



Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency
For the District of Columbia
Office of Legislative, Intergovernmental, and Public Affairs

POLICY STATEMENT

Public Affairs and Communications
Number: 1200
Effective Date: 5/15/2020
Review Due Date: 5/15/2022

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Director

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Overview

Background

Due to the nature and mission of the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA or the Agency), employees often are approached by individuals and entities from all levels of government, media outlets, and elected or appointed officials, seeking information regarding the Agency and the population it serves.

The purpose of this policy is to establish the principles governing:

- The Public Affairs and Communications Unit in producing and managing internal and external communications to promote broad public recognition and support of the Agency and its mission.
 - The official internal and external communications of CSOSA personnel regarding contacts with and inquiries from the media or officials.
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Summary of Changes

- Separation of policy from procedures.
 - Inclusion of definitions.
 - Clarification of roles and responsibilities.
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Coverage

This Policy Statement applies to all CSOSA personnel, including employees, contractors, and interns.

Authorities

- Section 11232 (b)(1), § 11232(b)(2), § 11233(b)(2)(B) of the National Capital Revitalization and Self-Government Improvement Act of 1997 (“Revitalization Act”), Pub. Law 105-33, 111 Stat. 712, D.C. Code § 24-132(b)(1), § 24-132(b)(2), § 24-133(b)(2)(B) (1996 Repl., 1999 Supp.)
 - D.C. Code § 24-133(b)(2)(B) (1996 Rep., 1999 Supp.)
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Disclaimer

The contents of this guidance do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.

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Overview, Continued

Supersedes This Policy Statement supersedes Policy Statement 1200, Media Policy, dated July 21, 2008.

References

- [Plain Writing Act of 2010](#)
- [Freedom of Information Act](#)

Administrator The Office of Legislative, Intergovernmental, and Public Affairs (OLIPA) is responsible for the contents of this policy.

Policy Disclaimer Nothing in this policy is intended to or should in any way infringe upon the rights of an employee to be protected under the Whistleblower Protection Act or any other statute or regulation designed to protect the rights of a federal employee.

Policy

- OLIPA Principles** The Public Affairs and Communications Unit produces and manages internal and external communications by:
- Disseminating clear and consistent messages about the Agency’s mission and activities to CSOSA staff, government agencies, community partners, the media, and the public.
 - Serving as the point of contact through which accurate and consistent information about the Agency is distributed, including internal and external communications.
 - Reviewing and approving both internal communications for Agency-wide distribution and external communications.
 - Ensuring that information provided to the media and the public is accurate and delivered promptly.
 - Ensuring that all of the Agency’s official written and visual content conforms to the Agency’s approved graphical, visual, and editorial standards, including, but not limited to, Plain Writing principles and branding guidelines.
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Elected and Appointed Officials

Only the Director and his/her designees are authorized to communicate with elected or appointed officials and their staff regarding the official Agency business. This Policy Statement excludes staff of the United States Parole Commission (USPC), the District of Columbia Superior Court (DCSC), Bureau of Prisons (BOP), Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), and Pretrial Services Agency (PSA) due to their routine case-related interactions with CSOSA employees. The exclusion applies to communications necessary to carry out the Agency’s mission.

- CSOSA personnel must seek review and approval from the Associate Director of OLIPA:
 - Before providing a written or verbal statement on behalf of the Agency responding to an elected or appointed official’s inquiry.
 - To engage with local, state, and federal elected or appointed officials and their staff on matters concerning legislation, finances, program policy, or general operations.
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Policy, Continued

Elected and Appointed Officials, continued

Only the Director and his/her designees are authorized to extend a formal invitation on behalf of the Agency to elected or appointed officials and their staff to attend any CSOSA sponsored or co-sponsored event, program, or observance.

- CSOSA personnel must submit a formal request to OLIPA before extending an invitation to an elected or appointed official and/or their staff.
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Media Inquiries

CSOSA personnel must report any media contact or request from an elected or appointed official about a CSOSA matter to the Director of CSOSA, through OLIPA's Supervisory Public Affairs Specialist.

CSOSA personnel must obtain approval from the Director of CSOSA through OLIPA's Supervisory Public Affairs Specialist, before speaking or corresponding with any media outlet or organization about any matter related to the Agency's official business.

This includes, but is not limited to:

- All media inquiries, including requests for offender interviews or statements.
- High-profile cases, such as those cases that attract enough media or public attention, and incidents that staff reasonably believe have the potential for media interest.

Exception:

An off duty employee, as a private citizen, is not prohibited from expressing his/her personal views on matters to the media, as long as the employee:

- Advises that he/she is expressing his/her own personal views and not that of the Agency and is not acting in his/her official capacity;
 - Makes it clear that he/she is not representing CSOSA;
 - Does not disclose sensitive or confidential information acquired in the performance of his/her official duties with CSOSA;
 - Refrains from using Agency insignia or wearing attire bearing the Agency's insignia while expressing his/her personal views; and
 - Does not identify himself/herself as a CSOSA employee when on social media and making political or otherwise sensitive commentary.
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Policy, Continued

**Disciplinary
Action**

Failure to adhere to this policy may result in disciplinary action.

Definitions

Branding Establishing a distinct visual identity for the Agency across various media and platforms. A strong visual identity enhances the community's recognition and support of the Agency and its mission. Elements such as the Agency seal, typography, color scheme, and graphical choices are all essential to establishing a consistent brand identity.

Elected and Appointed Officials Within this Policy Statement, the term "elected and appointed officials" includes, but is not limited to, executives of Federal and District Government agencies, members of Congress, the judiciary, members of the Council of the District of Columbia (D.C.) and D.C. Advisory Neighborhood Commission and the immediate staff of these officials.

Public/External Communications Digital, print, and, in some cases, oral content that will be consumed by an audience that includes individuals not employed by CSOSA. Additionally, the content is, purports to be, or gives the impression that it is official or Agency-sanctioned. This digital, print or oral content includes, but is not limited to, presentations, speeches, flyers, written reports, photos/videos, websites, social media postings, newsletters, and letters.

External Presentation Presentations made to an audience that includes individuals who are not employed by CSOSA. External presentations include those made at a conference, event, or meeting sponsored by an entity other than CSOSA, as well as, conferences, events, or meetings hosted by CSOSA, whether held on or off CSOSA premises, where any individual who is not employed by the Agency is in attendance. Presentations include, but are not limited to, those created in Microsoft PowerPoint, Prezi, or similar software.

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Definitions, Continued

Internal Communications

Comprised of all-digital, oral and print content to be widely distributed (to 50% or more of Agency employees) within the Agency. Digital and print content includes, but is not limited to, newsletters, periodicals, flyers, and email messages.

Plain Writing

Also referred to as “plain language,” is a style of writing designed to ensure the reader understands the message as quickly, easily, and thoroughly as possible. Plain writing strives to be easy to read, understood, and used. Plain writing is concise and avoids the use of jargon. Communicating in this manner does not mean oversimplifying concepts, but instead presenting the information in a way that makes it easier to understand and use by a wider audience.

Public Affairs

The Agency’s relationships with the media and the public information arm of the Agency’s public safety partners.

Strategic Communications

Policymaking and guidance to be disseminated within the Agency and between the Agency and external stakeholders. The policymaking and guidance provide a structured and systematic process to engage key audiences to create, strengthen, and preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of the Agency’s mission, goals, guiding principles, and priorities through consistent and coordinated programming and messaging.

Roles and Responsibilities

CSOSA Personnel

- Include employees, contractors, and interns.
 - Notify OLIPA's Supervisory Public Affairs Specialist immediately of any media contacts or inquiries.
 - Adhere to procedures established by OLIPA regarding internal and external communications.
 - Coordinate official communication requests (e.g. contacting elected and appointed officials) through their chain of command (supervisor, associate director, etc.) for review and approval before sending it to OLIPA for final review and approval.
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Associate Director of OLIPA

- Oversees public communication activities, including but not limited to, media relations, websites, use of social media, publications, speeches, briefings, etc.
 - Maintains effective relations with the media, public, other governmental entities, community groups, and organizations.
 - Keeps Senior Executive Leadership Team (SELT) apprised of press inquiries, as appropriate.
 - Ensures that pertinent information regarding unit activities is shared with the media promptly when appropriate.
 - Consults with the appropriate authorities before releasing information to the public.
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Senior Executive Leadership Team (SELT)

- Ensure their staff is informed about the Agency's public affairs and communication policies and related procedures.
 - Notify the Associate Director of OLIPA about media inquiries.
 - Inform the Supervisory Public Affairs Specialist about notable and newsworthy developments within their unit.
 - Anticipate, as much as possible, issues that could evoke controversy, including high-profile cases, and keep the Supervisory Public Affairs Specialist informed so that s/he may plan and execute appropriate communication strategies.
 - Review and approve official communications requests from unit employees before sending the request to OLIPA for final review and approval.
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Roles and Responsibilities, Continued

Supervisory Public Affairs Specialist

- Provides overall leadership and coordination for public affairs and communications activities.
 - Oversees the development and dissemination of communications strategies, tactics, and products concerning issues of Agency interest or importance, in consultation with the Office of the Director (OD) and program leadership, as appropriate.
 - Reviews requests for official communications as needed and delegates work to team members as appropriate.
 - Provides guidance and has final authority on the development and use of social media, the Intranet, and Web content.
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Public Affairs and Communications Unit

- Develops and implements internal communications strategies and plans for Agency-wide initiatives and events.
 - Generates and manages the content on the Agency's official social media platforms.
 - Develops and advises strategic communications, as needed.
 - Serves as a point of contact for external Agency communications with various governmental and community partners, including the media.
 - Serves as the designated Plain Agency's senior official on Plain Writing.
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