

Mediated Access: Public Information Officers' Perceptions of Media Control

By Carolyn S. Carlson
and Roberta Jackson¹

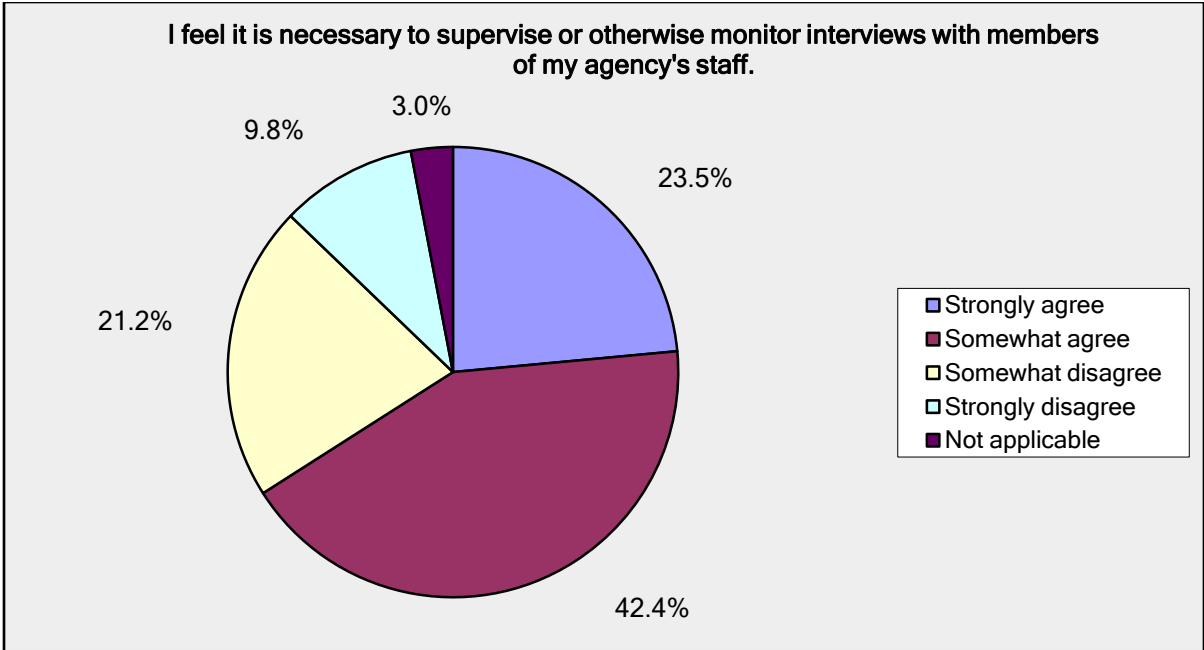
March 10, 2013

Monitoring reporters' interviews with government officials has become a routine practice among government public relations officials, mainly to protect against misquotes, according to a survey undertaken by the Society of Professional Journalists and the National Association of Government Communicators for Sunshine Week 2013. Surveyed were 154 current and former members of the National Association of Government Communicators, almost all of whom were currently employed as a public information officer or public affairs officer for a federal, state or local government agency. The survey was a response to an earlier survey, from 2012, of federal government reporters who indicated they felt PIO/PAO monitoring of their interviews and other forms of media control were a form of government censorship.

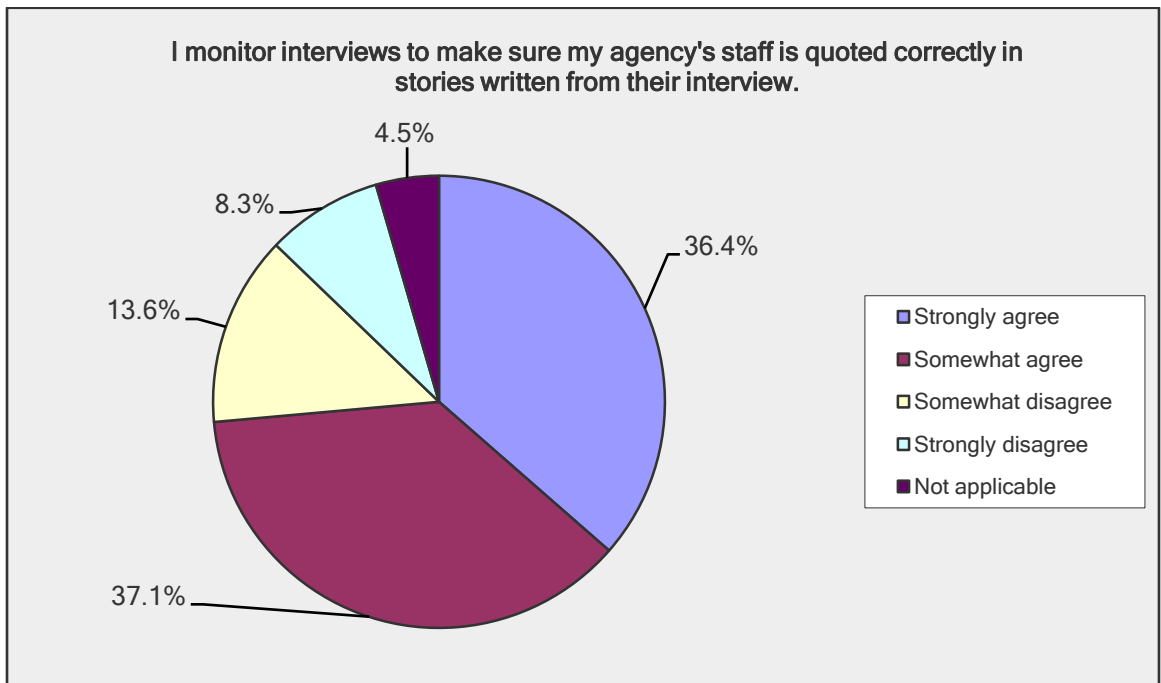
SUMMARY FINDINGS

- **Monitoring:** About 65 percent of the professionals interviewed agreed they feel it is necessary to supervise or otherwise monitor interviews with members of their agency's staff, but mainly for follow up or to assist their employee (n=33). "It makes sense to be there from a follow-up standpoint, or if questions come up about other parts of the department. I think it's my responsibility to coordinate and be present for interviews." The remaining third of respondents who disagreed with monitoring said they utilize subject matter experts and trust the staff. "We have subject matter experts who know their stuff and who know how to provide information to journalists and do so often."

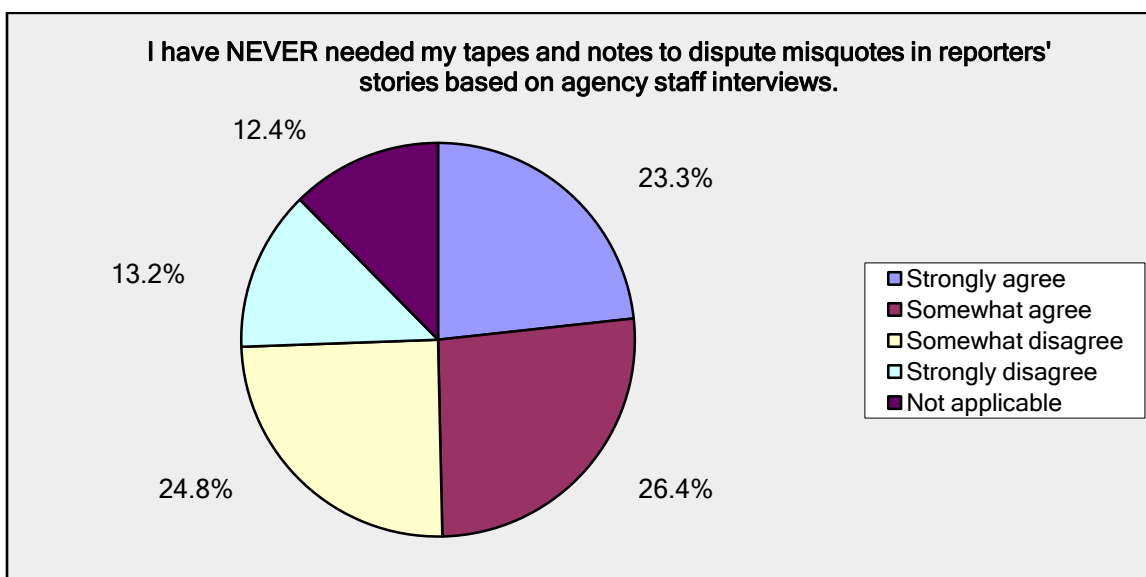
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- Getting quotes right:** Even so, about 75 percent of the public affairs officers and public information officers said they agreed that monitoring interviews was a good way to make sure their agency's staff was quoted correctly in the stories written from their interviews.

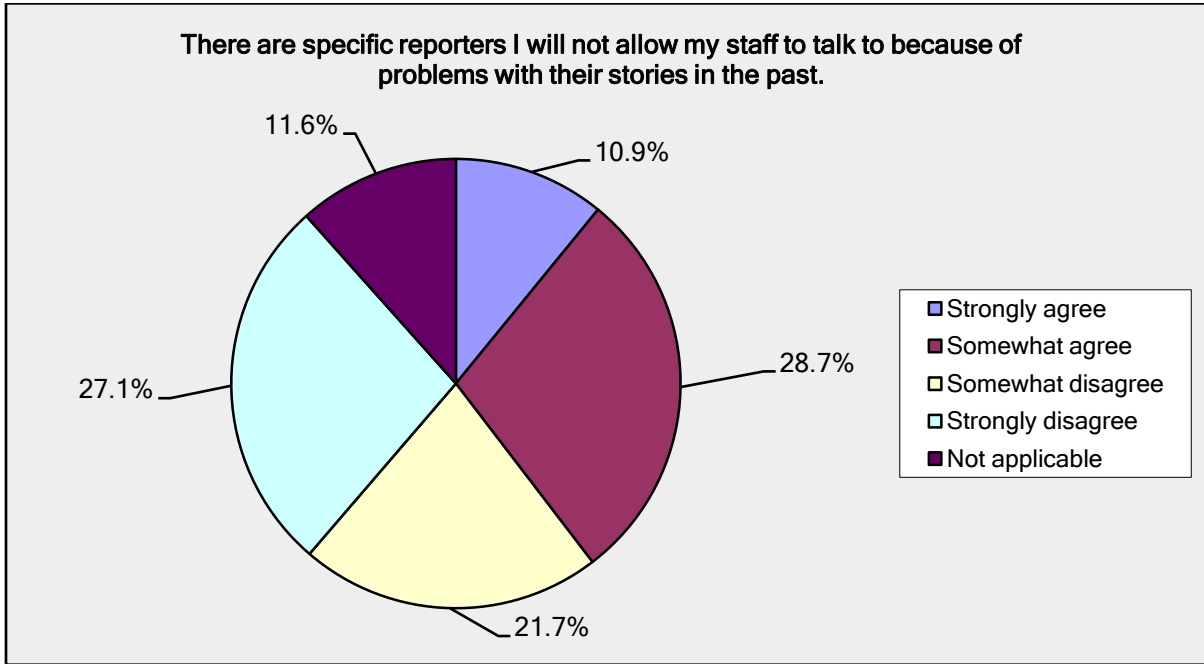


- Usage of tapes/notes:** Half of the respondents said they do not need their tapes and notes to dispute misquotes in reporters' stories based on agency staff interviews (49.7%, n=4). "I've done over 30,000 interviews by myself or with staff members and have never taped or taken down notes of quotes. If I have a problem with a quote, I call the reporter and talk to him/her." 38 percent said they did use their tapes and notes to dispute misquotes due to information taken out of context. "This tends to occur with reporters from trade media, which frequently take quotes out of context or use portions of quotes which reinforce a point they wish to make."



- Media Access:** 39 percent of respondents agreed there are specific reporters they will not allow their staff to talk to due to problems with their stories in the past (39.6%, n=51). "A few staff members are off-limits to certain reporters due to problematic unprofessional behavior by the reporters." But another respondent said, "We do not stop anyone from talking to a reporter who may have been a

problem in the past, but do remind him/her of previous problem, then monitor his/her story that follows very closely.”



STUDY SAMPLE

In all, 154 respondents (8.85 percent) completed the survey. Emails asking current and former members of NAGC to participate in the Survey Monkey questionnaire were sent to 1,739 people multiple times between Oct. 10, 2012 and Nov. 15, 2012 – the time was extended due to disruptions caused by Superstorm Sandy. The margin of error at a 95 percent confidence level for a sample of 154 is 4.3 percent.

Eighty-nine percent (n=138) of respondents were employed as a public information officer, public affairs officer, or public relations practitioner in a government office. The remaining ten-percent (n=16) surveyed were currently employed in some other role. Almost all were full-time employees (81%, n=111), a few were part-time (2.9%, n=4) and the remaining employees had other positions (16.1%, n=22).

A little less than half of employees surveyed were between the ages of 45 and 54 (44%, n=47), one quarter between the ages of 55 and 64 (26%, n=28) and one quarter between 35 and 44 (23%, n=23), five between 25 and 34 (5%, n=5), and two were with sixty-five and older (1%, n=1) or 18-24 (1%, n=1).

Out of the 133 respondents who answered this question, a third of the employees said they work for other federal agencies (30.8%, n=41), 23 said state executive branch agency or governor's office (17.3%), the next category tied with employees working for city or township government (14.3%, n=19) and county government (14.3%, n=19), 18 said federal defense-related agency (homeland security, state, defense, veterans affairs, 13.5%), 7 said other non-federal agencies (5.3%), 5 said state legislative or judicial branch (3.8%), and less than one-percent said congress or white house (0.8%, n=1)

More than half of the respondents had held their job between three and 10 years (3 to 5 years, 18.1%, n=23, 5 to 10 years, 34.6%, n=44), while a quarter had more than 10 years on the job (11 to 20 years, 26.0%, n=33). A little over 20 percent had less than three years (11.0%, n=14), or more than 20 years (10.2%, n=13).

Of the two categories of experience as a public affairs officer or public relations officer more than 60 percent had more than 11 years experience as a government public affairs officer (11 to 20 years, 30.6%, n=38, more than 20 years, 30.6%, n=38). Twenty-nine percent said 5 to 10 years (n=36) and the rest said less than five years (3 to 5 years, 6.5%, n=8, less than 3 years, 3.2%, n=4). Experience as a public relations professional more than 50 percent said between five to 20 years (10 to 20 years, 32.3%, n=41, 5 to 10 years, 20.5%, n=26), 41 percent said more than 20 years (41.7%, n=53), and the rest said less than five years (5.5%, n=7). Over half said they previously worked as a journalist (52.0%, n=66) where the other half had not worked as a journalist before their current role (48.0%, n=61). Almost all respondents held a bachelors degree or higher (four-year/bachelor degree, 52.0%, n=66, graduate/professional degree, 44.9%, n=57, doctoral/terminal degree, 1.6%, n=2), as the remainder held an associate or lower (associate degree, .08%, n=1, high school diploma, 0.8%, n=1).

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Are you currently employed as a public affairs officer, public information officer, or public relations practitioner in a government agency?

Yes	138	89.6%
No	16	10.4%

What is your current status as a PIO/PAO?

I work full-time as a PIO/PAO	111	81.0%
I work part-time as a PIO/PAO	4	2.9%
Other	22	16.1%

What type of government agency do you work for?

City or township government	19	14.3%
County government	19	14.3%
State legislative or judicial branch	5	3.8%
State executive branch agency or governor's office	23	17.3%
Federal defense-related agency (homeland security, state, defense, veterans affairs)	18	13.5%
Congress or White House	1	0.8%
Other federal agencies	41	30.8%
Other non-federal agencies	7	5.3%

I believe my job is to make sure accurate, positive information from my agency is conveyed to the public.

Strongly agree	105	77.8%
Somewhat agree	26	19.3%
Somewhat disagree	1	0.7%
Strongly disagree	3	2.2%
Not applicable	0	0.0%

I believe that controlling media coverage of the agency is a very important part of protecting the agency's reputation.

Strongly agree	27	20.0%
Somewhat agree	58	43.0%
Somewhat disagree	31	23.0%
Strongly disagree	18	13.3%
Not applicable	1	0.7%

I feel justified in refusing to allow reporters to conduct an interview if I feel it could compromise agency security or reveal damaging information.

Strongly agree	37	27.6%
Somewhat agree	53	39.6%
Somewhat disagree	22	16.4%
Strongly disagree	13	9.7%
Not applicable	9	6.7%

I respond to requests for interviews when it is convenient for me, not within any specific time frame.

Strongly agree	0	0.0%
Somewhat agree	6	4.5%
Somewhat disagree	25	18.8%
Strongly disagree	100	75.2%
Not applicable	2	1.5%

I think reporters have an unrealistic expectation of response time in their requests for interviews or information.

Strongly agree	6	4.5%
Somewhat agree	58	43.6%
Somewhat disagree	42	31.6%
Strongly disagree	27	20.3%
Not applicable	0	0.0%

I do NOT adhere to set criteria for determining which staff member(s) will be interviewed and whether an interview will be granted.

Strongly agree	20	15.0%
Somewhat agree	35	26.3%
Somewhat disagree	29	21.8%
Strongly disagree	43	32.3%
Not applicable	6	4.5%

I feel that reporters have a better idea than I as to who would be the best person in the agency for them to interview on a given topic.

Strongly agree	2	1.5%
Somewhat agree	1	0.8%
Somewhat disagree	24	18.0%
Strongly disagree	106	79.7%
Not applicable	0	0.0%

I do not believe that journalists would attempt to "go around" me and contact agency staff members directly.²

Strongly agree	4	3.0%
Somewhat agree	25	18.8%
Somewhat disagree	37	27.8%
Strongly disagree	64	48.1%
Not applicable	3	2.3%

My agency staff members know to and will refer reporters to me when they have been contacted directly by reporters.

Strongly agree	78	59.1%
Somewhat agree	42	31.8%
Somewhat disagree	4	3.0%
Strongly disagree	2	1.5%

² Open-ended comments for this and subsequent questions can be found in Appendix A.

Not applicable	6	4.5%
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All of my staff members can be fully trusted to give reporters an interview that would represent the agency well.

Strongly agree	22	16.8%
Somewhat agree	48	36.6%
Somewhat disagree	34	26.0%
Strongly disagree	21	16.0%
Not applicable	6	4.6%

I feel it is necessary to supervise or otherwise monitor interviews with members of my agency's staff.

Strongly agree	31	23.5%
Somewhat agree	56	42.4%
Somewhat disagree	28	21.2%
Strongly disagree	13	9.8%
Not applicable	4	3.0%

I monitor interviews to make sure my agency's staff is quoted correctly in stories written from their interview.

Strongly agree	48	36.4%
Somewhat agree	49	37.1%
Somewhat disagree	18	13.6%
Strongly disagree	11	8.3%
Not applicable	6	4.5%

I have NEVER needed my tapes and notes to dispute misquotes in reporters' stories based on agency staff interviews.

Strongly agree	30	23.3%
Somewhat agree	34	26.4%
Somewhat disagree	32	24.8%

Strongly disagree	17	13.2%
Not applicable	16	12.4%

I require at least some reporters to review the quotes they are going to use with me before publishing or airing their stories.

Strongly agree	4	3.1%
Somewhat agree	18	14.0%
Somewhat disagree	28	21.7%
Strongly disagree	68	52.7%
Not applicable	11	8.5%

There are specific reporters I will not allow my staff to talk to because of problems with their stories in the past.

Strongly agree	14	10.9%
Somewhat agree	37	28.7%
Somewhat disagree	28	21.7%
Strongly disagree	35	27.1%
Not applicable	15	11.6%

There are entire media outlets I will not allow my staff to talk to because of problems with their stories in the past.

Strongly agree	3	2.4%
Somewhat agree	15	11.8%
Somewhat disagree	21	16.5%
Strongly disagree	76	59.8%
Not applicable	12	9.4%

I do not have the authority to release information directly to the media without an internal clearing process.

Strongly agree	28	22.0%
Somewhat agree	30	23.6%
Somewhat disagree	35	27.6%

Strongly disagree	34	26.8%
Not applicable	0	0.0%

My organization requires multiple levels of clearance before information can be released to the media.

Strongly agree	26	20.5%
Somewhat agree	29	22.8%
Somewhat disagree	33	26.0%
Strongly disagree	39	30.7%
Not applicable	0	0.0%

There are certain reporters that my agency trusts to contact agency staff directly without having to go through the public affairs office.

Strongly agree	16	12.6%
Somewhat agree	32	25.2%
Somewhat disagree	14	11.0%
Strongly disagree	53	41.7%
Not applicable	12	9.4%

My relationship with most of my beat reporters is best described as:

Trusting and friendly	30	23.8%
Professional and courteous	91	72.2%
Strictly business	5	4.0%
We tolerate each other	0	0.0%
Adversarial	0	0.0%

How much experience do you have as a government public affairs officer?

Less than 3 years	4	3.2%
3 to 5 years	8	6.5%
5 to 10 years	36	29.0%

11 to 20 years	38	30.6%
More then 20 years	38	30.6%
How much experience do you have as a public relations professional?		
Less than 5 years	7	5.5%
5 to 10 years	26	20.5%
10 to 20 years	41	32.3%
More then 20 years	53	41.7%
How long have you held your current job?		
Less than 3 years	14	11.0%
3 to 5 years	23	18.1%
5 to 10 years	44	34.6%
11 to 20 years	33	26.0%
More then 20 years	13	10.2%
Have you ever worked as a journalist?		
Yes	66	52.0%
No	61	48.0%
How long did you work as a journalist?		
0-5 years	39	57.4%
5 to 10 years	14	20.6%
10 to 15 years	6	8.8%
More than 15 years	9	13.2%
What is your gender?		
Male	48	38.1%
Female	78	61.9%

Do you consider yourself to be of Hispanic or Latino origin?

Yes	8	6.5%
No	116	93.5%

What racial or ethnic group do you consider yourself to be?

American Indian or Alaskan Native	0	0.0%
Asian	0	0.0%
Black or African American	8	6.6%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	4	3.3%
White	109	90.1%
Multiracial	0	0.0%

What is your highest level of education?

High School	1	0.8%
Associate Degree	1	0.8%
Four-year/Bachelor Degree	66	52.0%
Graduate/Professional Degree	57	44.9%
Doctoral/Terminal Degree	2	1.6%

What was your principal area of study?

Communication	59	53.6%
Journalism	52	47.3%
Public Relations	24	21.8%
Advertising/Marketing	8	7.3%
Public Administration/Political Science	17	15.5%

2012 SPJ SURVEY SUMMARY

On the eve of Sunshine Week 2012, a survey of journalists who cover federal agencies found that information flow in the United States is highly regulated by public affairs officers, to the point where most reporters considered the control to be a form of

ensorship and an impediment to providing information to the public. According to a survey of 146 reporters who cover federal agencies, conducted by the Society of Professional Journalists in February 2012, journalists indicated that public information officers often require pre-approval for interviews, prohibit interviews of agency employees, and often monitor interviews. Journalists overwhelmingly agreed with the statement that “the public was not getting all the information it needs because of barriers agencies are imposing on journalists’ reporting practices.

To review the entire report, go to
<http://www.spj.org/news.asp?REF=1099#1099>

SURVEY SPONSORS

The National Association of Government Communicators (NAGC) is a national not-for-profit professional network of federal, state, local and tribal government employees who disseminate information within and outside government. The members are editors, writers, graphic artists, broadcasters, photographers, information specialists, and agency spokespersons. The NAGC is the only association for, by and about government communicators. The members are guided by a professional code of ethics which demands complete and timely communication between government and the people it serves. For more information on NAGC, please visit www.nagconline.org.

The Society of Professional Journalists is the nation’s largest and most broad-based professional organization for journalists. 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 on SPJ, please visit www.spj.org.

RESEARCHERS

The survey was conducted by Dr. Carolyn S. Carlson, an assistant professor of

communication at Kennesaw State University in Kennesaw, Ga. Dr. Carlson is a member of the SPJ Freedom of Information Committee and a former national president of SPJ. Roberta Jackson is a graduate research assistant at Kennesaw State University.

The project was undertaken on behalf of the SPJ FOI Committee to mark Sunshine Week 2013, March 10-16, celebrating Your Right To Know.

Appendix A: Open ended comments

<p>11. I do not believe that journalists would attempt to "go around" me and contact agency staff members directly. If you disagree, please cite an example.</p>
<p>Our agency has a decentralized policy of media relations, therefore reporters are welcome to either go through PIO or contact agency staff members directly.</p>
<p>There are reporters who will call staff members in various divisions to gain access.</p>
<p>On several occasions reporters, who know who I am and what my role is, have specifically contacted lower level staff trying to get them to speak on record about an issue.</p>
<p>Some agency staff who have talked with media in the past report direct contacts - not necessarily as an "end around" from me, but they may feel that they know exactly who to talk to, and therefore don't feel it's necessary to go through me. We try to discourage that; we want a single point of contact for all media in our agency.</p>
<p>Journalists attempt to do this on a fairly regular basis.</p>
<p>It's usually not subterfuge, sometimes reporters simply become aware of a good source on a topic, and it has become easier to contact sources directly via e-mail. I have not encountered overt end-runs or hostility, but I know that does occur.</p>
<p>Please do not write double negative questions and expect us to know what you are getting at. I'm supposed to disagree with what I do not believe? Say, what?</p>
<p>There have been cases when articles and television packages have been produced without the knowledge of the communications staff.</p>
<p>Journalist have a story to file and will do what they need to do to get that story, including going around perceived obstacles.</p>
<p>This has happened, but mostly with reporters who do not cover my agency regularly. When it has happened, the staff members the reporters contacted have directed them to me, as is required by agency policy.</p>
<p>Depends on the subject.</p>
<p>City employees are routinely contacted directly by journalists.</p>
<p>Many journalists know people at my agency from conferences or other interactions, and still others would go straight to the General Counsel or the head of the agency, if they saw fit.</p>
<p>Most often, reporters simply think they know best or don't know about my role to help facilitate the best subject matter expert for their interviews. I have heard of others having experience with reporters trying to "go around them", but personally I have found it done inadvertently through ignorance rather than out of malevolent intent.</p>
<p>Just the other day, a reporter called someone in EPI without going through the PIO office to talk about the meningitis situation.</p>
<p>Reporters call agency attorneys directly without first contacting the PA office for approval/coordination. They get names from public court documents on specific cases.</p>
<p>Journalists often call program managers first, and then are directed to me. Sometimes this is because the journalist is unaware of the protocol of the agency, and sometimes they do it intentionally.</p>
<p>Many reporters have existing relationships with key staffers. They inevitably try those first. If that isn't working, they come to me.</p>
<p>Several times reporters have done just that, but our staff is well trained and has not done interviews (even off the record) unless approved.</p>
<p>I have received requests from media for information via calls placed to staff in our library department.</p>
<p>This depends on the individual reporter, but reporters with knowledge of our agency are very likely to go around me or other PIO/PAO staff and directly contact agency staff. On the other hand, general assignment reporters or others with limited knowledge usually start with our staff because they have no idea where to begin within in the agency's ranks.</p>
<p>This happens often. I work with subject matter experts who are quoted; journalists simply google the name and send the person an email. It does not bother me that they "go around" our office; it is understandable that they do this in the digital era.</p>

<p>It happens all the time because we're a small organization, and once a reporter gets to know a staff member, they often call directly. Staff members are instructed to let me know about such calls; however, so there are no surprises when the interview airs or the story appears in the paper. We notify City Council and management staff daily of media calls and requests for interviews.</p>
<p>Reporters often seek information from multiple sources within the organization.</p>
<p>A reporter, who knows full well what our process is, went straight to an agency director instead of calling me first.</p>
<p>I have had journalists who have established relationships with program specialists, economists, or similar subject-matter experts. They contacted those individuals directly without going through me. When quoted, I was the one contacted by senior officials in the agency, or worse, in the department to explain why the individual spoke.</p>
<p>Too many to list.</p>
<p>While trying to gather information for a media request, this reporter was too anxious to wait for a response and turned around and called an elected official.</p>
<p>Reporter many times want to present "their view" not necessarily accurate; reporting today is political not factual.</p>
<p>Once media contacts, especially trade press, obtain a contact SME they often go directly to the SME (for an interview, quick question, statistic, etc.) without following protocol. This is routine.</p>
<p>I get calls from staff when reporters have contacted them directly without contacting me first.</p>
<p>Reporters who have not worked with us before calling directly on technical staff after seeing their name in a conference program. A former reporter turned academic contacting staff throughout the agency for various requests.</p>
<p>Social Media has changed the way journalists can interact with everyone.</p>
<p>Our regular beat reporters and the more seasoned reporters at major media outlets work with us and trust us as a resource. They know we will work hard for them and get factual, plain English responses. We will get them interviews with the right people when necessary, otherwise provide information directly (not every answer needs to be from head of the agency). Many smaller news outlets, blogs and sensational "investigative" reporter tactics are alarming and are a disservice to the public because they aren't straight forward with a request and a lot of time is wasted with them trying to "prove their angle" instead of getting facts for a balanced story. There is also an abuse of staff when calling after hours or at 5 p.m. with a 5:30 deadline for non-breaking news (they forgot to call), that needs to be researched (for facts!), and then having the audacity to print the agency couldn't be reached when the reality is the reporter was late or sloppy.</p>
<p>It is a reporter's job to obtain factual information from the best source of information. A good reporter would not hesitate to go directly to the source.</p>
<p>I'm the PIO for a 9-1-1 Center and reporters have "gone around" me to the County Commissioners regarding a police incident.</p>
<p>Reporters are welcome to contact our scientists directly. They go through me for assistance in finding the right person, but my agency has no problem with reporters directly contacting our staff. We ask that our staff let us know when contacted by the news media, but we (Communications Office) are not a gateway that a reporter needs to "go around."</p>
<p>In certain situations, particularly if they feel that they are "uncovering" a new lead or story.</p>
<p>They try, but our county has a policy that requires that any time the media contact a staff person or department head, that I be notified before they can talk to them.</p>
<p>I have reporters who will contact me, subject matter experts, and upper management all at the same time. It leads to complete chaos.</p>
<p>Many reporters do it, only to find they're trying to interview the wrong person or to the detriment of their deadlines. Smart reporters understand it's much faster for them to go through the PIO office.</p>
<p>Reporters have obtained contact information from social media sources to track down a staff member.</p>
<p>Journalists typically avoid talking with me if they can speak directly with someone who has first-hand knowledge/experience on an issue.</p>
<p>The reporters who cover our state house have the cell numbers of leadership but do not abuse this privilege.</p>
<p>Have only had a few instances, but have had reporters go to other staff knowing I'm the PIO. Also have had reporters get offended when staff have referred them to me.</p>

Reporters who routinely interact with certain department, personnel start to feel that going through a PIO is just an added, unnecessary step.
After repeated denials to interview the Agency's leadership, an investigative reporter at a waste, fraud and abuse watchdog organization called agency staff on their personal cell phones; and a TV reporter working with the same organization took a camera crew to an Agency office to try to get a comment from agency staff and aired the footage.
When I found out our Fire Chief was interviewed by watching it on the news.
Our local reporter often times goes directly to our police chief to get a quote, instead of calling me first. This is after we've told the reporter to contact me (our PIO) first.
Most reporters know that they need to work through the PA office; however there are reporters who will call principals directly on their cell phones.
Reporters, especially print reporters, often have independent relationships with staff such as senior management. They may not intentionally try to "go around," but they will sometimes go directly to the person they wish to interview.
There are some journalists that feel they need to talk to someone in charge instead of other subordinates who would provide the same information.
I don't think reporters "go around" me; sometimes they just don't know who to contact.
Reporters are free to call staff directly at any time. Staff are educated to know that they need to ask a few questions - -what are you calling about, what's your deadline, -- and then call me. If it's a simple inquiry -- how many people in homeless shelters last night? -- staff answer. If it's a political question -- why are we paying for so many homeless people? -- then I call the reporter and recommend a different person to address. Reporters get it. Staff does the work but decisions about what we do or don't do are made at the elected levels.
Journalists go around the public affairs office all the time. Sometimes, they get a name from someone else they interviewed from another agency or company, so they contact that person directly. I believe most journalists know that they need to go through a PAO when contacting a government employee, but reach out directly to people anyway. The usual excuse is that they don't know who to contact at the agency so they research the contact info for the person whose name they just received. Note: This doesn't happen with journalists with whom the PAO has established a relationship. It sometimes happens when a journalist is following up on a press release or some other material issued from the PAO, even though the PAO contact info is usually right on the product.
Most contact me first, but there are those few that bypass me with frequency.
Navy Times repeatedly cold calls staff at HQ requesting information even after repeated interaction with my staff. 60 minutes does this when advantageous NPR reporter in Seattle did it to me twice on a story after he got phone contact info from a previous interview Have had a couple bloggers do this as well
The City hasn't had a public affairs officer with experience in government communications, so the media are in the practice of calling employees directly. It's not necessarily an attempt to 'go around' me; it's more that that is the way it's always been done.
Multiple people may be emailed with the same inquiry.
Most of the recent questions have many what ifs. Such as #10, what if a reporter is green on their beat, then yes. If they know their beat, then maybe. I think a comment box on each question would give you more valuable data to use.
If a reporter covers us regularly they often have a previous interview's e-mail and it has been noted if they feel somewhat comfortable with the subject of the interview they will try him/her first, especially if they think PAO would intervene on the topic.
This happens at least a couple of times a year mostly from political reporters and yearly from news reporters.
They do it all the time via email more and more.
I've had a reporter call an auditor directly trying to get clean copies of audit reports. The auditor sent me

the call; they got copies of the reports with confidential information redacted.
Many journalists have long-standing relationships with senior officials. While the journalists generally contact me for interviews, there are instances where impromptu talks take place at social functions or while in attendance at other events, and I learn after the fact.
They (sic) go to agency website and contact employees directly.
Sometimes they do "go around", but it is important to have positive relationships with reporters, so they come to you first. Even after I've had reporters "go around" me, I've been able to call them and educate them on my role and that I'd be happy to provide them with information. From my experience, the PIOs/PAOs that have reporters "go around" them are not open and honest with their responses and don't respond to requests in a timely manner.
Investments media often wish to avoid PR folks and talk directly with our investment professionals. I've had radio hosts contact our executive director directly after interviewing him a few times on the radio.
As a former journalist, I would often try to contact the subject matter expert. I would typically get referred to the communications staff.
Journalists regularly attempt to contact staff directly rather than go through a public information officer.
This happens frequently, particularly if a subject matter expert has been named in a prior story reporters will frequently attempt to go to the SME directly rather than go through public affairs. I could cite numerous examples. In my experience, the majority of these episodes occur with reporters from Inside Washington Publishers ("Inside the Pentagon," "Inside the Air Force," "Inside Defense," etc.).

13. All of my staff members can be fully trusted to give reporters an interview that would represent the agency well. If you disagree, please cite an example.
Not all of my direct report staff have media responsibilities. "Staff " in my case involves leaders and supervisors in dozens of divisions.
There are some employees who may be well meaning but they lack the ability to fully differentiate between information that is still pre-decisional (and protected from disclosure) and information that is important to be conveyed to the public. I know of several occasions where well-meaning staff were led down rabbit holes of speculative answers because they had an over-whelming desire to see themselves in print. It does not do the press, the public, or the agency any favor to have misleading information published or aired.
Many of our staff members have no training or experience in dealing with media and will forward calls to appropriate spokespersons.
If you aren't accustomed to talking to the press, you may not be able to see the bigger issue/reason for asking within a question.
Not all staff members are skilled at interviews.
All my staff members BELIEVE they can be fully trusted, but some have more experience/better skills than others. That is why I determine who will be interviewed, not the reporter.
Ofentimes staff may not be fully aware of all of the information surrounding a particular issue. One of the responsibilities of a government communication director is to research the issue completely so that all aspects of the issue is understood. It is my job to explain the complete scope of an issue to some prior to interviews being conducted.
Some people are skilled at expressing themselves and explaining their work/their role to reporters. Some are not. Some have the "big picture" in mind. Some do not.
Some don't want to give interviews, because they do not trust reporters to report accurately and treat them fairly.
We have staff with varying levels of comfort and skill in media relations.
After one staff did an interview cold, it was found that she needed media coaching. Now, I require all staff to have media coaching before any interview.

<p>Unfortunately, many of our staff members believe they know media and public relations better than the professional PR staff and don't seek our advice or input. A couple of years ago, our agency came under media criticism for the number of state vehicles we owned in relation to the number of employees, but our administrative staff didn't respond in the way our PR staff suggested, and the media firestorm only grew worse.</p>
<p>I like to set some talking points ahead of time with staff members so they don't get off track.</p>
<p>All is too absolute and I don't think it's a matter of trust.</p>
<p>More media training is needed for people in my agency.</p>
<p>A small percentage of our staff is just not involved with issues or topics where they would be likely interview candidates (for example, clerical personnel or volunteer coordinator). Additionally, some staff members are more comfortable and articulate in interviews (especially with TV reporters) so I am much more likely to involve those staff members in media requests.</p>
<p>Technical staff straying outside their subject area: such as commenting on policy issues, leadership decisions, interagency cooperation, funding, etc.</p>
<p>I work with engineers and I do not trust they will make their work understandable or even focus on the news and value to the public vs. the technology or engineering. They could spend hours explaining details of how to build something and forget to mention the "why" or benefit of the overall project. We extract information and also collect from a variety of sources; one engineer may handle one phase and another the next. We collect the information for the reporters and public. Virtually everything we handle is public information and even "bad" news (like cost increases) needs to be released (engineers might not want to) with context and facts. We act as facilitators and advocates for the media and the public. Don't forget, we have ways to present facts directly to our customers and do so to present unbiased information.</p>
<p>If a staff member is not well versed on a topic, they do not need to act as though they do. This is how misstatements and misunderstandings occur.</p>
<p>Not all staffers are in the best position to answer a reporter's question. We put the individual who is the most versed on the subject "out front" for an interview.</p>
<p>Some staff members, due to experience, are more comfortable in dealing with media than others. It is easy for younger staff members to get flustered or carried away by the attention they receive. Media training helps prepare all staff members to be better communicators of the organization.</p>
<p>Very few of our staffers speak to the media.</p>
<p>No specific example, but absent widespread media training, I am not confident all staff can stay on message and know how to handle media inquiries/interviews.</p>
<p>I don't think some firefighters realize that talking off camera is pretty much the same as doing an interview. If it's sensitive information and shouldn't be made public, don't mention it in a conversation with a reporter.</p>
<p>We have staff of 8,000. Not everyone knows what they can and cannot do, which is why we continually work to educate them and make our procedures as transparent as possible.</p>
<p>Based on the topic/range of questions to be asked, we assign the content specialist most familiar with the issues to take part in the interview; usually a director level person.</p>
<p>Some are not comfortable speaking with reporters or lack the skills to explain highly technical information in clear, plain language. Speaking in acronyms and jargon is very common.</p>
<p>Some folks simply do not possess the communication skills to conduct an appropriate interview.</p>
<p>We have some junior staffers who need to learn how to handle reporters and they are advised to get questions first and then we discuss how to handle. If it is a controversial topic, we can't afford for them to get OTJ practice.</p>
<p>Some employees are just not cut out for talking to reporters. Others do not want to talk to reporters. This question is rather vaguely worded. "All of my staff member" sounds like it includes everyone in the entire agency. Don't like the word trusted. I trust all of my staff but some are not cut out for doing interviews.</p>
<p>Most can, but not ALL. Here's an example. A staff member was questioned by a reporter following a presentation. The staffer thought that all attendees at the meeting were technocrat-types and didn't know a reporter was present. The staff member had provided some pre-decisional information during the presentation, information that very quickly became public -- making it difficult then for the actual decision making process. It took months to recover and maintain control of the message.</p>

Not everyone is ideal for interviews. You look for appropriate SMEs. Current operational environment can also dictate certain people over others.
They don't do it often enough to be comfortable with talking with the media or with delivering our key messages. They prefer NOT to deal with the media.
Agency policy is that the agency head serve as the official spokesperson, and that is widely known.
Our field staff may not have the big picture and thus might present a skewed point of view. I depend on subject matter experts who have discussed the story in advance with me and often do the interview with me in the conversation as well. I am the agency spokesperson and media access to others is up to me.
There are people in my organization that are good interviews. They present themselves and the organization well. This is especially important on camera.
There are others who do not do well, especially on camera. Part of my job is to make sure the people we put in those situations can communicate effectively.

14. I feel it is necessary to supervise or otherwise monitor interviews with members of my agency's staff. If you AGREE, please explain your answer.
As the director of communications, I need to know the "before, during and after" so I can prep the interviewee as needed, hear responses to questions first hand (for my own edification as well as to be alert to potentially contentious responses or responses needing further clarification, and conduct any follow up needed.
For some staff members, it is a matter of comfort knowing they have a witness to what they said to a journalist in the event it may be misused. I take notes and sometimes record the interviews as a reference. In some cases, there is information we will have to provide the reporter later. In some instances, it may be necessary for me to interject to provide clarity, translate jargon/acronyms, and
I prefer to be in the room to help facilitate the conversation, not to supervise or monitor. Sometimes, the way a question is asked can change the answer, and I want to make sure the story is as clear and accurate as possible for the public.
I think it helps give the interviewee some sense of relief knowing I've got their back. I think it can also keep the reporter in line. It also helps with accuracy of information. If someone says an incorrect fact or figure in an interview, I am there to stop and correct it.
I want to be present so I know what was said in order to avoid any opportunity for conflicting opinions to be presented. Also, I volunteer to chase follow-up info as needed.
It allows for follow-up actions by the PAO/PIO as needed and helps to maintain an appropriate interviewer/interviewee relationship. I like to be able to look at the shot before the cameras roll, too, to be sure the interviewee is presented in a way they would like. I know staff member/interviewees appreciate that I support them as much as possible.
It is critical to sit in on interviews not to control them, but to take notes and to assist if the need arises.
It makes sense to be there from a follow-up standpoint, or if questions come up about other parts of the department. I think it's my responsibility to coordinate and be present for interviews.
It works best this way. Everything is above board. The reporter chooses which quotes to use but everyone knows what transpired.
It's important to present an accurate picture and consistent message and it is my job to make sure that happens.
My folks want someone to be there to answer a question they can't. See answer to 13.
Statements are sometimes subjective and it's good to have a second person there to "witness" or hear the interview. Also, being on the receiving end of the questions, there may be a "fog of war" and the person answering the questions can't always be objective about his/her own responses.
This question is misleading. We "monitor" both in-person and telephone interviews largely to support the person being interviewed--from introductions, establishing the time available, staying on topic, reinforcing key points, referencing prior news coverage or public misperceptions that are not accurate, etc.

We have intelligence issues in my agency. All interviews are monitored.
We listen in and participate with executives and engineers for follow up questions and to carry on further research (reporter asks a questions that John Doe doesn't have - reporter expects John Doe to track down Jane Doe for the answer? Not, the PIO can though...and if Jane Doe is on vacation, the PIO can track down someone else who can answer. We do not listen in/monitor PIO answers - they must research and fact check themselves. Also, the head of our agency may conduct an interview with the Washington Post and the story runs - then the local Patch or Gazette wants to cover the same story the next day but now the head of the agency is not available. The PIO being involved keeps facts and information available to every news outlet - maybe the smaller outlets aren't able to interview the top person from the breaking news story, but he/she still has the story. Keep this in mind, treat the PIOs with respect ...and only ask for the head person when really needed (and treat her with respect when you do, particularly since she has limited time) and you should have it easy with the PIO staff. Go around the PIO staff and treat them with disrespect, try to get different answers from different people (very likely in a big organization), and then you are hurting the professional relationship. Why would he trust you to interview the boss and not make him look bad (or misquote the boss!) or ask background questions someone lower could answer - don't always go to highest person for answer - negatively impacts time.
Again, it depends on the staff person being interview and the subject matter involved.
An interview with a subject-matter expert can devolve into political or policy questions that the individual is not qualified to answer. When the possibility that this could occur, my public affairs staff or I will monitor the interview to protect the employee from becoming a victim of a rookie journalist or of a journalist looking for a naive spill of a quotable opinion.
I would not use the word "supervise" but I would use the words facilitate and assist.
It depends on the person.
It depends on the reporter. We treat investigative reporters differently than we do general beat reporters.
It depends on the staff member who's speaking to the media. Some need a lot coaching and subsequent monitoring; others you can just send to the interview and know he or she will respond appropriately.
It depends on the topic and the level of the staff member. Also if a staffer is the subject matter expert and has never worked with a reporter, I will sit in on the interview and assist him/her if needed.
It depends on who is being interviewed and what the topic is.
It helps to be there in case staff forgets important points.
It is quickly clear who from my department is more (or less) capable of giving an effective interview.
It often helps the staff member being interviewed to have me in the room. Verbal and non-verbal feedback during and following the interview, passing notes (if they're being interviewed by telephone), etc., is helpful and reassuring. I also have a broader perspective on media relations and need to know what happens in the interview to do my job well.
My presence provides a level of comfort for staff, providing a witness of the conversation in the event of misquotes or errors. I can also verify quotes, explain jargon or acronyms, and keep track of any follow up items needed for the reporter.
Other PAOs and some senior leaders are good to go, but my policy or subject matter experts generally need some assistance
see 13
Supervise, monitor - what about just being there to help an individual to feel more comfortable or for me as a public information office to gain a better understanding of the topic. Again not liking the wording of the question. The next question (15) is even more of a leading question and does not take into account other reason to sit in on an interview.
This is not cut and dried. There are sensitive issues where I need to know what gets said in an interview so I'm not surprised by it later. There are also people who I completely trust to provide a quality interview on a non-sensitive issue. I don't need to supervise or monitor those.
We monitor some interviews, evaluating each interview request individually.
While not always necessary, it is good business practice to know what the media is asking and how your people are responding. Seeing reactions, tone, etc., is also important.

14. I feel it is necessary to supervise or otherwise monitor interviews with members of my agency's staff. If you DISAGREE, please explain your answer.
Generally we are giving interviews on scientific topics -- very straightforward research results -- not getting into policy or political matters. I am aware that interviews are occurring because I have coordinated the interaction, but I rarely sit in on the interview itself.
I don't sit in on interviews, for the most part, to "supervise" the interaction. I do it to protect the employee from aggressive reporters and to ensure the interview stays on the topic agreed to and within the interviewee's area of expertise.
I like to sit in on interviews to ensure that anything said that needs to be corrected is taken care of after the interview. Unless it is a glaring error of fact, I won't break the reporter's train of thought or the staff members' response.
I review interviews occasionally just to see how the spokesperson is performing.
It depends on the person and their experience level with the media. I will sit on interviews on hot topics, topics of high interest to governor's office, or topics which may have privacy or statutory issues to be sure confidential issues are not breached, but I do not restrict access to staff members who are trained and confident about providing information.
Monitor if requested by the person being interviewed. In the background only
Most of the senior staff who would do an interview don't need "hand-holding" - however, many have said they just feel more comfortable with a PA officer with them during an interview
My staffers generally provide good interviews and do not require my supervision.
Some people on the staff are designated to conduct interviews. They are well-versed on agency policy and have experience working with media.
Staff knows they should provide factual material rather than spew opinions.
Staffers who speak to the press are usually the best contact for the subject and know what they're talking about. I monitor for feedback purposes and to understand the media slant.
The people in our agency who conduct the interviews are the experts on the subject.
There are some topics that might require after-interview follow-up, as in situations where the person being interviewed doesn't know an answer, or needs further examples or data.
Training has helped prepare agency official in speaking to the news media.
Typically interviews are given by leaders in the police department, who know more about the subject and what is public information than I do. If they need talking point, we'll discuss it. However, I trust the interviewee to give an honest interview that still shows our agency in the best light.
Comments to the media generally are made by department or division heads, or elected officials. They are the most knowledgeable in their respective areas.
I will assist if asked, but for the most part I trust my colleagues to handle themselves appropriately
We do not monitor or 'sit in on' interviews. We do accompany film crews to locations where patients are present to protect privacy.
We have subject matter experts who know their stuff and who know how to provide information to journalists and do so often. Our staff knows to clear interviews with Communications; if they feel comfortable doing the interview we are generally okay with that. If, however, a member of the staff who does not usually deal with the press is asked to do an interview and they do not feel comfortable doing so or there is a subject matter expert more knowledgeable in the topics, Communications will arrange for that person to do the interview. We do not feel it's necessary to supervise unless our staff asks us to do so.

16. I have NEVER needed my tapes and notes to dispute misquotes in reporters' stories based on agency staff interviews. If you disagree, please cite an example.
There have been a few instances where obviously incorrect information has been published that required corrections.
A rookie reporter misrepresented agency statistics and misused a quote from an agency official requiring follow-up.
I take notes mainly for follow up. But even if we are misquoted, we rarely take action or respond. It has to be a grievous error for us to dispute the reporter's account of the interview. But of course I "need" my notes, for internal use, not for disputing the reporter's story.
There have been times when local reporters have misquoted officials in my agency and I reviewed tapes and notes to be sure.
Reporters known for misquotes are given written statements rather than interviews.
Again, I have heard of others with problems, but I haven't had a reporter with malevolent intent purposely misquote. Taken out of context to skew a story their way, yes; misquote to tell the story wrong, no.
I have had to request corrections or retractions for misquotes or quotes being used out of context though it is not a common occurrence.
I haven't but my boss has.
Never is too absolute.
Certain misquotes have occurred in the past.
Notes help. I have a lot going on and don't just rely on memory (maybe worked when I was 20 with less responsibility). However, most people don't realize when they are quoted that they really did say that, they just didn't mean it that way or out of context. Most of the time I defend a reporter to an "agency expert" upset with his quote and have to tell him, "Yes, you did say that!"
Not specific example, but I will frequently provide comments from myself or an agency person by email, which leaves a trail to check in the cases where something has been written incorrectly. Otherwise, I have not had very many situations, in the many years, where comments were written up incorrectly.
We always monitor interviews, both during and after, to make sure they are reporting accurately.
I have gone back and compared my notes to check something, but usually it is an interpretation rather than a fact!
Can't remember exact example, but have referred to notes in the past.
In one instance, I had a reporter from a local TV network affiliate report incorrect information about expenditures for a grant program. The reporter would not correct their story.
I have to correct reporters misquotes often.
I don't tape or take notes. But reporters can make mistakes. I then weight the merits of asking for a correction or not. Sometimes reporters have an agenda which is clear in the types of questions they ask; then I talk to their boss and I sit in on the interview.
I have had to use my notes frequently to either correct a reporter's story or to confirm to my own staff member that that is what he or she actually said. It works both ways.
There have been instances where my agency has felt quotes were taken out of context and published, which did offer appropriate background for the quote to be fully understood.
I had a reporter with the Miami Herald who began fabricating quotes and had to go to my leadership to prove it, and then, to the reporters editor. We got it fixed.
Reporters sometimes have their own agenda; I don't feel it necessary to waste my time or theirs correcting misquotes. For example, our agency consolidated three very old rural offices into one modern centrally located office. This was controversial in the three counties impacted by the closing of the rural offices. A local reporter called asking questions, claiming she had not received any of the three press releases sent to her office (2 via email and 1 via fax), asking questions that had facts stated in the press release. They also claimed did they know the offices were being consolidated despite the fact I had spoken to the owner of the newspaper, extending a personal invitation to the opening of the new office. Their headline ran with a picture of moving vans in front of the old office with a headline saying "Where did they go?" I did not waste time correcting this and strongly discouraged my executive director from doing so. Bias is bias and sometimes it's not worth the time it takes to try to change perception.
No specific example comes to mind but it has happened.

I've done over 30,000 interviews by myself or with staff members and have never taped or taken down notes of quotes. If I have a problem with a quote, I call the reporter and talk to him/her. I can count the number of times I've had to do that on one hand. Interestingly, I found that when I am misquoted it is generally for the better not worse.
Never say never. An example, was working with a reporter who typically used snippets of interviews. Having what was actually said enabled us to prepare an effective and supportable letter to the editor when the principal was quoted out of context. As a side note, with this particular reporter thereafter, we provided responses in writing only and no longer offered interviews.
We've had to go back and verify words used in the past. No major examples, but a good practice.
I dealt with a reporter who wrote a story about the backlog of streetlight outages a few years ago. He had multiple errors in the story. It took several rounds of changes to get the online version of the story correct. The print version required a correction the next day, but by then the damage is done. I had to go through with the reporter specifics of what we discussed because initially he did not want to acknowledge an error on his part.
This tends to occur with reporters from trade media, which frequently take quotes out of context or use portions of quotes which reinforce a point they wish to make. This happened frequently when discussing cost overruns and schedule delays with the B-2 Stealth Bomber program.
In instances where we are conducting an interview with an investigative reporter, we have our own internal television crew record the entire interview and have it posted, in its entirety, on our website to provide the complete context of the questions and responses.

17. I require at least some reporters to review the quotes they are going to use with me before publishing or airing their stories. If you agree, please explain.
We often allow agency officials to speak "on background" so that they can feel comfortable speaking freely about agency work with reporters. In such cases, reporters understand that if they want an on-the-record quote, they must seek clearance from our office.
If a reporter called after an interview for clarification, that's great, but we do not ask nor expect the right to review interview quotes.
Always prudent to check quotes before going to press.
What journalist would agree to that?
I know of no seasoned reporter that is willing to do this.
It's great if they offer, but I never ask to do so. As a former reporter myself, I find the concept troubling.
I never seek prior censorship of news stories, but I always strongly encourage reporters to call or email back if they need additional clarification or explanation of something I or one of our staff said.
We generally like to review interviews on intelligence issues or we just don't do them at all.
I can usually tell if I am dealing with a rookie reporter or one that is not familiar with either the topic or the agency. I try to review in this case.
We offer if we have an extremely technical issue to review facts or clarify, that's about it. It's the reporter's choice, but I also expect the reporter to get it right. If we offer and he refuses and gets it really wrong, he loses credibility.
It depends on the reporter.
In the rare instances where a reporter cannot be trusted to quote staff accurately, we communicate solely in writing via e-mail and copy the editor.
I encourage the reporter to follow up with me if there is a question or quote that needs to be clarified, but usually it will go as spoken.
I do not require pre-clearance from any reporter.
If you don't have a relationship with the reporters and some form of trust, you need to get out of this business.

After doing an extensive interview, I sometimes ask reporters to voluntarily allow me to review the quotes they ultimately select for publication. There are times that because of the nature, complexity or sensitivities of a topic, we will do an interview on background and then work with the reporter to select specific statements as direct or attributed quotes.
Sometimes the topics discussed are complex and junior journalists need much background to understand the issues in order to report out accurately.
Require may be strong. Some reporters are trade media and they are interested in getting more articles so they will run product by us if we ask them to.
I cannot imagine any reporter agreeing to this request. I think it would lead to a very tense conversation.
I think this crosses the line. We each have our respective responsibilities and jobs to do. I tell our subject-matter experts that what they say may be used by the reporter in quotes (verbatim), in part or in paraphrase. On occasion, a reporter will tell us what they will use, but only as a heads-up not for approval.
Often this request is based on history with the reporter.
They usually point out the quote(s) they'll use as a courtesy.
While not a requirement, I have a good enough relationship with many reporters who run the text by me for accuracy checks due to the importance of detail in describing operations.
I send follow-up e-mails after interviews reiterating our points, which typically, is used in quotes. It is my job to be prepared or have my staff prepared/trained to give interviews. I've had reporters run quotes by me as a courtesy, but never have I requested it.
We always ask investment trade media reporters to share their story or quotes to ensure that the information is accurate.
I find that a lot of my senior leaders insist on being able to do this when they do interviews with reporters, and I end up apologizing to the reporters for my senior leaders making this request. I find it insulting and it is not my way of doing business. My feeling is if I find the right person to speak to the media and make sure everybody understands the ground rules, rarely do I find reporters misquoting people. It tends, as I said before, to happen with only certain reporters and I handle them with extra care and caution, but I never insist on seeing quotes prior to publication and don't think that PAOs should insist on this.

18. There are specific reporters I will not allow my staff to talk to because of problems with their stories in the past. If you agree, please explain.
There are a handful of reporters in our market who have established a reputation for possessing less-than-acceptable standards of journalism. We work very hard with news editors to let them know of our concerns, and follow up immediately on any inaccurate reporting.
I generally handle reporters or news organizations known to have biases, strongly adversarial points of view, or a reputation for unfairness, with kid gloves.
At a different agency, we had dealings with several sensational TV reporters who would write the story before conducting interviews, then try to get quotes to support invented issues. Those reporters would only be allowed access to the PIO or Director-level spokesperson with PIO support due to past problems. However it's very rare.
Some staff do not wish to be interviewed a second time by a reporter who has badly mischaracterized their research or badly misquoted them in the past. I am not making the decision to not offer second interviews in those cases. The decision is made by the staff member.
There are some reporters I prefer to speak with myself because those reporters have demonstrated that they cannot always be trusted to get the story right.
There are some reporters who are notorious for misquotes and/or animosity. We provide written statements rather than interviews to them.

There are specific reporters I will not allow to talk with my staff without my supervision.
60 Minutes has a bad reputation among the PIOs I know. I would never allow 60 Minutes to do a report with my staff because I believe the positive story we set up for them would just be spun into something completely different.
We've had reporters like that in the past, but not currently.
When I have problems with a reporter, I deal directly with the reporter. If that isn't effective, I talk to their news director or editor. Only once in my 17-year career, in my present job, have I told a news director that I will not talk to a specific reporter because I felt I could not trust the reporter to do an accurate story.
There is one person, a TV reporter, who has misquoted us so often and so egregiously that we just don't talk to that person anymore. In general, we have been treated well and fairly by the press.
Yes, a couple have presented entirely different stories than what they stated their original purpose was.
Not my office specifically, but at the dept level, due to past behavior.
Usually independent bloggers who have an agenda.
A few staff members are off-limits to certain reporters due to problematic unprofessional behavior by the reporters. Those staff members probably would not agree to speak with the reporters, even if I asked!
There is one reporter the technical and engineering staff refuses to talk to; only the PIOs are forced to deal with him. He's rude, biased and gets a lot wrong. We do our best with him, but only the PIOs have "talking to the media" in their job descriptions so we cannot force "experts" to do so. With that said, we have tried to talk to him and his editor to no avail to improve.
If a reporter has a tendency to skew stories, call when they know a person is on vacation so only one side is presented, ignore contrary information because it does not match their theme, violates a joint "off the record" agreement, or accuses rather than ask questions, etc., then the head PIO deals with that reporter on sensitive issues.
We have, in the past, had reporters call to interview about one topic and arrive and start interviewing about a completely different, more controversial topic; they are not allowed to have interviews.
Those reporters are no longer with the local paper.
In the rare instances where a reporter cannot be trusted to quote staff accurately, we communicate solely in writing, via e-mail, and copy the editor.
Some reporter's use techniques that can cause problems, but I won't allow the lack of a story to become the story.
We do not stop anyone from talking to a reporter who may have been a problem in the past, but do remind him/her of previous problem, then monitor his/her story that follows very closely.
Rare, but the occasional reporter who misrepresents their intent, or deliberately skews stories in disregard of the information given, has burned the 'trust bridge' and so loses privilege extended with the customary benefit of the doubt accorded most reporters.
Just can't seem to understand or try to understand the info we provide resulting in inaccurate reporting.
Again, I treat investigative reporters differently than general reporters. I have to work much harder to help them understand the facts and how the system works. I don't deny anyone access. We are government: we must be transparent.
There have been some reporters who have not been so careful with the accuracy of how they portray the facts. I want my staff to have faith in the media so that they are comfortable doing interviews, they can't do that if the information they provide is not used correctly. Therefore, if a reporter has a track record of bad reporting, I will not subject my staff to such an experience and will handle the query myself. Also, some reporters are hostile or antagonistic by nature and make my staff uncomfortable or nervous, which then can skew the way an interview goes or cause staff to speculate beyond their own expertise. This does neither the reporter nor the agency any good.
We have one, in particular, who is only interested in the dirt no matter how undirty the topic.
I always tell staff of my previous interactions with reporters both good and bad. I also read articles from reporters (if I have not talked to them in the past) to get a feel for what they write and anticipate their questions and have information ready.
Reporters earn their reputations. Sadly, I have worked with reporters who lie, misrepresent themselves, misquote interviewees, and are untruthful. We know that bad news doesn't get better with age, but we do expect accuracy in reporting.

We've been contacted by reporters where we know the focus will be on humor; those interviews are declined.
A couple of reporters who get accusatory and rude are the ones who get less face time.
Those reporters still have access but it's via the internet or on a conference call. Let's face it, journalistic standards are way down. You cannot depend on a reporter to do the homework or have any thought as to the consequences of the story or even in some cases, its integrity.
There are one or two reporters we have had problems with accuracy. When they call, it's handled directly by me or our director of communications.
When a reporter takes a quote out of context or misquotes a spokesperson or subject matter expert, it results in an immediate discussion. When it happens a second time, I issue a caution to the reporter that they are in danger of losing my support. If it happens a third time, I do not support their interview requests. I will respond to their inquiries, but only in writing. This has only happened twice in a 34-year public affairs career.
Very rarely does this happen, but it does happen only after repeated egregious errors.

19. There are entire media outlets I will not allow my staff to talk to because of problems with their stories in the past. If you agree, please explain.
Sixty Minutes falls into the "kid gloves" category. We will talk to them, but carefully.
My staff does not talk to media, I do. But I will speak to anyone and provide answers to questions, regardless of past behavior and stories.
There are some media outlets, of very limited circulation, run by individuals whose unprofessional conduct makes interviews inappropriate. We provide written statements.
We only work with legitimate media.
I try to keep an open mind.
One TV station has been trouble in the past. Depending on what reporter calls for the interview will determine if the interview is granted to that TV station.
We do not operate this way.
There are some media outlets with a reputation for sensationalism or skewing the facts to fill a predetermined agenda, so we are careful with how we respond to them. Also, we will only respond to legitimate media, no matter what platform they use to disseminate their news. But when we hear from a "media" outlet that we have never heard of or never worked with before, we'll do some research to see what kinds of things they cover and the flavor of their work. We want to be sure they are real, ethical journalists and not conspiracy theorists or other brand of unprofessional, so-called citizen-journalists.
There are outlets that simply won't give you a fair shake and as such require special handling.
I may not like some people from the outlets or their message, but playing favorites is not my job.
A trade reporter.
When an outlet puts out false or misleading data and they don't feel a need to correct it, they get less face time. When an outlet publishes photos that have no current news value, even according their senior editor, but the photos do put lives at risk (even after our request not to publish). They get less face time.
As long as I am present for interviews and staff has proper media training, it shouldn't matter what the outlet is. Allowing or not allowing certain media outlets access is not appropriate for government entities as we serve a general public. Doing this could be seen as not being an accessible/transparent government and may result in worse stories.
One alternative publication tried to hijack a video contest we were running to support energy conservation, challenging its readers to submit porn videos and promising to vote for them in the contest. When I contacted the editor to discuss this, he refused to talk on the phone and then posted our email exchanges on their site.
As I mentioned previously, I have had problems with quotes out of context and/or reporters going directly to subject matter experts with Inside Washington Publishers. I handle their requests very carefully and insist that my staff refer all of their queries to me personally.