

Appendices A-D

Mediated Access

*Transparency Barriers for Journalists' Access to
Scientists and Scientific Information at
Government Agencies*

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August 2015

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Appendix A: Multiple Choice Survey Questions

I am required to obtain approval from the public information office before interviewing employees.

All the time	50	30.7%
Most of the time	38	23.3%
Some of the time	33	20.2%
Rarely	22	13.5%
Never	20	12.3%

Public information officers respond to my requests for information and interviews in a timely manner.

All the time	19	11.7%
Most of the time	73	44.8%
Some of the time	54	33.1%
Rarely	13	8.0%
Never	4	2.5%

If I go through the public information office to get access to a subject matter expert, it takes multiple requests for information and interviews.

All the time	8	4.9%
Most of the time	29	17.8%
Some of the time	73	44.8%
Rarely	44	27.0%
Never	9	5.5%

I have been prevented by the public information office from interviewing agency employees in a timely manner.

All the time	4	2.5%
Most of the time	14	8.6%
Some of the time	57	35.0%
Rarely	39	23.9%
Never	49	30.1%

My requests for interviews with specific agency employees are selectively routed by public information officers to other agency employees.

All the time	6	3.8%
Most of the time	23	14.6%
Some of the time	53	33.8%
Rarely	47	29.9%
Never	28	17.8%

Public information officers or administration officials monitor my interviews, either in-person or over the telephone.

All the time	10	6.5%
Most of the time	30	19.5%
Some of the time	49	31.8%
Rarely	29	18.8%
Never	36	23.4%

I can successfully interview subject matter experts without involving the public information office.

All the time	16	10.3%
Most of the time	34	21.9%
Some of the time	53	34.2%
Rarely	39	25.2%
Never	13	8.4%

I have a positive working relationship with public information officers that helps me get in touch with subject matter experts I need to speak with.

Strongly agree	46	31.9%
Somewhat agree	46	31.9%
Neither agree nor disagree	38	26.4%
Somewhat disagree	7	4.9%
Strongly disagree	7	4.9%

I have a positive working relationship with agency subject matter experts that helps me get the information I need.

Strongly agree	47	32.2%
Somewhat agree	56	38.4%
Neither agree nor disagree	32	21.9%
Somewhat disagree	6	4.1%
Strongly disagree	5	3.4%

The public is not getting all the information it needs because of barriers agencies are imposing on journalists' reporting practices.

Strongly agree	37	25.0%
Somewhat agree	47	31.8%

Neither agree nor disagree	25	16.9%
Somewhat disagree	17	11.5%
Strongly disagree	22	14.9%

Has your ability to access government subject matter experts become easier, stayed the same or become more difficult over the past five years?

Become significantly easier	4	2.8%
Become marginally easier	17	12.1%
Stayed the same	64	45.4%
Become marginally more difficult	35	24.8%
Become significantly more difficult	21	14.9%

Have you recently sought information from any government agency during an emergency or crisis situation? If so, what kind of emergency was it?

Epidemic	10	7.1%
Drug related emergency	0	0.0%
A chemical spill	5	3.6%
Hurricane	4	2.9%
Tornado	6	4.3%
Storm (wind, snow, ice etc.)	16	11.4%
Flood	6	4.3%
Infectious disease	21	15.0%
Food safety	2	1.4%
I have not sought this kind of information	70	50.0%
Other	11	

How did you find out about the crisis or emergency initially?

From a tip, a source or a member of the public	30	56.6%
From a competitor	11	20.8%
From a government public information office	12	22.6%
From some other means	33	

Were you able to speak with agency subject matter experts without going through the public information office?

Yes	25	26.6%
No	33	35.1%
I did not try to speak with experts first	36	38.3%

How much information on the crisis did you get from the agency's website or its social media accounts (Twitter, Facebook)?

All of it	3	3.3%
Most of it	11	12.1%
Some of it	44	48.4%

A little of it	19	20.9%
None of it	14	15.4%

How quickly was information posted on the website or social media accounts by a public information officer?

Immediately	1	1.6%
Within minutes	16	25.8%
Within hours	32	51.6%
Within days	12	19.4%
Never	1	1.6%

If you asked the public information office for information not included on the website or social media accounts, how quickly did they respond?

Immediately	1	1.5%
Within minutes	12	17.6%
Within hours	39	57.4%
Within days	11	16.2%
Never	5	7.4%

Did the response meet your deadline?

Yes	51	81.0%
No	12	19.0%

How soon was the PIO able to connect you with experts who could comment on the crisis or emergency?

Immediately	5	7.7%
Within minutes	5	7.7%
Within hours	32	49.2%
Within days	10	15.4%
Never	13	20.0%

Did the response meet your deadline?

Yes	43	84.3%
No	8	15.7%

Appendix B: Open-ended Survey Questions

Thinking of the last time you were prohibited from interviewing, please explain the reason you were given for the prohibition, if any.

Our "employee" typically someone who has written a report, is not allowed to do interviews.
Not available in the time frame I required.
No reason; simply issued a statement.
The agency did not feel that expert was the appropriate person for my questions; thus, it needed to go to a higher official.
I rarely included government offices in my stories.
Agency wasn't ready to make a public comment.
Declined to comment.
Meetings, crisis occurrences.
Much of the time it's difficult or impossible to talk to the persons most knowledgeable in federal agencies, and if you call directly, they will simply refer you to public affairs. Even if you start with public affairs, you will often be told that comments should come from them only, or it's not possible to comment on a pending matter, etc. If interview is granted with a knowledgeable staff member, there might be a long wait or an effort to vet your questions in advance. There's a lot of push and pull, and many times we have little or no leverage.
None given. Just received statements from communications team.
I have talked to state and USGS employees on occasion only after they had received permission to talk from their PIOs. Also, have barriers at times with BuRec employees, but access is easier.
"Too busy" and "prefers to answer in an emailed statement."
The person was recently appointed; so, I was told they were waiting until the person had settled in to do interviews.
The PIO did not respond in a timely manner and/or the PIO told me that the person wasn't available.
Honestly, I do a zillion stories per day and just e-mail people when it seems as if someone is being portrayed in a bad light and ought to have a chance to respond. I usually just ask once, or, in unusual cases, twice. I didn't really care who I interviewed; I just wanted to give quotes giving CMS's side on issues. I got used to the idea that CMS doesn't respond and stopped emailing them for comments a couple of years ago because it seemed pointless. Maybe I'll try emailing them again to see if the situation has changed now. Since, I don't usually ask to speak to specific employees, a lot of the answer choices here are a poor fit for my situation. In a lot of cases, a "not applicable" answer would work better.
I am not usually given a reason for not being able to interview someone in government. The PIO simply drops the ball and ignores my request.
I was told the agency was not the right agency to answer my questions.
They were unavailable.
I was not able to name the source.
Not available.
Prefers to answer questions via email.
New policies had been set up so that an employee I once talked to could no longer talk to press.
"We need time to find an expert."
The reasons are rarely clear or not given.
Decided they didn't like my take on writing.
Prefer not to speak to a representative of your publication.
HHS/CMS officials spoke at length off the record and refused to answer my questions on the record.
None; the information office just keeps stalling until it is too late for the story.
Not available.

None given. The request is ignored.
Person not available.
Can't recall a time this happened recently.
I can't remember a specific time only that it has happened at least once.
Tight deadlines.
Policy
"Not available for an interview, but can answer questions via email."
It was a story about phthalates and paraben in beauty products, I requested to speak to someone in the FDA and they said they could only respond via email.
Can't think of a time that happened.
Availability
I don't think they knew the answers to our questions.
No reasonable answer given; just because.
Person not available
Lack of details/information.
Just delaying or not responding.
Personnel issue
The person they wanted to speak with me was out of the office.
No reasons ever offered.
I was not prohibited, but it took several months before I got a response and by then the story had long since been written.
The official is too busy, after the gentleman in question had agreed to talk to me.
My institution doesn't give reasons, but I suspect they do it because they are worried my academic opinion will offend one or more philanthropic donors.
Person unavailable.
I answered Questions #6-#11; but, they are really irrelevant to the editorial work that I do.
Not available.
Not available.
The person was too "busy."
Can't remember the last time. They usually want to get their leaders or experts together with me.
None
We mostly interview independent experts we find in other avenues, primarily relying on published releases from government agencies.
Could not comply on short notice which is often the case in covering environmental news for radio shows.
Most rank and file employees are told to refer media questions to the PIO, even if the PIO winds up referring me to the original employee in the end. The only time I was expressly prohibited from interviewing an employee was after a massive sewage spill.
Not ready to talk about a new development or report, even though it was to be released in a few weeks.
Time constraints
Not available.
That they were unavailable or busy.
The agency said it thought its officials provided other ample venues for citizens to learn of its activities.
Often not given a reason, just a statement that "he/she's not available." A few times, "He/She's not the best person to comment (on a study he authored). You can talk with our PIO who works on that beat."
This has not happened to me.
They don't comment on specific applications until they've been heard or approved.
Sometimes, I am given sanitized, talking point-like answers.
I have never been prohibited from interviewing agency employees.... "In a timely manner" on the other hand....

The public information officer didn't understand my request.
Target was busy.
Not available.
EPA refused an interview and sent a non-responsive boilerplate statement instead.
They claimed my organization is not a journalism outfit.
The National Forest biologist said his supervisor told him only he, the supervisor, could answer questions about a particular topic - biological review of cattle grazing allotment and rules governing grazing there.
Ongoing criminal investigation or complications in people's personal lives.
Not available.
Usually no reason given, just a delay in response.
Official is "not available."
I was required to fill out a formal FOIA request to interview personnel in an office I had previously exposed for compiling and publishing bogus data.
Subject matter
No availability.
No reason given.
No reason was given.
Usually, there are just massive delays. When we get a reply back, the article has been published for days.
Not available.
That used to happen occasionally at the state level. The Federal Government has been much more cooperative.
Time and Availability
Person wasn't authorized to speak to the press.
The press officers simply never responded to me, or took too long.
Schedule conflicts
I was told the person did not wish to be interviewed.
Person not available in my time frame, which was a pretty big time frame.
PIO basically thought that they were capable of handling the questions themselves.
None

Public information officers or administration officials monitor my interviews, either in-person or over the telephone. Please give any examples.

Typically, a PIO will set up a conference call with the person I'm interviewing and sit in on the call.
Usually, I'm required to submit questions first and then the interviewee is given the answers and not allowed to deviate. If I ask a different question, the person says he/she has to get permission to answer the question or send me the info I've requested.
They routinely monitor reporter questions and often times shuts down all information and access, other than a short statement.
Sits next to me in a scientists' office.
Want to stay on the call for interviews and copied on emails.
They'll stick around for interview and offer/add clarifying elements to ensure the "points" are made.
Communications staff sometimes sits in on interviews at the state level.
On some occasions, PIOs insist conversation be on background and they still want to sit in on the call. An interesting expression I've heard lately: "Quote check." They want you to run by them in advance any statements you decide to use.
I have had PIOs or supervisors sit in on interviews, generally at the federal or state level. Usually supervisors only,

because the technical details are better known by underlings.
Most interviews I do are on speaker phone with PIO and agency employee.
Once, when interviewing an expert about radiation monitoring, we were accompanied by the PIO.
I'm not sure if you're referring to government interviews. If it's with a hospital system the PIO is present. If it's with an independent physician or private entity, then the PIO is not present. If it's with VA dept. of health, the PIO is also not there; although the person who is interviewed is required to inform the PIO of the questions asked etc.
The only times I've been on CMS interviews were on the HealthCare.gov calls last year, with a cast of millions. Once in awhile, CMS answered questions via emails.
When I have interviewed someone from the VA, the PIO may be sitting in the room. This person sometimes contributes to the conversation, but, more often than not, does not.
The EPA PIOs have often sat in on interviews over the phone. Sometimes, state agency PIOs do the same, but that's less common.
Not aware of this.
At SC DHEC board meetings, employees and board members often consent to in-person interviews only when a public information officer is involved in the conversation. At one DHEC meeting, I had a public information officer tell me in front of a board member that it was not the proper time to interview him. I told the PIO that was the board member's call. The board member then took a few questions. The agency's board also has posted signs saying only authorized personnel are allowed in the immediate area where the board meets.
They often listen in on the interview. That also happens with corporations.
Interview about regulation of endocrine disruptors.
The PIOs are usually on the line when I interview scientists.
They may listen in on an interview, but it's often helpful, because they can then send appropriate follow up information; rather than burdening the official.
If the interview is in person, I am rarely alone with the person that I'm interviewing. I almost always have a "shadow," a public information officer. It's incredibly frustrating.
I wrote a story for Marie Claire about an FDA approved topical medicine and when I wrote something negative, I had to speak to someone on behalf of the FDA.
If I do an in-person interview, a PIO will sometimes sit in. They participate less often on phone interviews.
Interviews with HHS officials are usually monitored by someone in the press office.
It's usually a speakerphone interview or a conference call, with the PIO hovering in the background.
Recent nurses' strike: working conditions and training (came about over Ebola).
They listen in when I interview agency staff.
If I interview an EPA official, be it the head of EPA Office of Water or senior policy advisor, an EPA PIO is always present.
My communications are usually over e-mail, and the PI officers review them before they are released to the journalist.
Head PIO will sometimes listen in when I am interviewing top officials in the department.
It has happened, but I can't remember when or with whom.
Again, the last few questions are irrelevant to me and my circumstances.
Not applicable
PIO joined us for an interview of an engineer at the site of a river restoration project this month.
Can't recall any recent specific examples.
Our local hospital always has a marketing representative on the line during interviews, but they never interrupt. I think they would if I asked something that wasn't legal for them to answer. But it has always kind of bothered me. I don't think my sources have answered differently because of it, but I'll never really know.
It seems the higher up the person, the more likely a public information officer listens in.
All of my interviews with agency officials and, depending on the agency, many with scientists. NIH, my main beat, usually lets me talk to scientists unmonitored, and when they do sit in, they say it's because they want to get up to speed with what the researcher is doing for planning their own coverage, which I think is usually legitimate. VA and DOD can

be ridiculous, cutting researchers off mid-sentence if they're saying something they shouldn't.
Often insist on written questions in advance. It never used to be this way.
Not applicable
JPL, which I cover often, always monitors my in-person interviews.
It's been a while since I've interviewed anyone on the phone or in person, so I don't really remember.
Anytime I interview a public official on the phone at any level of government, whether local, state or federal, a PR person is always on the phone.
PIO sometimes sits in on significant interviews.
I can only think of one, when a PIO listened to an interview, so that she could catch up on the topic.
Not applicable
When trying to separate apples-to-apples data from apples-to-oranges statistic pushed in a health-related press release, the PIO sat in on the interviews I conducted.
For example, when I interviewed, one of EPA's well known experts on sea level rise. And it was pretty clear that he had been reined in - he didn't speak as colorfully as he used to in the past (at least based on past quotes from him I've seen in other media outlets).
They come with the person I'm going to interview.
Generally, at the most senior management levels.
They may sit in on phone calls.
Almost all interviews with CDC, FDA are monitored. NIH monitors some. At NIAID, they want to monitor and also demand quote approval. I have declined interviews because of these conditions. These conditions have worsened.
Usually, only with the top officials, NOAA chief or NWS chief and usually, when done from conference; during the weekend, when someone is caught in an unusual place or time.
I did an interview with a department of defense manager and the PIO provided a conference call line and participated in the conversation.
None

I can successfully interview subject matter experts without involving the public information office. Please give any examples.

Sources I've interviewed many times tend to be comfortable enough with me that they don't feel the need to involve their press office, especially if I'm calling with a quick question or just checking in on the status of a particular project or topic.
I've developed relations with someone who represents the team of writers, "Today in Energy" and he grants me the access I request.
If I call them directly and they agree to talk to me.
Depends on who I contact first.
Any time I contact an individual who has insight on a specific subject, I am referred back to the PIO.
I generally have the cell phone numbers of the people in charge of most of the agencies I cover. I usually start with them and shuffle my way down. In one case, with a particular large municipal utility, I usually start with the PIO and will receive either a response directly from the PIO or employee with knowledge. If I request an interview, it is usually granted.
I have a good relationship with the state epidemiologist, and have occasionally interviewed him without using an intermediary. If time allows, I generally go through a PIO, because that's their preferred protocol.
I don't really try to go around PIOs. I'm usually asking for company or agency responses, not really looking for personal opinions.
The PIO, as mentioned above, may be sitting in the room. He or she does not often interject comments during the

interview. In fact, at the conclusion of the interview, the PIO may leave the door open to additional requests for information or may offer to obtain studies or other documents that may help with my story.
National lab scientists about a published study.
Not recent examples
If you call a SC DHEC staffer, that person most often will tell you to call the public information office first. I've had the same experience with the EPA in Atlanta.
Sometimes I call sources directly, and sometimes they talk.
Get their number and call directly - some agencies are more forthcoming than others - the EPA is particularly bad at providing access to their experts and data.
If I interact with them at a conference or other public event where it's a one on one conversation.
I am 100 percent confident I could do the interview without them and largely have no need for them to be there.
Scientists at NASA are the easiest to interview in this regard.
I usually interview MDs and PhDs
The American Meteorological Society gave me excellent access to experts. The American Meteorological Society has also made experts available for interviews on numerous occasions at broadcast meteorology conferences and workshops.
Typically, someone has to review and approve the interview before it appears in print.
This does not apply to me. I gather information via press releases and vet in other ways.
Sometimes a journal article will provide the direct contact information for the author, and I can reach out to them that way.
Typically, I go straight to the source.
I usually will get comment from FDA administrators directly at scientific meetings I attend. Many times I quote from their public presentations. I also have direct content information for most of the sources I would use.
The only time I can successfully interview EPA officials without the intervention of a PIO is at an out-of-town conference. The folks know me, but they also know that the EPA press office will hound them if anything is reported that doesn't follow the party line.
Especially, on science-related matters. I usually must contact a public information office, but they refer me to the scientist or study writer, and I interview without interference.
Calls to Colorado River Basin Forecast Center
I've been on this beat for 22 years. I've covered the environment off and on over the last 40 years, and I'm versed in air quality, water issues, national parks, national forests, Superfund, hazardous waste disposal ... a lot of stuff. I often know as much of the history or more than PIOs. Most of the agencies I cover know that.
I don't often interview government officials in my shows; instead I rely on outside experts in their field.
NCDENR has enough employees and so, not all of them are under the thumb of their director. After eight years of reporting, I have some sources that will talk to me off the record and give pretty detailed info. At the federal level, EPA has never been easy to work with. If my phone call is answered or returned, I get a vague answer and reassurance that they're doing everything they can to keep everything safe. There aren't many truly scientific organizations in the area I cover. Probably, the one that's often overlooked is agriculture science. I get great responses from the academic community when I can catch them. This state has two major agricultural research schools with many knowledgeable staff members happy to talk about their agricultural study fields (Pun intended). I typically have to go through a university media liaison to find these sources, but only the first time. Once I have contact information, I can usually email them my questions and get a response. Health and medical news is a little harder. All questions must go through the local hospital's marketing department. Sometimes, it is several days before I hear back from someone. They sit in on my interviews, but they do give me access to department directors instead of just media people. Public health is trickier. I have their number, but they are always incredibly busy. Their department is a great resource for diseases and other health-related topics, but they are nearly impossible to reach. I don't think that's because they are avoiding me - when I have caught up with them, they have been nearly effusive with data and information. The local town is lucky enough to have several aerospace companies based here. Sadly, none of them have shown willingness to work with the local media. I got to tour a factory once - it was amazing. Nothing but multi-million dollar machines humming away while making helicopter engines. But I wasn't allowed to take photos or describe the machines in the story. Non-profit organizations that either commission or carry out

studies are quite responsive. It's one of the times I don't mind being sent up the chain of command, because the director (and they usually point me toward the director) knows the most about what the study contains. The problem with non-profits is that their data can be toward a particular political viewpoint. Those are ones to look out for.

For USDA, Smithsonian Institute, I believe I've been able to directly contact the expert I wish to speak to.

Even with the involvement of the public information officer, I am not allowed direct access at all.

I often call the experts I need to talk to directly without using a PIO. In the cases where I reach out to the PIO, they will give me the person's phone number, or have the person call me directly. The PIOs almost never sit in on the conversations.

To be honest I haven't tried this, I've always gone to the press office first.

It depends on the agency. NIH is generally helpful. CDC insists on being involved, but is also helpful. NOAA, it depends on the issue, but they are generally helpful. EPA stonewalls most of the time. Due to my news organization, I'm considered a high profile journalist by some agencies and that triggers extra steps.

Only the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the USGS and sometimes the U.S. Forest Service do not enforce a policy of having a PIO on the phone during interviews with officials.

All requests go through the PIO; some interviews are conducted with PIO present.

I have press numbers for specific offices or contact info for certain scientists; I often email them directly without any issues.

If we directly email physicians working for the VA, they sometimes respond without involving the public information office.

Information on GMOs is widely available outside public information offices.

I typically only speak with very busy people like the head of the National Hurricane Center and I understand that there's a process to follow. Most of the time, it works fine.

I call program manager X to discuss Y.

Nowadays, I can directly contact scientists at NASA and ask them questions. About a decade ago, this was not the case.

NOAA is one of the few agencies _ NASA is the same _ where I do not have to go through public information officers (except if I need to find people who I do not know to talk and in that case, they are helpful). EPA, FDA, CDC, NSF, USDA are quite different, they are more restrictive; but luckily, I spend more of my time with NOAA and NASA, which generally have good press practices unlike most of the federal government.

I provide climate forecasts without interference.

Appendix C: Survey Analysis

“Mediated Access: Science Writers’ Perceptions of Public Information Officers’ Media Control Effort”

Carolyn S. Carlson April 2015

Also available at: <http://spj.org/pdf/foi/science-writers-survey-report.pdf>

Summary

Science writers struggle to get information from government agencies for their stories, finding they must go through the public information office to contact the subject matter expert within the agency in order to get an interview. Then they have to wonder how candid their expert is being because the PIO always knows who is talking to which reporter and often sits in on the interview to monitor what is being said. But the PIO is a big help during times of crisis in getting information to the media via its website and social media accounts, as well as providing information not available online and experts for interviews, almost always on deadline. These are among the findings of a survey of science writers conducted jointly by the Center for Science and Democracy at the Union of Concerned Scientists and the Society of Professional Journalists. Ur mint landici tatestionet amusapitis anitio iliquia voluptas alia coremqu atiunda epelique voluptas solorporum valoratiate poremol oremoll oribea et ut invelent in adjust text as needed so the column break falls at the end of this line on the page.

Study Sample

The survey was conducted online Jan. 20, 2015, through Feb. 14, 2015. Email invitations were sent to a list of people identified as journalists interested in science, the environment, health and medicine. The list, purchased by the Society of Professional Journalists, originally had about 8,000 names on it; we took a sample of 2,000 names. After the initial email, the sample size shrunk to 1,667 due to bad email addresses, opt outs by people who were not journalists, etc. The sample was sent a postcard before the first email was sent urging them to participate in the survey. The postcard included a link and 11 people went ahead and did the survey using that link. The first email invitation was sent Jan. 20, 2015, followed by six reminder emails through Feb. 13, 2015. A total of 243 responded to the emails, making the total response 254 for a response rate of 15.23 percent. The margin of error for this sample size is 5.7 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

Of our respondents, 62.6 percent were full-time journalists working for legacy media (n=134), 20.6 percent were freelance journalists (n=44) and the rest were part-time or other, which included retired journalists and several television meteorologists who didn’t consider themselves journalists. Almost a quarter (23.2 percent) worked for newspapers, 22.3 percent worked for online-only media, 19.9 percent worked for magazines, 15.6 percent worked for television and the rest worked for radio, wire services or other outlets. Their beats were almost evenly divided between science (35.3%), environment (31.8%) and health and/or medicine (32.9%). Most spent at least half their time reporting on issues with a scientific component (35% more than 75%, 21% spent 50%-74%), with 24.8 percent spending 25 percent to 49 percent and 19.2 percent spending less than 25 percent of their time reporting scientific stories.

Sixty percent of the respondents said they mostly dealt with a public information office at the federal government level, while 21.4 percent that they mostly dealt with a state-level PIO, 6.9 percent with a regional PIO and 11.6 percent with a city, county or other local agency PIO. But when asked to identify the agency by name, 69.48 percent identified a federal agency, 17.53 percent a state agency, 7.79 percent a local agency and 5.19 percent some other agency.

The respondents were experienced journalists, with more than half having more than 20 years' experience (53%) as a journalist. The average age was 50, with a median age of 53.5. The predominant gender was male (54.1%). Ninety percent of the respondents were white (90.2%), with 3.8 percent Asian, 3.0 percent multiracial and 1.5 percent black.

General Findings

Public information offices routinely require reporters to get their approval before interviewing employees (30.7% all the time, 23.3% most of the time, 20.2% some of the time). Sometimes, when reporters ask to interview a specific subject matter expert, their request for an interview is routed to a different agency employee by the public information office (33.8% some of the time, 14.6% most of the time, 3.8% all the time). It's not unusual for reporters to have to make multiple requests for information and interviews when they go through the public information office to get access to a subject matter expert (44.8% some of the time, 17.8% most of the time, 4.9% all the time). But most of the time, the public information officers respond to requests for information and interviews in a timely manner (33.1% some of the time, 44.8% most of the time, 11.7% all the time).

About half of the respondents say it is unusual for public information officers to prevent reporters from interviewing agency employees in a timely manner (30.1% never, 23.9% rarely). But a third of respondents (35.0%) said they were blocked from interviewing subject matter experts some of the time (8.6% most of the time, 2.5% all the time). Of those who were prevented from interviewing, when asked to provide an explanation, many said the person they wanted to interview just wasn't available in the time frame they needed them (n=29, 30%), while others said they were told the person they wanted to interview either wasn't allowed or didn't want or was too busy to talk to them (n=25, 26%). "Our 'employee' typically (is) someone who has written a report, (but) is not allowed to do interviews," said one respondent. In some cases, the PIO gave out a statement in lieu of an interview (n=14, 14%). "The EPA refused an interview and sent a non-responsive boilerplate statement instead," said one respondent. But in many cases, no reason was given for the denial of an interview (n=23, 24%).

One respondent explained, "Much of the time it's difficult or impossible to talk to the persons most knowledgeable in federal agencies. They are usually scared rabbits, and if you call directly they will simply refer you to public affairs. Even if you start with public affairs, you will often be told that comments should come from them only, or it's not possible to comment on a pending matter, etc. If interview is granted with a knowledgeable staff member, there might be a long wait or an effort to vet your questions in advance. There's a lot of push and pull, and many times we have little or no leverage."

Reporters who manage to get an interview find the public information officer is often a third party to the interview – either monitoring it in person or listening in to the telephone call (31.8% some of the time, 19.5% most of the time, 6.5% all of the time). One respondent described his/her interviews as tightly controlled by the PIO: "Usually I'm required to submit questions first and then the interviewee is given the answers and not allowed to deviate. If I ask a different question, the person says he/she has to get permission to answer the question or send me the info I've requested." Some respondents cited specific agencies: "NIH, my main beat, usually lets me talk to scientists unmonitored, and when they do sit in, they say it's because they want to get up to speed with what the researcher is doing for planning their own coverage, which I think is usually legitimate. VA and DOD can be ridiculous, cutting researchers off mid-sentence if they're saying something they shouldn't," said one respondent. "Our local hospital always has a marketing representative on the line during interviews, but they never interrupt. I think they would if I asked something that wasn't legal for them to answer. But it has always kind of bothered me. I don't think my sources have answered differently because of it, but I'll never really know," said another respondent.

Many reporters said they could successfully interview subject matter experts without involving the public information office (34.2% some of the time, 21.9% most of the time, 10.3% all of the time). Often, these were people they met at conferences or meetings, or had long-term relationships with. One respondent said, "The only time I can successfully interview EPA officials without the intervention of a PIO is at an out-of-town conference. The folks know me but they also know that the EPA Press Office will hound them if anything is reported that doesn't follow the party line." Others reported there are specific organizations that do not require them to go through the PIO first. One respondent explained, "NOAA is one of the few agencies _ NASA is the same _ where I do not have to go through public information officers (except if I need to find people to talk who I do not know and in that case they are helpful). EPA, FDA, CDC, NSF, USDA are quite different, are more restrictive; but luckily I spend more of my time with NOAA and NASA, which generally have good press practices unlike most of the federal government."

Despite some complaints, most of the science writers said they have a positive working relationship with public information officers that helps them get in touch with the subject matter experts they need to speak with (31.9% somewhat agree, 31.9% strongly agree). However, the majority also feel that the public is not getting all the information it needs because of the barriers that agencies are imposing on journalists' reporting practices (31.8% somewhat agree, 25.0% strongly agree). And they think the situation has not gotten better over the past five years. Almost half say their ability to access government subject matter experts has stayed the same over the past five years (45.4%), while a quarter said it has gotten marginally more difficult (24.8%) and more said it has become significantly more difficult (14.9%).

Findings on Crises Reporting

Approximately 90 of the science writers had sought information from a government agency during an emergency or crisis situation, varying from infectious disease (n=21) and epidemics (n=10) to storms (n=16), hurricanes (n=4), tornadoes (n=6) and floods (n=6). More than half of them were trying to get information from federal agencies (52.11%), with the rest going to state agencies (21.13%), local government agencies (8.45%,) and other agencies (18.31%). Only one in five said they learned about the emergency from the agency's public information office (22.6%), while most learned about it from the public or a source (56.6%) or some other means.

During the emergency, three-fourths of the science writers either were not able to (35.1%) or did not try to speak with subject matter experts (n=38.3%) without first going through the public information office. Only 26.6 percent said they went straight to the subject matter experts without going through the public information office.

Almost half of the science writers got at least some of the information they needed on the crisis from the agency's website or its social media accounts such as Twitter or Facebook (48.4%), and 20.9% said they only got a little of that information from the agency's online efforts.

Most of the respondents reported that the information they needed had been posted on the website or social media accounts by the public information officers within hours of its availability (51.6%) and a good number said it was there within minutes (25.8%). However some said the information didn't show up for days (19.4%).

Public information offices were responsive during the crisis for the most part, when reporters contacted them for information that was not included on the website or social media accounts, responding within minutes (17.6%) sometimes and more often within hours (57.4%) and a few times within days (16.2%). Only five respondents (7.4%) said they never got a response when asking for information not on the website or social media accounts. Overall, for four out of five respondents the response that they did get met their deadline (81%). Similarly, about half reported that the PIO was able to connect them with experts who could comment on the crisis or emergency within hours of their request (49.2%). Some said it took days (15.4%) and some said they were never connected with the experts they needed (20%). Most said they got to their expert within their deadline (84.3%).

Comparison to Earlier Surveys

This is the fourth survey of reporters that the Society of Professional Journalists has sponsored since 2012. The first surveyed [Washington-area reporters](#) who covered federal agencies. The second surveyed members of the [Education Writers Association](#) and the third was a national survey of [state and local political reporters](#). The second and third surveys were released in 2014. The four surveys had several questions in common and this section compared the results of the science writers' survey with the previous surveys.

In nearly every case, the results from the science writers' survey were significantly less severe than results from the federal reporters' survey in 2012 and in many cases from the education writers and local reporters' surveys in 2014. (See Appendix C) For the question "I am required to obtain approval from the public information office before interviewing employees," 54 percent of science writers said this happened most or all of the time, which was on par with the answers from local reporters (52.8%) and education writers (55.5%), but significantly lower than the federal reporters' answers (78%).

Almost half of science writers said they had been prevented from interviewing agency employees in a timely manner at least some of the time (46.1%), which was significantly more than education writers, when 32.6 percent said they had been prohibited from interviewing at least some of the time, but was significantly less than the federal reporters, when 69 percent

reported having been prohibited from interviewing at least some of the time. It was on par with local reporters, where 51.4 percent said they were blocked from interviews at least some of the time.

Science writers were by far the least likely to complain about their requests for interviews being selectively routed by PIOs to other agency employees. Just 18.4 percent of science writers said this happened most or all of the time, which is significantly less than the 67 percent of federal agency reporters and 37.2 percent of education writers and 30.5 percent of local reporters.

Monitoring is common throughout, apparently, with more than half of local reporters (53%) and science writers (57.8%) reporting it happens at least some of the time. But for federal agency reporters (84%) and education writers (71.1%), it is significantly more likely to happen at least some of the time.

The federal reporters also were significantly less like to answer all or most of the time when asked if PIOs responded to requests for interviews or information in a timely manner (37%) compared with science writers (56.5%) or local reporters (51.8%) or education writers (52.5%).

Science writers are the most successful at getting interviews without involving the public information office, with 32.2 percent saying they can do that most or all of the time. That's significantly more than the 17.6 percent of local reporters, 21.3 percent of education writers and 15 percent of federal reporters who say they can successfully interview subject matter experts without involving the public information office.

But science writers are somewhat less likely to report a positive working relationship with PIOs that helps them get in touch with the subject matter experts they need to speak with. Only 63.8 percent agreed that they had a positive relationship with the PIOs, which was significantly less than the 73.3 percent of local reporters who agreed and the 78.8 percent of education writers who agreed. Their answers were on par with but slightly below the 70 percent of federal agency reporters who agreed that they had a positive relationship with the PIOs.

Finally, science writers were the least concerned about the public not getting the information it needs because of barriers that agencies are imposing on journalists' reporting practices. Only 56.8 percent agreed with that statement, which was significantly less than the 76.1 percent for education writers, 77.7 percent for local reporters and 85 percent for federal agency reporters.

Conclusion

The analysis of the science writers' survey compared with the earlier surveys of political and education reporters indicates the science agencies may be more open and less controlling than other types of government agencies -- there may be more protection for scientists to speak openly as opposed to other people. Also, it appears a good number of science writers are better able to develop relationships with their subject matter expert sources than other types of reporters, thus mitigating the public information offices' efforts at media control.

However, the science writers' survey shows that there are still extensive restraints on experts and journalists communicating with each other. While they may not be as concerned as respondents in previous surveys, a majority of science journalists surveyed here still said that the public is not getting all the information it needs because of barriers agencies impose. The hazard of suppression of information and ideas is multifold. It includes muddling of understanding needed to solve problems, even among scientists themselves; manipulation of the public for various motivations; and the indefinite veiling of problems and malfeasance. Both the science and the journalism communities may want to consider issues the current situation presents in light of these findings.

Sponsors and Author

The survey was conducted by Dr. Carolyn S. Carlson, an assistant professor of communication at Kennesaw State University and a member of the Society of Professional Journalists' Freedom of Information Committee. She was assisted by graduate research assistants Megan Roy and Ngozi Maduoma.

Sponsors of the survey were the Center for Science and Democracy at the Union of Concerned Scientists and the Society of Professional Journalists.

The Union of Concerned Scientists puts rigorous, independent science to work to solve our planet's most pressing problems. Joining with citizens across the country, we combine technical analysis and effective advocacy to create innovative, practical solutions for a healthy, safe, and sustainable future.

Founded in 1909 as Sigma Delta Chi, SPJ promotes the free flow of information vital to a well-informed citizenry, works to inspire and educate the next generation of journalists; and protects First Amendment guarantees of freedom of speech and press. For more information about SPJ, visit spj.org.

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Appendix D: Request for Supplemental Information

Dear Journalist,

The Union of Concerned Scientists, in collaboration with the Society of Professional Journalists, is conducting research on how well journalists are able to access scientists at federal agencies. If you have experience reaching out to scientists at federal agencies, we want to hear from you!

Earlier this year we sent out a survey to a sample of journalists who self-identified as environment, health, or science reporters. Analysis of the survey data is currently ongoing. Results will be disclosed and discussed on April 9 at an event at the National Press Club.

The purpose of this email is to gather supplemental information that will be combined with the survey results and published in a report to be released in June. Whether or not you completed the survey, we welcome your responses to any or all of the following questions:

- How easily are you able to speak with subject matter experts at the federal agencies you contact most frequently? What are the agencies? What obstacles have you encountered?
- Was there ever an emergency or crisis situation you were covering when you needed to speak with someone at an agency but had difficulty reaching someone who could answer your questions to your satisfaction? Please explain.
- Do you have positive working relationships with public affairs officials or agency scientists that help you get information you need? At which agencies?
- If you have more than 6 years of experience covering environment, health, or science, have you observed any changes, for better or worse, in your ability to speak with federal scientists?
- Are there other issues you think we should know about based on your experiences interacting with public information officers and/or scientists at federal agencies? Please explain.

Your responses will be kept strictly anonymous unless you wish to be identified. Please send your responses to Deborah Bailin at dbailin@ucsusa.org in the body of an email or as a Word attachment, and indicate if you prefer to remain anonymous or are willing to allow us to quote you by name. Additionally, please let us know if you would be willing to participate in a follow-up phone interview.

The deadline to send a response is Thursday, April 9, 2015.

Your response is important! It will aid our work in trying to improve government transparency and communication with the media by subject matter experts.