



the state of media relations

A look at the relationship between the Los Angeles Police Department, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and members of the Los Angeles Press Corps



July 2018

Introduction



The Radio & Television News Association of Southern California (RTNA) represents broadcast media outlets from Kern County, through Los Angeles County down to San Diego County.

For almost seventy years, the RTNA has been the singular voice of radio and television news operations for southern California. The RTNA is an advocacy and educational organization dedicated to organizing pool coverage for high profile events, lobbying for better access and strengthening the working relationship between the media and agencies they interact with on a regular basis. The RTNA is also known for producing the Golden Mike Awards®, the longest running broadcast news award in the country. It also advances excellence in journalism education through its annual scholarship program.

The RTNA's Board of Directors includes working journalists, news managers, retired public servants and those who believe in a strong and free press.

the state of media relations

The RTNA fields complaints from reporters and outlets who experience challenges with public agencies and sometimes their Public Information Officers (PIO's). The RTNA's Media Access Committee works to research the complaint and, when necessary, help resolve the issue.

This survey is the result of ongoing complaints and concerns received from reporters and outlets regarding their interactions with the LAPD and LASD.



methodology

The State of Media Relations survey was created by members of the RTNA's Media Access Committee. The survey represents the opinions of news professionals for the period of June 2015 through June of 2018.

The twenty-three (23) questions were derived from the most common complaints received from reporters, assignment editors, videographers and news managers. Other questions were added to create a demographic profile of the respondents. The respondents are working journalists, assignment desk personnel, news managers, editors, producers and videographers.

The survey was sent via email to one hundred twenty-three (123) news professionals in the LA market. The respondents were determined by media outlet and reporter distribution lists from the LAPD, LASD, and RTNA. And, for the first time, the RTNA chose to include print outlets, online and digital networks for a more thorough and diverse representation of the Los Angeles Press Corps.

Of the one hundred twenty-three (123) sent, ninety (90), or **73%, responded.**

To encourage honest and candid replies, respondents were guaranteed anonymity.

Questions Submitted In Survey

*Where necessary, each question was posed for both LAPD and LASD.
These questions do not include those used to establish demographics*

1. When you call LAPD/LASD does someone have an answer to your question?
2. Is the LAPD/LASD available after hours?
3. Do you find your reporters/photographers waiting a long time for someone to give a statement?
4. Which agency do you think provides a quicker response to a scene?
5. Do you feel officers/deputies have the authority to speak on behalf of their department?
6. Do you feel you have easy interview access to any person in the LAPD/LASD?
7. Do you feel you have the ability to reach out directly to someone in the LAPD/LASD without fear of reprisal?
8. Do you feel relations between the media and the LAPD/LASD have worsened or improved over the last 3 years?
9. Do you feel the LAPD/LASD has become more or less transparent over the last 3 years?
10. Do you feel media relations management at the LAPD/LASD see you more as a burden or partner?
11. If there was one thing you would change about media relations at LAPD/LASD what would it be?
12. Any additional comments?

demographics

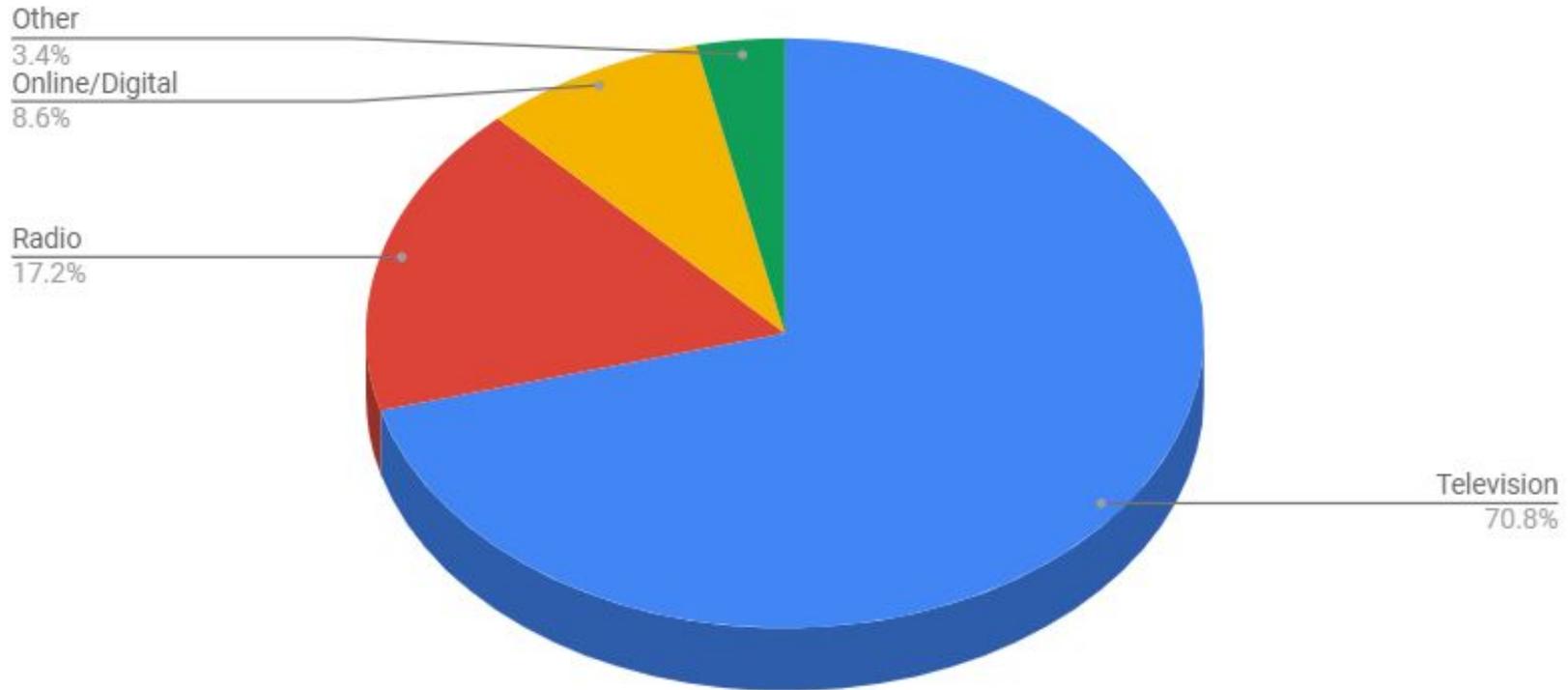
The statistics on the following pages illustrate who replied to the survey and the medium they represent.

The majority (70.7%) of respondents are from area television stations and represent all the major news operations, including national and international bureaus. There are also respondents from local foreign language television outlets. Radio outlets are the second most reported medium (17.2%) followed by online/digital (8.6%) and other (3.4%), which represents print, bi-weekly and monthly publications.

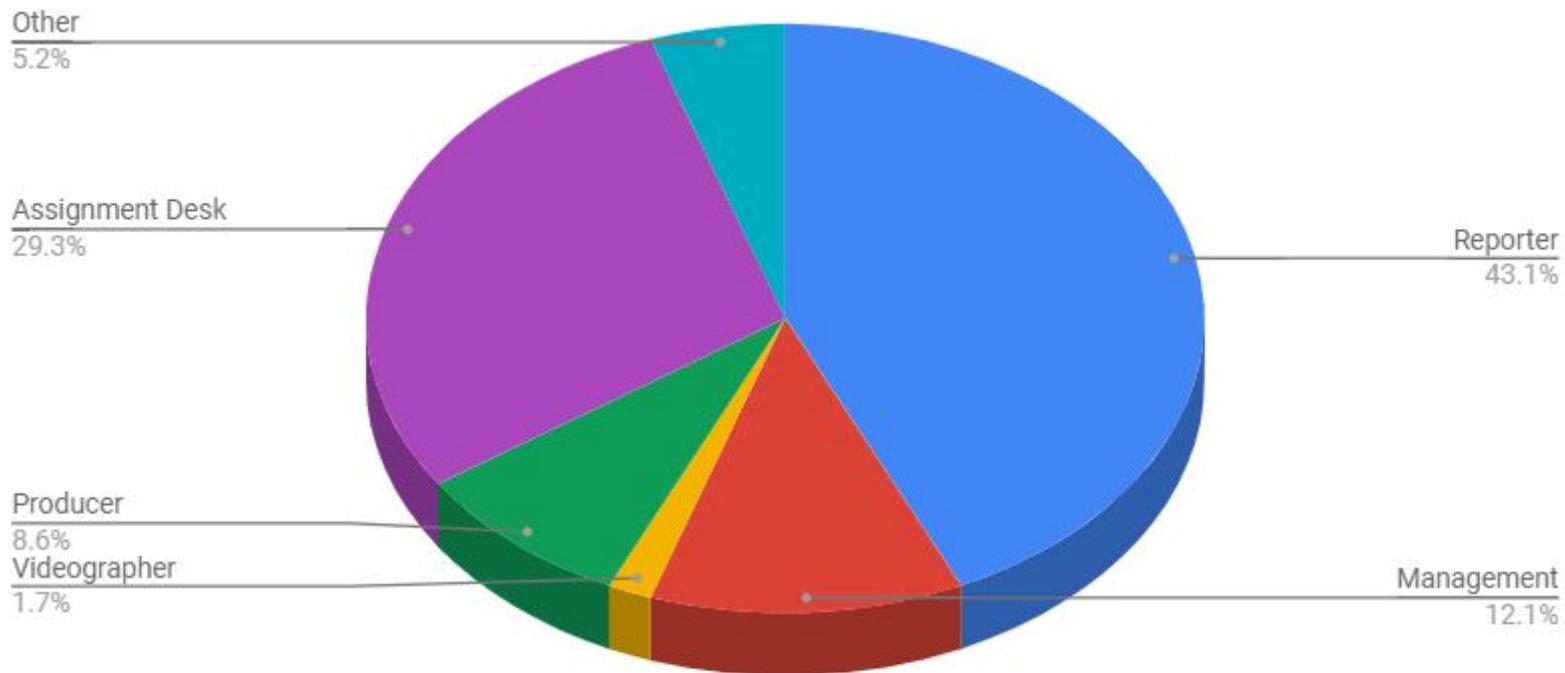
The respondents include working journalists, assignment desk personnel, news managers, editors, producers, and videographers.

90% of respondents have regular contact with law enforcement in the field, 10% have regular contact from a desk position (editor, producer, manager, assignment editor).

Type of Media Outlet



What Is Your Role?



contact by phone or email

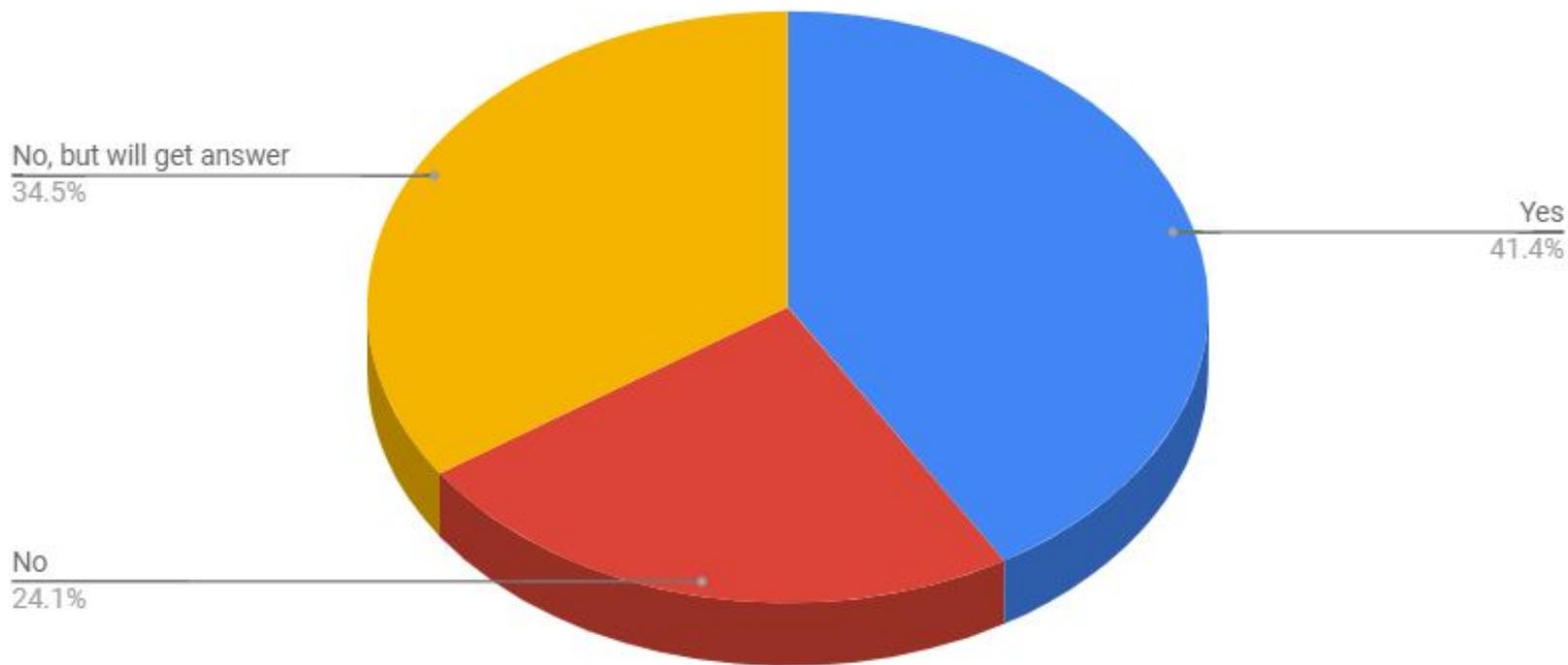
One of the regular complaints received by the RTNA is regarding contact by phone and email. The survey revealed when it comes to follow up from an inquiry both the LAPD and LASD are deficient.* There is also serious concern about the lack of knowledge of incidents and the lack of motivation to check on an incident.

The LAPD and LASD are close when it comes to initial contact via phone. Both agencies received equally higher marks when it comes to providing an answer to an inquiry on the first phone call. However, both agencies received poor ratings when it came to a follow-up email. Many respondents say having to send an initial email request is useless as no one follows up on the request.

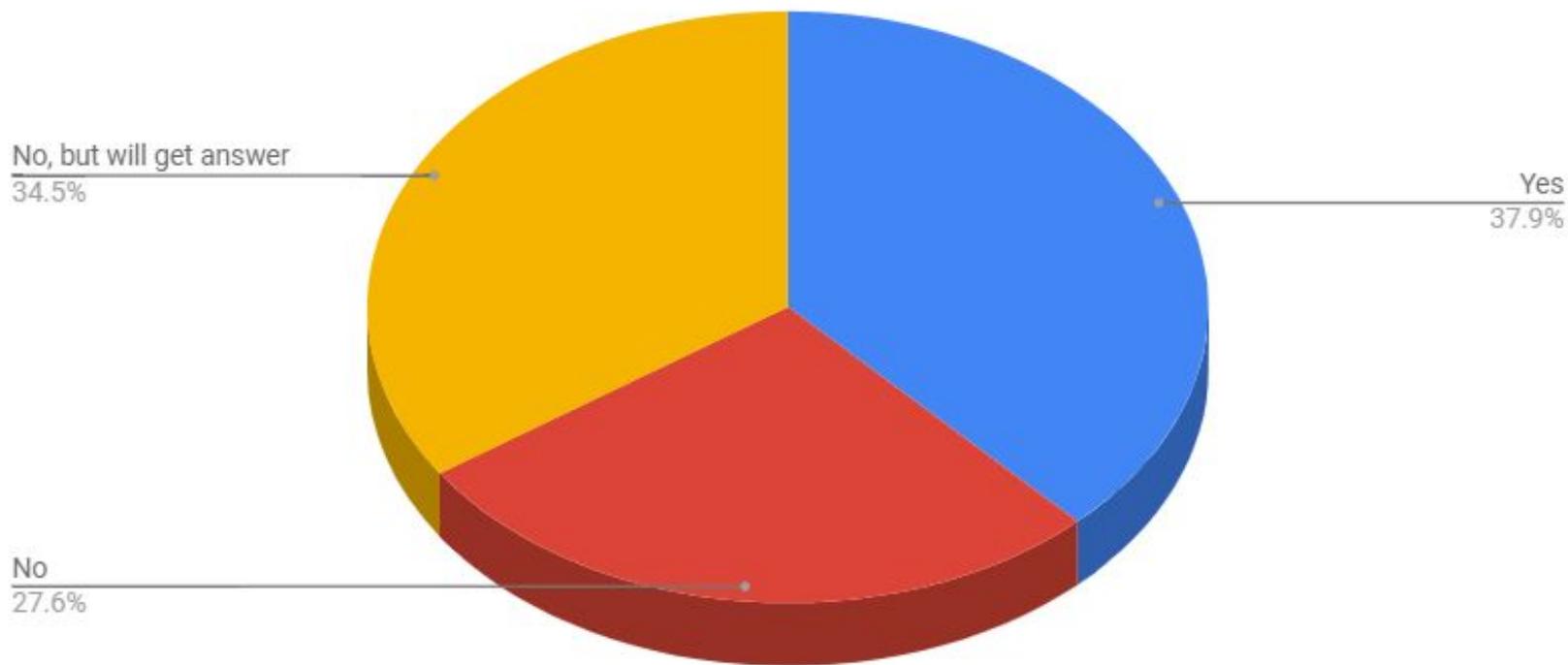
One of the top concerns is the lack of after hours and overnight coverage in the LAPD's Media Relations Section (MRS). The LASD received high marks for its after-hours coverage. A third of respondents say dealing with both agencies after hours is like navigating a maze.

** This information was determined by numerical data and narrative comments*

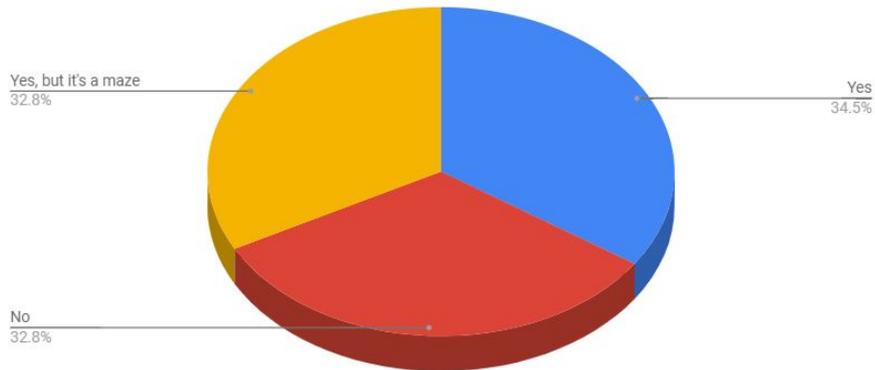
LAPD Answer To Your Inquiry?



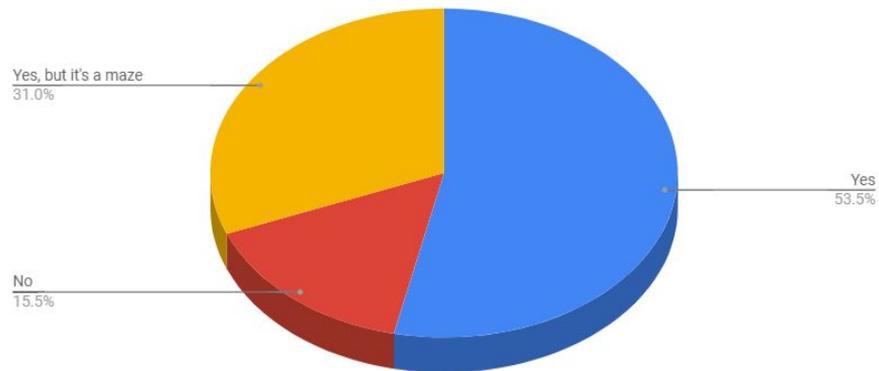
LASD Answer To Your Inquiry?



LAPD Media Relations Available After Hours?



LASD Media Relations Available After Hours?



response in the field

90% of respondents say their primary contact method with LAPD/LASD is in the field.

Respondents (62.1%) say it takes a long time for the LAPD to **issue a statement** at the scene of an incident while the LASD responded a bit quicker (55.2%).

20.7% feel the wait wasn't that long for the LAPD, 29.3% say the wait time for the LASD was acceptable.

Which agency has **the quickest response to a scene**? LASD (39.7%) / LAPD (37.9%)

Respondents say more should be done to empower officers and deputies to initially speak to the media on-scene rather than wait for a spokesperson, creating a good stopgap measure until a spokesperson or subject matter expert arrives.*

ability to interview

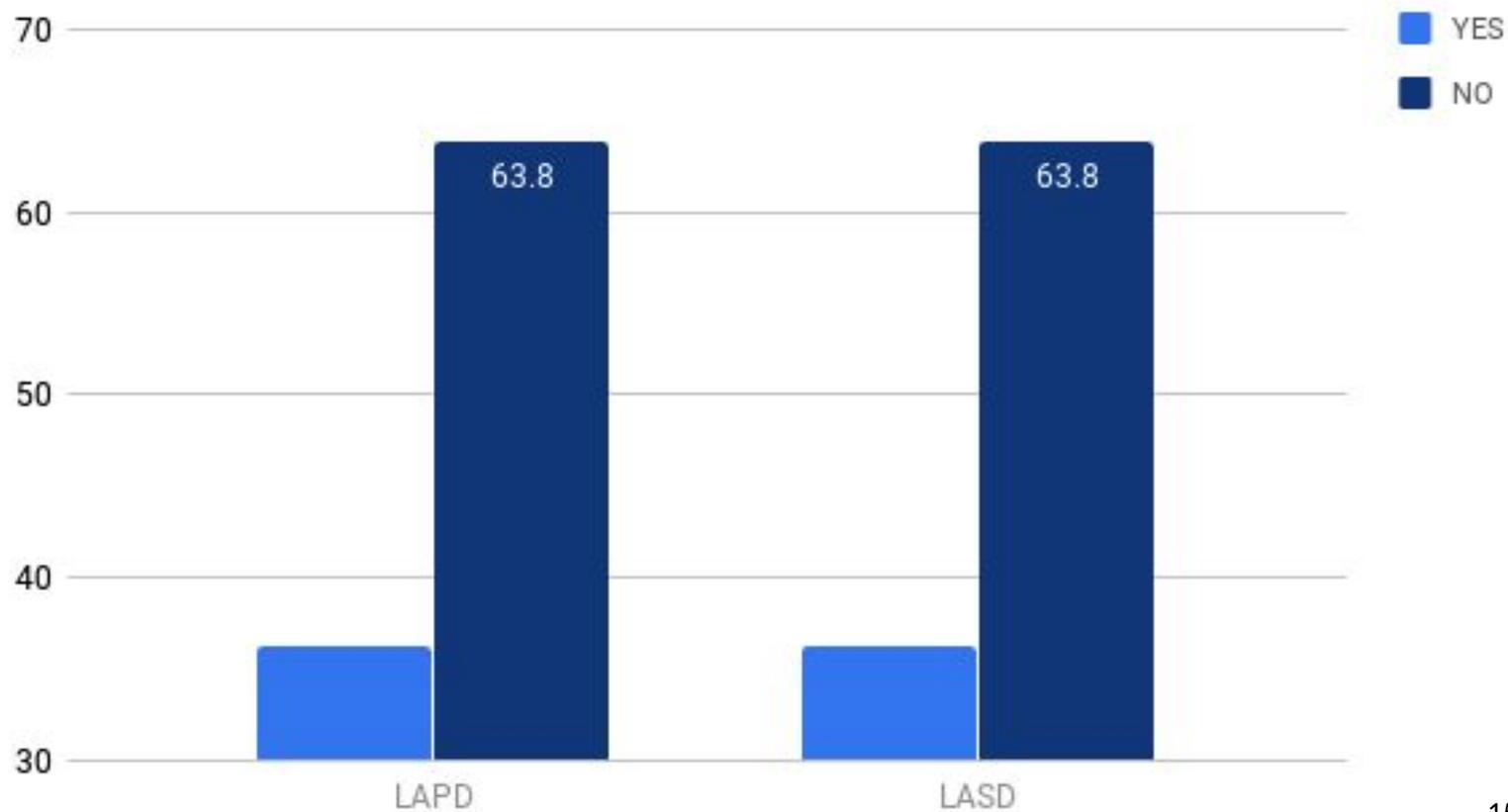
The survey determined there is a growing trend for reporters and news outlets to establish a rapport with individuals in law enforcement at all levels, including command staff. The intent is to bypass media relations altogether.* Respondents say doing so provides a quicker reply to inquiries without the red tape and frustration of one or a few trying to block access or control the message.

When it comes to trust the LASD received high praise. Individuals within the SIB were acknowledged for their efforts to help the media gain access to command staff, including the sheriff. Respondents say the LAPD has established too many roadblocks to access detectives and command staff, including the chief. Respondents say they feel the LAPD is working against them.*

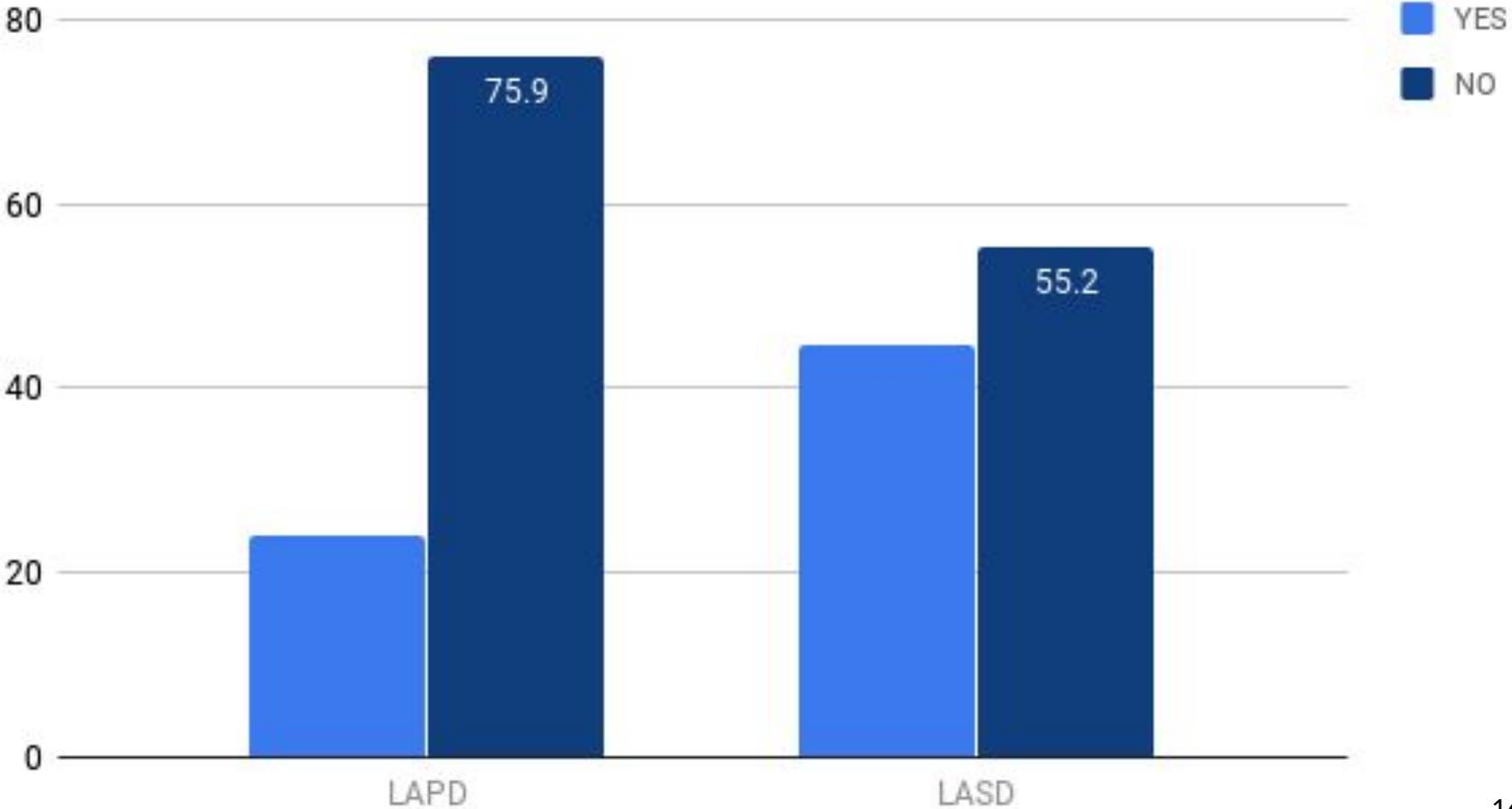
The following data shows the views of respondents concerning access to individuals, regardless of rank, within the LAPD and LASD.

**Derived from narrative responses*

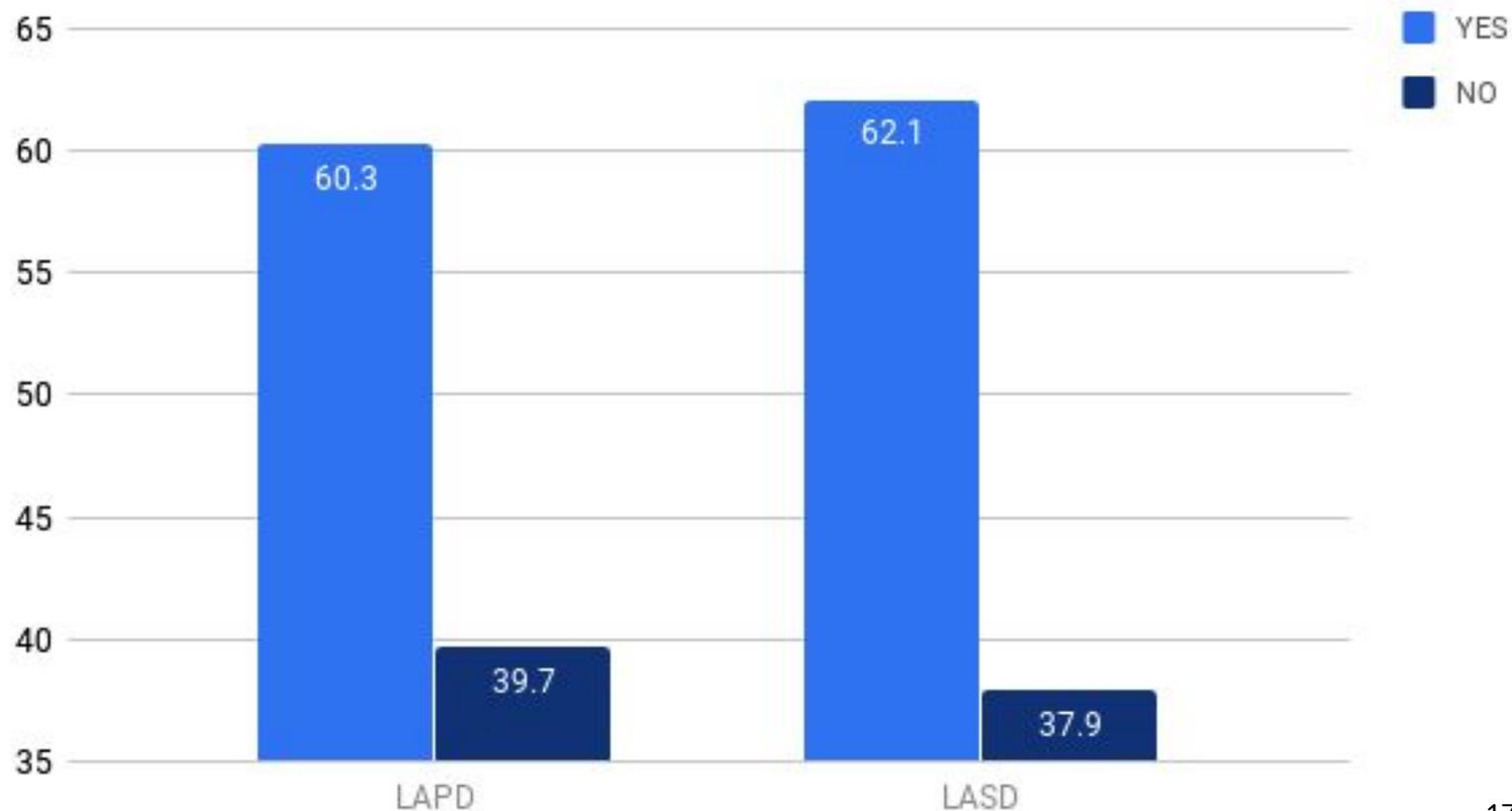
Rank and File Able To Speak To The Media?



Easy To Interview People In The Department?



Reach Out Without Fear Of Reprisal?



relationships and transparency

We asked respondents to rate the state of media relations over a period of three (3) years, June 2015 to June 2018. Just under half of the respondents say there has been no change in relations with the LAPD while 50% say it's status quo at the LASD.

Almost 26% of respondents say relations with the LAPD have worsened, while only 14% say the same for LASD. 36% of respondents say things have gotten better at the LASD while 29% say the same for LAPD.

The most common complaints about LAPD deal with the lack of knowledge of 409.5 p.c., the lack of support after hours and the frustration with new leadership.* The most common complaints about the LASD deal with the lack of Spanish speakers at a scene and quality and speed of information being released.*

The LAPD received praise for its easy process of obtaining and renewing a press credential and for its ability to get information from a division when necessary. The LASD received high marks for monitoring active events, including Nixle alerts, and its efforts to improve access.

65.5%

Percentage of respondents who feel management of Media Relations at LAPD see the Media as a **burden**
- 34.5% feel management sees them as a **partner**.





41.4%

Percentage of respondents who feel management of Media Relations at LASD see the Media as a **burden** - 58.6% feel management sees them as a **partner**.

These are narrative replies to the following question:

“What one thing would you change about Media Relations in the LAPD?”

The answers are grouped by similarity in topic. The order is based on the popularity of each topic.*

1. Communication - Response to Inquiries - Follow up

Be more accessible after hours; provide a 24 hour desk; staff overnight; better comm with their divisions; follow up on PRAs; respect deadlines; do away with email since they never reply; better more effective communication; be more like LA Fire, they're the best at real time updates; make sure divisions answer phones; email requests are a waste of time - still waiting for an interview request from March; at least answer the phone; after hours coverage is a must for the #2 city in America; be more intuitive on the needs of the media; longer weekend hours; someone in the office even when there's a big event outside; 24 hour coverage; anyone in the office should be able to give a soundbite whether it's on the phone or in person; easier access to watch commanders, especially if we can't get info from media relations; I prefer going to the scene because the Sgt. or Lt. on scene is usually willing to speak, going through media relations has been a nightmare since the Andy's left; better after hours access; be more like the sheriff's department and have someone after hours; quicker response to email requests; have better coverage from 11PM to 7AM, when I brought this up to the head of media relations he was dismissive; there needs to be more effort to monitor radios and be proactive with getting information; get releases out with summary faster.

**Comments were edited for brevity, grammar and context where needed*

These are narrative replies to the following question:

“What one thing would you change about Media Relations in the LAPD?”

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2. On Scene - In The Field

LAPD media relations is one of the best in SoCal in terms of responsiveness and navigating situations in the field; make sure reporters/photogs were able to get more reliable info/interviews in the field; better access to crime scenes, at least line of sight; more people on scene allowed to talk to us; better education with rank and file on how to treat media in the field; easier access; at least us go where you let the public go; breaking news interview access needs to get better; better access to detectives with more case knowledge; I'm tired of going through the Spanish inquisition anytime I want to interview a detective; it always seems like the LAPD sets up the media as far away as possible from a scene.

3. 409.5

What happened to the LAPD? Doesn't it understand we have a legal right to access natural disaster scenes? I have to constantly argue with a rookie about access and they couldn't care less; train the officers on 409.5; 409.5 seems to be a mystery with LAPD; I wish they taught 409.5 in the academy; doesn't the LAPD get training on PC 409.5? It seems like no one on scene understands it; why do I find myself having to teach a cop about 409.5 in the field? They just have a blank stare.

These are narrative replies to the following question:

“What one thing would you change about Media Relations in the LAPD?”

The answers are grouped by similarity in topic. The order is based on the popularity of each topic.*

4. Management

Rubenstein is a nightmare to work with, his answer is always NO and he cares more about covering the chief/mayor's ass than serving the community; I knew the LAPD stopped caring about the media when it hired a weatherman to lead the media relations division; why can't you get a real commander to be in charge?; Josh Rubenstein does a good job given his background; horrible since Andy Smith left; worthless, return them all to the field; RHD needs its own PIO separate from media relations, especially away from Josh Rubenstein; when did it become the Josh Rubenstein show?; Josh Rubenstein clearly plays favorites and it's frustrating; the boss doesn't seem to care about events that happen after his office closes; the current state of media relations reminds me of when Mary Grady was in charge, and we know how that ended.

5. Other Comments

More outreach to Spanish media; get Skype for clearer remote interviews; divisions need the power to speak to us without always getting permission from media relations; need access to more experts instead of a spokesperson; It hasn't gotten better, more red tape and hoops to jump through; I think the LAPD is getting more defensive because the media are getting more aggressive; quit treating us like we're the enemy; morale in media relations is bad, just talk to them; need to utilize social media and more high tech; horrible since Smith and the other guy left; Meghan Aguilar, Captain Sandoval and Officer Im are great to work with.

**Comments were edited for brevity, grammar and context where needed*

These are narrative replies to the following question:

“What one thing would you change about Media Relations in the LASD?”

The answers are grouped by similarity in topic. The order is based on the popularity of each topic.*

1. Access - Response to Inquiries - Quality of Information

Quicker release of information; faster response to questions; need to expand on the simple Nixle alert, I think it's lazy to always have us refer to Nixle; many times SIB has no information, it's better to call each station for the latest; get us an expert instead of always a spokesperson; make SHB actually give us an answer instead of the runaround; I don't bother with media relations, it's a waste of time - would rather call each station or person directly; very helpful, especially Deputy Schrader, if she doesn't have the answer she'll track it down and call back; deputies need to be more proactive; faster response to my inquiries would be a big help; don't send out a nixle or alert until you have more information, simply saying there's a shooting only forces us to call and then there's no information; why do you have to ID a person's race when it's not relevant to the case?

**Comments were edited for brevity, grammar and context where needed*

These are narrative replies to the following question:

“What one thing would you change about Media Relations in the LASD?”

The answers are grouped by similarity in topic. The order is based on the popularity of each topic.*

2. Spanish, Korean and Chinese Speakers

The sheriff's department needs more Spanish speakers for the media; we would appreciate more outreach to the Spanish media; the detective bureau is pretty good at having a bilingual speaker but it would help if there were a Spanish speaker at every station; they need more foreign language speakers for Chinese and Korean audience; they do a great job getting us a Spanish speaker.

3. Management

Nicole Nishida is a gem - every PIO should be more like her; I don't bother calling media relations, I just call Nicole Nishida; If it weren't for Nicole I probably wouldn't bother calling the sheriff's department; deputies at SIB don't seem to have enough info on anything so I just call Nicole Nishida, if she doesn't have the answer she knows who to call to get it; Nicole is always accessible, I feel more comfortable calling her than the main office; hard to say, I just call Nicole Nishida for everything; I prefer to work with Nicole over that other lady (Carol?), Nicole doesn't seem to have the ego the other lady does, plus Nicole doesn't give me push back when I want to talk to the sheriff; Nicole is a life saver.

**Comments were edited for brevity, grammar and context where needed*

These are narrative replies to the following question:

“What one thing would you change about Media Relations in the LASD?”

The answers are grouped by similarity in topic. The order is based on the popularity of each topic.*

4. Other Comments

Make stats available online; start using Skype instead of phone for remote interviews; LASD does a much better job of handling breaking news than LAPD, especially for media staging; please, please, please train the rank and file to speak to us so we don't have to wait so long for a spokesperson; I have been impressed with the department's efforts to improve relations with the media; nothing but props since Steve Whitmore left; be consistent with training - some deputies at headquarters seem on top of it others act like they just learned how to answer the phone; love the accessibility to the sheriff; still a pain in the ass to get anything about the jails, forget it if I want to do a tour or a deep dive on the conditions inside; LASD is the least helpful agency in LA County, especially if you have an exclusive - they will tip off other outlets on your story; Juanita Navarro is very helpful and I only deal with her; I feel like SIB has made incredible improvements over the years; I feel like whoever's in charge now has hurt efforts to get more information; release mugshots and start letting us interview inmates, it helps with transparency and balance; the guards at HOJ should be treated the way they treat us, like inmates being waterboarded; I really wish the parking situation could be more equal for those of us who don't have a big TV truck; always a good experience, someone always willing to help; it's stupid for SIB to always wait for a release before they can speak.

**Comments were edited for brevity, grammar and context where needed*

recommendations



Based on this survey, complaints received from our constituents and historical data the RTNA has the following recommendations to improve relations between the LA Press Corps and the LAPD:

- Work to establish a method for getting information 24/7, be it through a rollover number to a rotating division or to RACR division. A rollover number was used from 2008 to 2010 with some success
- Re-establish the use of the RTNA media access committee (MAC) in the training of officers, Lt's., Sgt's., Supervisors and Commanders. Members of the RTNA's MAC had been considered adjunct instructors until 2017 when they were no longer involved. Empirical data show the RTNA's involvement had a very positive impact on relations and policy shift.
- Use the RTNA's 409.5 curriculum in future media relations classes

recommendations



Based on this survey, complaints received from our constituents and historical data the RTNA has the following recommendations to improve relations between the LA Press Corps and the LAPD:

- Work to establish a more efficient method of logging incoming media requests and create a time frame for follow up
- Revisit the earlier edict that all sworn officers be allowed to speak on behalf of the department. The effort was taken seriously and progress was noticeable
- Lighten up the restrictions for access to department employees
- Allow more transparency by cutting red tape on ride along requests, shadowing opportunities and access to information
- Allow more than one person to grant media requests

recommendations



Based on this survey, complaints received from our constituents and historical data the RTNA has the following recommendations to improve relations between the LA Press Corps and the LASD:

- Work to establish a more efficient method of logging incoming media requests and create a time frame for follow up
- Allow more deputies and rank & file to speak on behalf of the department
- Lighten up the restrictions for access to department employees
- Allow more transparency by cutting red tape on ride along requests, shadowing opportunities and access to information
- Allow more than one person to grant media requests
- Work to make a Spanish speaker available at each station willing and able to speak with the media. The RTNA can assist with training.

summary



The LAPD and LASD are the two largest law enforcement agencies that interact with the LA Press Corps on regular basis and creating this survey is a great road map to helping improve relations among all the stakeholders.

I would like to thank the members of the RTNA's Media Access Committee for their tireless efforts to continue monitoring and improving working relations between not only the LAPD and the LASD but every public agency that deals with the media. Whether it's an issue with parking, credentials, access or a simple disagreement among a reporter and PIO the Media Access Committee works to ensure that people from both sides of the yellow tape can do their respective jobs with mutual respect.

Thank you for your attention.

Chris Little, President - Radio & Television News Association of Southern California