

## Department of the Interior Departmental Manual

---

**Effective Date:** 01/17/2025

**Series:** Information

**Part 470:** Public Communications

**Chapter 1:** General Policy and Procedures

**Originating Office:** Office of Communications

---

### 470 DM 1

1.1 **Purpose.** This chapter identifies the laws, regulations, and standards and establishes the policy and procedures governing the official internal and external (public) communications of bureaus, offices, and employees at the Department of the Interior (Department) regarding the programs, operations, or activities of the Department.

1.2 **Scope.**

A. The policy in this chapter applies to all Department's Bureaus, Offices, and employees except as provided in section 1.2 (B).

B. The policy in this chapter does not apply to the official public communications of the Office of Inspector General.

1.3 **Public Communications.** Public communications are the release of information to the public through press releases, media advisories, media events, news features, news media interviews, speeches, statements about official business for public release, letters to the editor, opinion pieces, social media, Internet and Intranet postings.

A. Official Public Communications. Official public communications are public communications made by Department employees in their official capacity on behalf of the Department or bureau concerning Department or bureau policy, actions, decisions, and/or opinions.

B. Other Public Communications Regarding Programs, Operations, and Activities of the Department. Other public communications regarding the programs, operations, and activities of the Department are made by Department employees in their individual capacity. Such communications may be related to an employee's official duties or based primarily on knowledge acquired through official duties but are not made by employees on behalf of the Department or a bureau.

1.4 **Policy.** This chapter is aimed at promoting broad public understanding of the Department's mission and the work of its bureaus and offices. It establishes principles for excellence in public communications and provides procedures for facilitating the flow of information from the Department to the public. The Department supports a culture of openness

01/17/2025 #5195

Replaces 03/07/2012 #3940

with the news media and the public that values the free exchange of scientific ideas, data, policy and information and provides for the accurate dissemination of our work. We are committed to keeping our constituencies informed, and we welcome public interest in our programs and activities.

Accordingly, it is the policy of the Department to:

A. Use the news media, web-based, and social media products and other communications channels to report and explain to, and interpret for, the public the Department's policies, programs, and activities.

B. Use clear, concise language, avoid jargon, limit to the extent practicable the use of technical terms and clearly and concisely explain any technical terms.

C. Ensure information provided to the news media and the public is accurate and delivered in a timely manner and maximize disclosure consistent with requirements and intentions of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). (See 383 DM 15 for FOIA policy and procedures.)

D. Ensure cooperation and coordination among the Department's program and public affairs communities.

E. Uphold high standards for all public affairs employees, including:

(1) Be honest and accurate in all communications;

(2) Act promptly to correct mistakes or erroneous information, both internally and externally;

(3) Ensure that employees may speak on behalf of the Department to the news media and the public about their official work and freely and openly discuss scientific, scholarly, technical information, and, approaches, findings, and conclusions based on their official work, consistent with the provisions of this chapter and consistent with the Department's Scientific Integrity Policy and 305 DM 3 "Integrity of Scientific and Scholarly Activities."

(4) Honor embargoed dates for publications;

(5) Respond promptly to media requests and respect media deadlines;

(6) Appropriately protect information that is exempt from disclosure or where disclosure is restricted by statute, regulation, Executive Order, or other executive branch policies and directives;

(7) Internally promote policies and actions that support the Department's mission and provide prompt, accurate, and complete information to the public.

F. Encourage bureaus to use social media and other digital tools to communicate their missions and messages with the public.

G. Establish a process to address and resolve internal disagreements that may arise from a decision to proceed or not proceed with the issuance of a news release or other type of official public communications.

H. Ensure cooperation to the extent practicable with non-governmental organizations, firms or groups requesting official communications in the form of written or graphic material, or speeches that require special preparation consistent with the procedures of section 1.6 (G) of this chapter.

I. Increase dissemination of information through suitable nongovernment media. (For procedures, see 476 DM.)

J. The Department and bureaus are expected to decline to comment on pending litigation and should refrain from commenting on Office of Inspector General and Government Accountability Office reports beyond referring to the official agency response included within those reports.

K. OCO does not expect bureaus to invite elected officials or other external partners to include quotes in news releases. If a bureau or office has a formal partnership and wishes to invite a stakeholder to include a quote, the bureau has the responsibility to clear the quote with the Ethics Office and the Division of General Law.

**1.4.1. Department of the Interior policy for official use of social media sites and tools.** It is the policy of the Department that social media tools be accessed and used in a responsible manner. Official use of social media to communicate and engage with the public must be in accordance with all applicable Federal laws, regulations, and policies including those regarding accessibility; records management; information quality; and intellectual property.

A. OCO will provide regular guidance, communication and coordination of digital and social media campaigns that will involve multiple, if not all, bureaus to amplify:

(1) Administration and Secretarial priorities.

(2) Nationally recognized days, weeks, or months that are related to the mission of the Department, pertinent Bureaus/Offices, or our Interior community (Black History Month, Great Outdoors Month, National Wildlife Refuge Week, etc.).

(3) Notable Department accomplishments.

(4) Other pertinent thematic strategies as determined by OCO. Bureaus and offices are expected to participate and collaborate in these social media strategies to maximize outreach to their constituencies. OCO will often provide content for the bureaus and offices to use or pull from in their social media outreach.

1.4.1(a) **Official Use of Social Media at the Department.** Bureaus/Offices use social media to communicate their missions and engage with the public. The Department's Digital Media Guide ([www.doi.gov/dmguid](http://www.doi.gov/dmguid)) provides current guidance on the use of social media, including specific types of social media tools and services available for use.

A. Bureaus/Offices may use only approved social media services.

B. Employees must be granted approval to use social media, or other third-party services, to directly support or enhance activities undertaken in an official capacity. This includes receiving approval to create social media accounts for locations, programs, offices, and employees that are to be used for official work. Social media accounts created as professional personas (for example an account dedicated to "Bark Ranger Gracie") for official business and maintained using government resources (staff time, devices, etc.) are the property of the federal government. Content created in an official capacity may constitute a federal record and is subject to relevant information related laws and regulations, including the Freedom of Information Act.

C. Bureaus/Offices must follow the approval process detailed in the Department's Digital Media Guide when creating social media accounts. Any social media account that has not been approved via the approval process detailed in the Digital Media Guide is subject to immediate termination. Approval is required when creating social media accounts. Any social media account that has not been approved via the approval process detailed in the Digital Media Guide is subject to immediate termination. Approval is required to ensure:

(1) Cross-Department alignment of social media efforts and reduce duplication in accounts.

(2) When appropriate, information is delivered to citizens and the general public in the context of unified themes or messages; and

(3) The social media service has an appropriate Terms of Service (TOS) Agreement, Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA), and when required, a System of Records Notice (SORN).

D. Each Bureau/Office will maintain a list of all official social media accounts on its public website and in accordance with OMB memoranda. This catalog will be periodically provided to the Department's Office of Communications (OCO) and Office of the Chief Information Officer. See the Digital Media Guide for details.

E. Official social media accounts (both new and existing) must have a primary point of contact who is responsible for managing account security, overseeing employee access and training, and distributing guidance. The contact must be a full-time, permanent federal employee. (A list of Bureau/Office contacts is provided in the Digital Media Guide.)

F. Before gaining access to an official social media account, employees (including part-time, seasonal, volunteers, and partners) must take the mandatory social media training and sign the Department's social media user agreement.

**1.4.1(b) Guiding Principles for Official Use of Social Media.** The following principles should be employed when using social media services in an official capacity within the Department:

A. Bureaus, offices, and employees should discuss any Bureau/Office related information that is considered non-public information. The discussion of internal, sensitive, proprietary, or classified information is strictly prohibited. B. Social media sites should not be used as the sole venue for conducting official government business or disseminating information related to official Department functions. Press releases, grant opportunities, rulemaking notices, and other official announcements should also be made public through additional means, such as a Department or Bureau/Office website, or an email distribution to the press.

B. When representing the Department or a Bureau/Office in an official capacity, information posted on social media reflects on the Department, and the Bureau/Office is responsible for the content published. Any content posted to a social media site while acting in and employee's official capacity is considered public content, regardless of any privacy controls that restrict access to that content. Content posted on social media will be available to a large audience, may be published and discussed in the media, and is subject to FOIA and other rules requiring public disclosure.

C. When using social media in an official capacity (when managing either an official organizational account or an official individual account), know and follow all applicable laws, regulations, and guidelines, such as the Appropriate Use of the Internet, Rules of Behavior for Computer Network Users, and the Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch. Restrictions include:

(1) Do not engage in vulgar or abusive language, personal attacks of any kind, or offensive terms targeting individuals or groups.

(2) Do not endorse non-Federal products, services, or entities.

(3) Do not solicit donations of any kind.

**1.4.2 Department and Bureau external facing websites.** The Department's Web Manager, located in the Office of Communication, has overall responsibility for developing Web content-related regulations, guidelines, procedures, and standards for the Department.

A. The Department of the Interior Web Council (DWC) is responsible for periodically reviewing and proposing new and existing Web standards for incorporation into the Department's Web Standards Handbook.

B. The Bureaus and Offices are responsible for:

(1) Developing and issuing internal procedures to ensure compliance with the law and the Department's policies and procedures and implementing the Department's Web Standards Handbook;

(2) Designating a Web manager responsible for implementing the Department's Web Standards Handbook. The Bureau/Office web manager is the primary liaison with the Department for Web related activities;

(3) Complying with Federal and State laws concerning the Web as well as implementing the recommendations of the Department's Web Standards Handbook, paragraph 3.6. The Web Standards Handbook (386 DM 3, Handbook) is issued by the Department's Chief Information Officer. It contains Web policies and guidance for implementing and maintaining the Web presence in the Department. The Handbook provides guidance on Web requirements mandated by Law, standard Web elements, and Web identification. The Department's Web Standards Handbook is available on the Department's website.

## 1.5 Responsibilities.

### A. Office of Communications (OCO).

(1) Providing leadership and coordination for the Department's public affairs activities, promoting a culture of openness with the news media and the public, and supporting the principles of this chapter.

(2) Establishing public affairs policies and priorities and providing guidance to bureaus and offices on communications policy and procedures.

(3) Determining which news releases and other types of public information will be issued nationwide by the Department, in consultation with the bureaus.

(4) Providing guidance and direction to bureau public affairs officers and staff, when necessary, as to the need for developing news, interviews, feature stories, briefing material, or articles and making final determinations as to the manner in which information issues of Department interest and/or importance are to be handled.

(5) Ensuring the accuracy of news releases and other types of official public communication by providing for review prior to release by scientists, scholars, engineers and other subject matter experts.

(6) Providing guidance on the use of social media, intranet and web postings consistent with the Department's social media policy.

(7) Establishing and implementing Department-wide employee communications strategies, policies and products on behalf of the Office of the Secretary.

(8) Providing reviews of requests for official communications as needed and delegating reviews to bureau public affairs officers, as appropriate.

01/17/2025 #5195

Replaces 03/07/2012 #3940

(9) Providing guidance to bureaus and offices on public communications by employees, consistent with this chapter.

(10) Working with the appropriate Assistant Secretary, bureau or office head, bureau Public Affairs Officer, and the Office of the Solicitor, as necessary, to address and resolve internal disagreements that may arise from a decision to proceed or not proceed with the issuance of a news release or other type of official public communication at the national level.

(11) Senior public affairs specialists are assigned to assist bureaus and offices with communication planning, scheduling interviews, and supporting critical communications actions by the bureaus. Case load responsibilities include:

- a. Working with bureaus and offices to forecast priorities, including upcoming announcements and long-range planning;
- b. Coordinating review of news media requests and communications materials;
- c. Coordinating rollout plans for priority announcements;
- d. Working with bureaus and offices to ensure communication plans, including press materials align with administration and Department priorities;
- e. Coordinating announcements with the Department social media / digital communication leads, intergovernmental affairs and congressional / legislative affairs;
- f. Providing media engagement support, such as coordinating media availabilities, preparing principals, and monitoring coverage.

B. Bureaus and Offices.

(1) Implementing their communications programs, adhering to Department policies, procedures and priorities, and coordinating public affairs and communications activities with the OCO.

(2) Determining the newsworthiness of policy actions, and the manner in which the news is to be disseminated, with the concurrence of the OCO.

(3) Referring questions to the OCO that have the potential to generate significant media coverage, public interest or inquiry, particularly those involving more than one bureau or office.

(4) Ensuring the accuracy of public communications that do not require OCO concurrence, by providing for review prior to release by scientists, scholars, engineers or other subject matter experts.

(5) Providing guidance to employees for the coordination of public affairs and communications activities as part of their official duties, consistent with this chapter.

01/17/2025 #5195

Replaces 03/07/2012 #3940

- (6) Providing guidance to employees on other public communications regarding programs, operations or activities of the Department, consistent with this chapter.
- (7) Monitoring and managing the content employees publish on blogs, wikis, social networking websites, or other forms of social media in their official capacity.
- (8) Providing guidance to employees on the use of social media, the intranet and web postings, consistent with Department social media policy and this chapter.
- (9) Ensuring that all-employee messages from the Secretary to bureau or office-specific audiences are reviewed and distributed by OCO.
- (10) Providing a mechanism to resolve internal disagreements that may arise from a decision to proceed or not proceed with the issuance of a bureau or office news release or other type of official public communications. Bureaus must determine responsibility for addressing and resolving such disagreements, providing for appeals, as appropriate.
- (11) Referring matters that concern scientific or scholarly integrity to appropriate officials implementing the Department policy on “Integrity of Scientific and Scholarly Activities” (305 DM 3).

C. Employees.

- (1) Keeping their supervisors and bureau public affairs personnel informed of all significant actions that have the potential to generate public interest or media attention.
- (2) Understanding the difference between official public communications made in their official capacity and other public communications regarding the programs, operations or activities of the Department made in their individual capacity, as defined in this chapter.
- (3) Maintaining a clear distinction between official public communications made in their official capacity and other public communications regarding the programs, operations or activities of the Department made in their individual capacity.
- (4) Clearly indicating to the public whether they are communicating in their official or individual capacity.
- (5) Disseminating accurate and adequate information about their work and confining statements made in their official capacity to factual material related to their area of responsibility.
- (6) Referring through appropriate bureau channels any news releases or requests for media interviews concerning policy matters, or that cut across Department or bureau lines for prior review and approval, consistent with this chapter.



(7) Following Department and Bureau/Office procedures regarding official public communications; and

(8) Complying with the laws, regulations and standards identified in this chapter governing other public communications regarding the programs, operations or activities of the Department.

**1.6 Official Communications Review/Approval Process.** The review and approval process outlined in this chapter calls for coordination among OCO, the bureaus, and employees to help facilitate public communications.

A. All Department news releases that involve significant policy announcements or that may generate significant news coverage, public interest or inquiry must be cleared by OCO prior to release. In addition, all releases quoting the Secretary or Assistant Secretaries must be cleared by OCO. Bureaus must establish clear processes for coordinating approvals with OCO consistent with the following requirements:

(1) A draft news release must be prepared and submitted to OCO for each significant decision or action document intended for Secretarial action. The draft news release must be prepared under the guidance of the Assistant Secretary recommending the anticipated decision, with the help of a bureau public affairs officer, and must contain essential background information and rationale for the action expected to be taken.

(2) On some issues and public awareness efforts, OCO may require a more comprehensive communications plan or may designate an agency spokesperson to provide consistent, accurate information to the media and the public.

(3) For procedures governing advance preparation of news releases on notices and documents to appear in the Federal Register, see 318 DM.

(4) Scientists, scholars, engineers and other subject matter experts will be provided the opportunity to conduct a factual review of news releases concerning their work prior to publication to the extent practicable.

(5) In emergency situations that threaten life or property, an official communication related to the emergency may be made without first obtaining approval from OCO. Bureau public affairs offices must provide guidance during emergency situations.

(a) Bureaus will notify OCO as soon as practical in emergency situations and will coordinate the continued release of information as the situation allows.

(6) OCO does not expect bureaus to invite elected officials or other external patterners to include quotes in news releases. If a bureau or office has a formal partnership and wishes to invite a stakeholder to include a quote, the bureau has the responsibility to clear the quote with the Ethics Office and the Division of General Law.

(a) Bureau quotes in outside news releases must be cleared by the Ethics Office and the Division of General Law and submitted to OCO for approval.

B. Bureaus must notify OCO in advance of any media interviews, media requests or contacts that may involve significant policy announcements or may generate significant news coverage, public interest or inquiry. The types of media requests to share with OCO include those concerning:

- (1) National level outlets and regional outlets in top media markets.
- (2) Controversial issues.
- (3) Topics that relate to Administrative or Secretarial priorities or recent announcements.

C. External communications regarding Law Enforcement incidents and, in particular the release of body worn camera footage and other video footage will be conducted in accordance with 446 DM 41.

D. All speeches from political appointees must be cleared by OCO. Bureau public affairs chiefs must determine which, if any, speeches from non-political appointees require OCO review.

E. Video Requests of the Secretary should go through Scheduling and Advance, as well as OCO. If a bureau or office believes a video from the Secretary would be helpful to emphasize and/or advance a message, please share the initial request during your weekly meeting with OCO communications and in the communications plan for the announcement or initiative. Once the bureau or office has made the request to OCO and Scheduling and Advance, the requesting team will write the initial draft (please follow the speech cadence outlined in this document under Secretary's Talking Points and Speeches). The OCO team will book space for the Secretary to film, and will take the lead on production, including video camera and teleprompter, post-production editing, internal approval and sharing to the bureau or office point of contact.

F. All non-technical articles for publication, letters to the editor, and editorial replies written by employees of the Department in their official capacities are subject to prior review by OCO. Bureau public affairs chiefs must determine when OCO review is required.

G. Department publications, electronic or print, must be cleared through the appropriate bureau publication approval process (314 DM 1). All materials that include any message from the Secretary must be reviewed and approved by OCO.

H. Bureaus must consult with OCO and the Office of the Chief Information Officer through the bureau's social media point of contact prior to creating new social media profiles and/or presences that have not been previously approved for use. Any social networking profiles or social media presences that have not been approved may be terminated.

I. Any substantive information and/or audiovisual products posted to a third-party social media website must also be provided in another publicly available format such as the Department's or bureau's website. Third-party social media websites must never be the only place in which the public can view Department information.

J. Bureaus and offices are encouraged to publish scientific, scholarly and technical material produced as a result of official activities.

(1) Scientific, scholarly, and technical material is not subject to OCO approval. However, when bureaus or offices determine that material to be published involves important new scientific, scholarly or other technical information, has direct bearing on policy questions, or relates to programs of other bureaus of the Department or other Federal agencies, the bureau or office must notify OCO and make a copy available upon request prior to publication for awareness.

(2) Publication of such materials may be authorized by bureau heads through professional or other journals or media in lieu of Government publication. For procedures governing utilization of non-Government publications, see 476 DM.

K. Written or graphic materials or speeches prepared by bureaus and offices in response to requests for official communications from non-governmental organizations, firms or groups may be subject to prior review by the OCO. This review will generally be delegated to the bureau public affairs chief. The following conditions apply:

(1) The preparation or presentation of material in response to requests for official communications must not impose an unreasonable burden on the staff of the bureau or office concerned.

(2) The official communications must promote better and wider understanding of Department objectives, policies, programs, and activities.

L. Prior approval must be given by OCO for creation of new positions, appointments, details, transfers, or termination of existing positions or termination of employment of professional level employees, excluding adverse employment actions, in the following types of positions: public affairs officers, public affairs specialists, information officers, information specialists, other positions in the information series, and any other positions performing similar functions including those in external affairs at the grade of GS-14 and higher.

M. OCO may obtain assistance directly from bureau public affairs and information officers on any public affairs project and, when the occasion arises, may request to detail bureau personnel to OCO for work on special projects. In the same manner, OCO personnel may be detailed to a particular bureau or to the staff of the Secretariat for specific projects.

N. The OCO Director may issue instructions to bureau public affairs and information officers to carry out the assigned responsibilities of OCO.

O. It is the general policy of the Department not to use paid advertising in any publication in connection with its programs and activities, except where special legal requirements and authority exist. In the event that any bureau or office believes paid advertising is necessary because of the significant benefits it affords in enhancing public participation, the following apply:

(1) Paid advertising requires prior written approval by the bureau public affairs office or OCO, in consultation with the Office of the Solicitor.

(2) No paid advertising will be approved or authorized without strong justification that supports a critical program or activity.

(3) Bureau public affairs offices must determine when review is required by OCO. OCO can relieve the bureau public affairs office of approval authority upon discovery of inappropriate or improper justification.

(4) The prohibition of paid advertising does not apply to sponsorship of conferences in which an agency advertisement may be featured in conference materials or to the use of paid advertisements for recruitment purposes.

**1.7 Other Public Communications Regarding the Programs, Operations and Activities of the Department.** Employees may engage in public communications regarding the programs, operations, and activities of the Department, including matters related to their official duties, or based primarily on knowledge acquired through official duties, provided that:

A. They do not disclose information protected from disclosure by statute, regulation, Executive Order, or other Executive Branch or Department policies or directives, including classified information and controlled unclassified information such as personally identifiable information, and information protected by the Trade Secrets Act, 18 USC § 1905, Privacy Act, 5 USC § 552(a), and Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552 (FOIA). For example, Exemption 5 of the FOIA permits agencies to protect from disclosure pre-decisional and deliberative information, which may include certain drafts, reports, and other information. Therefore, unless information has already been published or otherwise publicly released by the Department or bureau, employees must seek guidance from their supervisor before engaging in public communications regarding the information.

B. They do not violate Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch, 5 C.F.R. §§ 2635.101-902, or the regulations governing Department employee responsibilities and conduct, 43 C.F.R. Part 20. For example, pursuant to the Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch, employees communicating in their individual capacity may not use or permit the use of their official titles or positions in such a way that a reasonable person would believe they were communicating on behalf of the Department or bureau. Therefore, when employees engage in public communication in their individual capacity regarding the programs, operations, and activities of the Department they must clearly indicate that they are not representing the views of the Department.

C. They do not violate the Department's Limited Personal Use of Government Office Equipment and Library Collection policy at 410 DM 2, which limits the personal use of government equipment such as computers and copiers by employees. For example, use of government equipment must not interfere with official business, involve commercial gain, and the expense to the Government must be negligible. Therefore, when employees engage in public communication in their individual capacity regarding the programs, operations, or activities of the Department, they must do so within the limitations of 410 DM 2.