 questions you think may be asked. Then create a bulleted list detailing content of the answers. Below are tips to respond to many types of questions:

1. TRIGGER WORDS

“How embarrassed are you by what happened?” “Aren't you ashamed of the way your office handled this?”

You might regret what happened, and you might not like the way your office responded. But "embarrassed" and "ashamed" are trigger words. Simply work with the words **you** choose and not the ones by the questioner.

2. PERSONALIZING AN ISSUE

“How do you feel about this, personally?” “As a public servant this must be difficult for you.”

You might choose to respond in an emotional way; although, generally you should stay with the issue, and not with how you feel about the issue. Keep returning to your core message. For example, “This is not about any individual. This is about ensuring everyone has...”.

3. GOING FOR THE JOLT

“How much of this mess do you take responsibility for?”

Often the first question is benign. Then someone may deliberately try to put you off your stride with a provocative or aggressive question. Make your answer a clear statement of your key message. If necessary, bridge from the question back to your main point.

4. THE IMPOSSIBLE QUESTION

Your office has recently purchased new computers for everyone.

“Why are you tossing out perfectly good computers?”

Steer clear of the impossible question. You can deflect by saying, “We are simply keeping up with technology to be more efficient for the citizens. Here's what we are doing with the other computers...”. (Deflect) “What we are doing is working toward a more efficient and responsive approach to the voters. (Ignore)

5. CAN YOU GUARANTEE?

Never promise more than you can deliver.

“This was a terrible gaffe for our citizens. Can you guarantee it won't happen again?”

No one can guarantee no mistakes — ever. Bridge back to what you want to talk about. “We have examined the circumstances, we've talked with staff, and we feel we've carefully created additional quality standards.”