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U.S. Department of Justice

Federal Bureau of Prisons

Washington, D.C. 20534

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Via e-mail

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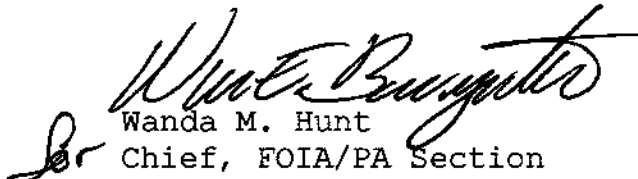
Dear Requestor:

This is in response to your Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for a copy of the Public Information Officer's Handbook.

We have located the document which is responsive to your request. This document contains 38 pages and is being released to you in its entirety.

We trust this has been responsive to your request. If you have any questions or concerns please contact Wm E. Baumgartel, Senior Paralegal Specialist.

Sincerely,

  
Wanda M. Hunt  
Chief, FOIA/PA Section

cc: File  
enclosure



**Public  
Information  
Officer's  
Handbook**

**2004**



**Prepared by:  
Office of Public Affairs  
Information, Policy, and  
Public Affairs Division**

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# Introduction

Media interest in the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) has continued to grow since the last edition of the Public Information Officer (PIO) Handbook. As a public agency, the Bureau has a responsibility to provide the public with information about its programs and operations; and public information concerning inmates in its custody. Equally important is its responsibility to ensure that institution security and public safety is not compromised, or inmates' rights to privacy. Whether it is to dispel myths, clarify unfounded perceptions, or to further educate and inform, the BOP wants to ensure the general public is better acquainted with the agency through the news media.

The guidelines in this handbook are not changes to our *News Media Contacts Program Statement (P.S. 1480.05)*. Rather, these guidelines are an effort to explain how this national policy is to be implemented to ensure Bureau-wide consistency in its application. A consistent approach to handling media requests is especially important because there are many factors that need to be considered as a part of each media request (e.g., policy, past practices, Regional and Central Office concerns, and the specific issues in the request).

Television, radio, the print media, and the Internet all have a tremendous impact on public perceptions. Because it is so important to maintain our credibility with the public, Bureau PIOs have an important role in working closely with the media to ensure the media understand and accurately represent our policies and practices.

While some institutions generally attract more media attention than others, all PIOs must remain alert to the possibility that an unexpected event (e.g., the arrival of a high-profile inmate) could suddenly thrust their institution into the limelight. An event like this has the potential of placing a PIO in the spotlight answering a barrage of questions from reporters. In an institution emergency, such as a disturbance or hostage situation, immediate and ongoing media coverage will likely occur. With an effective institution media emergency plan, PIOs can more effectively respond to public and media inquiries.

In order to portray the Bureau accurately, PIOs must be prepared, must have a clear understanding of agency policies and procedures, must dedicate the time and resources necessary to do their job, and must be ready to react responsibly. The PIO Handbook can serve as a useful reference guide for PIOs in the development of public affairs strategies that balance the needs of the media with the institution's responsibility to maintain security and order.

# 1. The Function of the Public Information Officer

In the BOP’s Central Office, day-to-day contacts with the media and general public are delegated to the Office of Public Affairs (OPA), a branch of the Information, Policy, and Public Affairs Division. This office also serves in an advisory role to the Regional and Institution Public Information Officers (PIOs).

Responsibility for carrying out the Bureau’s information policies rests with the Regional Director on the regional level, and with the Warden or Chief Executive Officer at the institutional level. These administrators may retain day-to-day responsibility for information programs, or delegate it to another staff member. In most cases, the Executive Assistant is the designated PIO. Only PIOs should respond to the news media; otherwise, conflicting, inconsistent, inappropriate, and erroneous information may be disseminated.

***Institutions/Field Offices***—When a field PIO believes that an institutional issue or event will attract national or negative media attention, after consultation with the Warden, he or she should immediately contact the Regional PIO and Central Office, OPA staff. This will allow them to provide advice about handling the situation and prepare a consistent response should the media contact Regional or Central Office personnel. All PIOs must be completely familiar with and have a working knowledge of the *News Media Contacts Program Statement* (see **Appendix A**).

The responsibilities of the institution PIO usually include:

- Acting as official spokesperson for the facility (but referring questions about high profile inmates, national policy, or about issues that may receive national or negative media attention to the Central Office).
- Maintaining close communication with the

Warden on all matters of potential media interest.

- Maintaining a high degree of familiarity with BOP policies and how they are implemented through institution supplements.
- Review daily newsclips, posted by OPA on Sallyport, to maintain current knowledge of newsworthy issues related to the BOP or corrections in general.
- Conducting tours of the facility for the general public and for reporters who are doing stories about institution programs or operations.
- Coordinating requests to interview inmates or staff, ensuring that required procedures are followed and that appropriate forms are signed by reporters and inmate(s). Before contacting the Regional PIO and Central Office, Office of Public Affairs staff to request assistance in addressing a specific media request, PIOs need to ensure they have a clear understanding of the potential story’s scope (who will be involved) and focus (what issues will be addressed) – always ask the reporter for more details when necessary.
- Preparing and distributing news releases. In the event of a serious incident, it is necessary to fully coordinate all news releases with both the respective Regional Office PIO and the Central Office, OPA staff. This particularly applies to those cases where national media attention or bureau-wide impact could possibly result from a local incident.
- Providing an overview of media policies and procedures to all staff during institution familiarization or annual training.
- Developing a local media emergency plan,

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using guidelines distributed by Central Office, OPA.

- Being proactive in developing a positive relationship with local media.
- Submitting published news articles about the facility in a timely manner to the Regional PIO and Central Office, OPA staff for their review and information.
- Maintaining a high degree of familiarity with information included on the BOP's website ([www.bop.gov](http://www.bop.gov)). This information can serve as a useful public information resource. For example, PIOs can direct news media representatives to the website to review the BOP's *News Media Contacts* policy.

### ***Evening/Weekend Hours:***

*PIOs need to establish procedures for adequately addressing media inquiries after normal business hours. There are situations when reporters will need to speak with an institution spokesperson during evening or weekend hours. Institution procedures should clearly outline the steps staff should take if a reporter calls the institution to speak with a spokesperson after normal business hours.*

***Regional Offices***—Each Regional Office has a PIO (usually the Executive Assistant to the Regional Director) who responds to inquiries from the media and the public. Institution PIOs should maintain regular contact with Regional PIOs to ensure that they are aware of events that may generate local, regional, or national media interest.

***Central Office***—Since the Central Office is the national headquarters for the Bureau, the Office of Public Affairs PIOs are responsible for responding to all media inquiries that effect or involve the Bureau as an agency. The Central Office PIOs act as official spokespersons for the agency, handling

the stories that are negative or may have national implications. The Central Office PIOs inform the Director, divisions, regions, institutions, or other BOP staff of media inquiries on a daily basis or as needed, and notify the Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of Public Affairs of any issue that may receive national media interest. For this reason, it is important that Regional or institution PIOs notify the Central Office, OPA (202-307-3198) whenever a potentially negative or national story may be broadcast or published\*. This allows DOJ and Central Office, OPA staff to prepare for additional inquiries and eliminates any embarrassment that may arise from not knowing about a significant issue.

In addition, Office of Public Affairs PIOs serve as a resource to BOP staff (particularly in regions and institutions) regarding media-related questions or procedures. Responses to particular inquiries will ordinarily be researched in collaboration with central office, region, and institution staff and will reflect the Bureau's public position about a subject.

***The Department of Justice's Office of Public Affairs***—The Office of Public Affairs in the Department of Justice expects the BOP's Central Office, OPA staff to keep them informed regarding any media issues that may be of national interest. The Department's Office of Public Affairs keeps the Attorney General advised of significant media issues, just as the Central Office, OPA staff keeps the Director informed.

Within DOJ, several offices have been set aside for media representatives use. Many of these offices are occupied daily by reporters assigned to cover DOJ issues and events. For example, the *Associated Press*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *ABC News* have offices at the Department of Justice staffed with reporters who can immediately report

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\*Note: As a point of contact during weekends, holidays, or evening hours, in addition to the Central Office Duty Officer, the Department of Justice's 24-hour Operator can reach the BOP's Public Affairs Staff at any time should an emergency arise. The DOJ Operator can be reached at (202) 514-2000.

on DOJ related matters. Some reporters have permanent DOJ IDs, allowing them access to the Department at any time. Because of this arrangement, DOJ staff are routinely questioned by the media about late-breaking news stories that originate from anywhere in the country.

Additionally, since these reporters primarily cover DOJ issues, they routinely contact BOP OPA staff seeking comments about specific agency issues.

**Orientation of Staff**—One of the roles of the institution PIO is to provide staff with an overview of media policy. (Annual training or institution familiarization would be a good time for this overview to occur.) Several specific points should be highlighted:

- Only the Chief Executive Officer (or designee) is authorized to talk to the media on behalf of the institution.
- Staff should be cautious about openly discussing inmates or institution business during off-duty hours (particularly in public places).
- Staff should notify the institution PIO whenever they are contacted by a media representative regarding corrections-related issues, either on or off the job site.
- Administrative action could be taken against staff who ignore policy and willingly become anonymous sources for the media—particularly when they disclose information related to an ongoing investigation or the security of the institution.
- Staff can be prosecuted for unauthorized disclosure of sensitive or protected information, or could find themselves personally liable if they violate an inmate’s or staff member’s right to privacy.
- Staff may speak freely to the media without

prior authorization when the topic or circumstances are unrelated to their work for the BOP.

- Union officials representing the Bargaining Unit (in their official capacity) can interact with the media (e.g., providing interviews with print or broadcast media, placing advertisements in newspapers, appearing on public talk shows and radio stations, and speaking at conferences and conventions) without approval from the agency. However, they are subject to the same limits as other staff regarding the disclosure of sensitive information.

**Orientation of Inmates**—Inmates should also be informed of policy and procedures on media contacts to avoid any misunderstandings. A basic overview of these procedures should be presented by the PIO during the Administration and Orientation process; more detailed information should be provided in the institution’s inmate handbook.

This information sharing benefits staff as well as inmates; a thorough understanding of policy and procedures enables staff to more effectively schedule, control, and document media requests and interviews.

Ultimately, the PIOs objective is to keep everyone who needs to know informed about significant events or issues. This will provide them with an opportunity to formulate accurate, appropriate, consistent, and timely responses, thereby enhancing the BOP’s credibility and that of the Department of Justice.

## 2. Who Are the Media?

**News Media**—Representatives of the news media are those whose principal employment is gathering and reporting news for a newspaper, news magazine, national or international news service, radio, television program, or internet news site.



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News media representatives are clearly defined in the BOP's *News Media Contacts* Program Statement 1480.05 to eliminate any confusion about who qualifies for access into BOP institutions. By limiting media contacts to news media representatives, the Bureau enables the public to learn about the BOP without disrupting the orderly or safe operations of the institution or adversely impacting staff resources.

***Non-news Media/Book Authors***—Program Statement 1480.05, Section 8e, makes provision for interviews by reporters not specifically connected with commercial news organizations. These are permitted “only by special arrangement and with approval of the Warden.” This section also outlines the criteria PIOs should consider as a part of their review of any book author’s request for an inmate interview.

Traditionally, film makers, freelance reporters (not under contract with a recognized media organization), independent production companies, and other “non-news” reporters are typically denied access because they do not meet the established criteria outlined in the policy.

As internet news services (e.g., *Slate Magazine*, *ABC.com*) continue to increase, PIOs may receive requests for interviews from these web-based sources. As an evolving news source, careful attention should be given before PIOs authorize any interviews with a web-based source who claims to be a news representative. Normally, the only recognized “on-line” services that PIOs should consider as legitimate news organizations are either those linked to a legitimate news organization (e.g., *ABC.com*, *CNN.com*, etc.) or specific sites that publish material with editorial controls over what they publish (e.g., *Slate Magazine*, *Salon Magazine*, etc.).

PIOs should not approve interview requests from entertainment-based internet organizations, or authorize inmate participation in “live” internet interviews, including “live” discussions on legitimate news media web sites.

PIOs should contact Central Office, OPA staff whenever they need assistance in determining the legitimacy of any on-line requestor who claims to be a news representative, or in developing a strategy to respond to these types of requests.

***Foreign Media***—Foreign journalists continue to play a significant role in today’s world of global communications, especially in regard to criminal justice issues. Like their domestic counterparts, members of foreign media organizations also have shown increased interest in the Bureau over the past several years.

While foreign media requests are handled in the same manner as requests from U.S. media, there may be diplomatic or security concerns about a specific foreign journalist visit. In addition, attempting to verify the authenticity of a foreign news organization and its staff can take a considerable amount of time. Thus, *before granting a request*, PIOs should contact the Central Office, OPA\* (in coordination, as always, with their Regional Office PIO) to advise staff of the request. In conjunction with the U.S. Information Agency’s Foreign and International Press Centers, Public Affairs staff can verify the authenticity of the non-U.S. media outlet the reporter claims to be representing, as well as the reporter’s credentials.

When necessary, foreign news agencies may be asked to provide a copy of their publication/news program so that PIOs can familiarize themselves with the foreign news organization before making a final decision on access.

The type of credentials foreign journalist have will vary based on their respective duty assignments - some are U.S.-based (work primarily in this country), while others are not. Thus, in order to conduct routine law enforcement background checks on foreign journalists, PIOs will need to

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\*Central Office, OPA staff coordinate national briefings and visits of foreign dignitaries, provide international technical assistance, and help coordinate various foreign media activities in BOP institutions (e.g., documentary filming).

verify the type of credentials, including photo identification, that these journalist have (e.g., driver's license, passport, or media credentials.)

**Tabloid Media**—Occasionally, institution PIOs will receive requests for information or interviews from “tabloid media.” These organizations are entertainment or “infotainment” based, and exist both in print and television network format. For example, common newspapers tabloids on the market include *The Globe* and *The National Enquirer*. Similar television programs are often syndicated shows (e.g., *Jerry Springer Show*), and rarely focus on reporting the news of the day. Although the BOP's *News Media Contacts* policy does not exclude these organizations from consideration, careful review should occur before granting inmate interviews with these groups. Central Office OPA staff can assist institution PIOs with the close scrutiny needed for these type of requests. Of course, public information is provided to the groups as to any public request.

**Network News Magazine Shows**—Network news magazine television shows do meet the BOP's definition as “news media organizations.” For example, requests from ABC's *Primetime* or NBC's *Dateline* shows should be processed in a manner consistent with the BOP *News Media Contacts* policy. Any requests for BOP staff interviews from these groups should be immediately directed to Regional PIO and Central Office OPA staff.

**Syndicated Shows**—Often, BOP PIOs will receive requests from syndicated television shows (e.g., *America's Most Wanted*, *Oprah Winfrey Show*). These type of programs are sometimes interconnected to traditional news sources. Depending on the specific project, PIOs may consider them under the BOP's definition as a “news media organization.” However, since these shows are often broadcast nationwide, Regional PIO and Central Office, OPA staff must be consulted prior to deciding how to handle such requests.

**Cable Network News Shows**—On occasion, institution PIOs will receive requests from news programs at cable networks (e.g., Public Broadcasting Station, Learning Channel, Discovery Channel.) News shows on cable networks do meet the BOP's definition as “news media organizations.”

**Entertainment Cable Networks**—Normally, entertainment cable networks (e.g., *HBO*, *Showtime*) do not meet the BOP's definition as a “news media organization.” However, if these networks are producing an educational-orientated documentary, (e.g., story regarding BOP's drug abuse programs) the Bureau has considered them as a “legitimate news organization.” PIOs strategy for responding to entertainment cable network requests should be made on a case-by-case basis, and only after consulting with Regional PIO and Central Office, OPA staff.

**Satellite Broadcasts/Live TV**—Requests from local and national television companies to broadcast inmate interviews “live” via satellite transmission have also increased as this technology has expanded.

Normally, “live” satellite interviews (where the segment actually airs simultaneously with the interview) requests should be denied for security reasons.

Taped Satellite Interviews (where the segment is sent via satellite to a studio and recorded and aired on a later date) are permissible as long as the inmate agrees, and no institution security concerns exist. Since these type of interviews also require extensive planning and coordination, PIOs need to ensure that no operational problems exist before advising a reporter that their taped satellite interview has been approved. Remember to notify Regional PIO and Central Office, OPA staff prior to approving any taped satellite interview that may be broadcast nationally.

### 3. Professionalism

“The media” are individuals trying to make a living and get ahead in their professions, just like Bureau staff. They are not to be regarded as either friends or adversaries, but as professionals trying to do a job.

**Keys to Success**—The way the PIO handles the media is vital to creating a positive image of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. A large measure of the PIOs success can be measured by how well they develop and maintain their *individual credibility* and demonstrate the *agency’s credibility*. All PIOs must ensure they present *accurate, consistent, and timely* information. Finally, PIOs must be cognizant of providing *appropriate* information. All PIOs must live by the motto: *Be Prepared*.

*Credibility* is critical to sustaining professional relations and effective communication with reporters.

To develop and maintain *individual credibility*:

- Be knowledgeable about the BOP.
- Keep it short and simple (KISS).
- Tell the truth.
- Avoid technical jargon.
- Make your points - get your message out first.
- Being clear, reliable, concise, patient, and pleasant.
- Do not make promises you can’t keep.
- Call back if (and when) you say you will.
- Tell a reporter why (whether for security, personnel regulations, investigative, or other reasons) you can’t provide certain information.
- Exude confidence and be positive.
- Express genuine concern at all times.
- Never speak “off the record.”
- Always say “I don’t know” when unsure of any answer and offer to get back with an answer.
- Dress professionally.

- Look at the reporter - not the camera.

To demonstrate the *agency’s credibility*:

- Present information about BOP operations and programs which demonstrates the success of the agency (TRIAD, Prep Studies).
- Discuss agency policy.
- Discuss agency internal and external monitoring processes (e.g. Program Reviews, ACA accreditation).

*Consistency* of the information you provide is another critical part of professionalism. Reporters will quickly pick up on inconsistencies; this can seriously damage your credibility. Suppose a reporter called an institution, a Regional Office, and the Central Office to ask how many institutions there are in the BOP, and received three different answers. This inconsistency would definitely reflect on the professionalism of the agency. Thus, PIOs should always focus on:

- Consistency in stating our position on issues (PIOs should always check with Regional PIO or Central Office, OPA staff if unsure of the agency’s position on a specific issue).
- Consistency in our interpretation of media policy. Regional PIO and Central Office OPA staff can assist institution PIOs who have technical policy questions regarding the BOP’s *News Media Contacts* policy.
- Consistency in the statistical information we provide. Since circumstances and numbers can change quickly, PIOs must ensure they have the most current information available when responding to the media.

Additional steps that PIOs can take to

ensure their consistency in response include:

- Having a trained primary and alternate PIO. This enhances the agency's ability to respond with "one voice" in addressing specific institution matters.
- Gathering and organizing information in a way that does not contradict previously given information. Many PIOs maintain a file of previously issued information which they routinely review for accuracy and consistency in response.
- Remember your responses should focus on **DEFINING AGENCY POLICY, MORE THAN DEFENDING SPECIFIC ACTIONS**. By defining policy standards, we can avoid appearing defensive, and can fully educate the public regarding institution operations and programs, as well as the rationale for any actions taken by BOP staff related to a specific incident.
- Briefing the Warden and other key staff on the information given out, so they can respond correctly if interviewed later on the same subject.
- Keeping copies of all news releases for future reference.

Always ensure the information you provide is *accurate*.

Within the rapidly growing BOP, even basic facts and figures change constantly. It is every PIO's responsibility to read BOP-related reports, newsletters, and other publications to stay current on basic statistical information and specific issues affecting your facility or office.

*Timeliness* of information is critical.

While they may not always be objective, the vast majority of reporters attempt to be fair. They work

in a highly competitive business; they must work hard to provide a story that is interesting and sells their product. Thus, they find it hard to forgive unfairness. To reporters, unfairness means deliberately giving competitors a break on a good story, or refusing to answer or call back in a timely manner when responding to a legitimate question. (see "Deadlines and Exclusives" Section for more details on this matter).

Finally, be aware of the *appropriateness* of the information you provide. Be sensitive to the "big picture" and contact the Regional PIO and Central Office OPA Staff if you have any doubt.

***Being Proactive***—Often times, the public and the media generally do not find corrections newsworthy except for assaults, disturbances, escapes, or other emergency situations. Therefore, it is your responsibility to proactively present the positive programs and activities offered at your institution.

Establish a local media network that includes radio, newspapers, and television. Don't wait for something bad to happen to make contact. Keep the media informed of all newsworthy events at your facility. "Be proactive, not reactive." Take the time to meet the editor of the local newspaper, or local TV and radio producers.

***Confrontations***—Often, reporters will raise controversial issues, or use inaccurate or inappropriate terminology in phrasing a question. If this occurs, do not argue or react angrily, and never repeat incorrect or inappropriate terminology. Reporters are experts in confrontation; if you join in an argument with them, it will remove you from the professional standard you are attempting to establish, and portray the wrong image to the public (especially on TV). Always remain calm and take your time with tough questions. In fact, this would be an excellent opportunity to "bridge-over" to a more positive aspect of the topic being discussed. Therefore, develop a strategy for dealing with each media session *prior* to responding to negative

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issues or events.

***“Off the Record”***—There is no such thing as “off the record.” In communications with the media, if you say it expect to be quoted. The PIO should not participate in any conversations with reporters that are considered to be “off the record.” Be wary of allowing yourself to be approached in an informal setting by reporters—you are more apt to say things without thoroughly thinking the issue. If you approach every media contact as official business, there will never be a misunderstanding of the purpose of the contact.

***Deadlines and “Exclusives”***—One crucial aspect of the reporter’s job that a PIO needs to understand is deadlines. It is a serious matter if a reporter on an afternoon daily paper calls at 10:00 a.m. for information and you don’t call back until 3:00 p.m. The paper’s deadline may be noon; it’s probably on press or in the hands of the delivery crew by 3:00 p.m. The reporter is going to look bad if the same information you couldn’t obtain in time appears that evening on TV or in the rival morning paper.

If several reporters call for the same information, call them back, when you have the facts, in the same order they called you. Pay no attention to attempts by a reporter to land an “exclusive” by requesting that you delay providing the facts to others. Every reporter who calls deserves a callback and is entitled to the information.

Whenever there is a potential news story at the institution, all reporters deserve an even break. If the Warden, for example, has an announcement to make about an escape, you should develop a news release and, after consultation with the Regional PIO and Central Office, OPA staff, give copies to all reporters simultaneously (possibly through use of a FAX machine or via e-mail). If this is not possible, call them in sequence (or have someone assist) as rapidly as possible, and read the news release to them over the phone. Avoid spending too much time with one reporter while trying to disseminate this information, so that all reporters

may receive the release in a timely manner.

You should never play favorites among the media. It might be worth remembering, however, that wire services and television reporters can get on the air faster than newspapers can get printed and on the streets, and radio and internet are even faster. Thus it might work to your advantage, when issuing news releases, to begin with newspapers, then TV, and conclude with radio and internet sources.

***Being Responsive***—Most reporters understand if you are unable to respond to a question for privacy or security reasons. Don’t abuse goodwill, however, by using these to cover confusion, lack of knowledge, or unwillingness to dig for information. If you don’t know the answer to a question, admit it—tell the reporter you will look into the issue and respond later.

In some situations—particularly when dealing with high-profile offenders—you simply cannot satisfy reporters. Often these offenders are anxious to avoid reporters both when entering prison and when being released. It is Bureau practice not to reveal the exact time of a high-profile inmate’s arrival or departure from an institution. In rare cases the Bureau permits high-profile inmates to depart by exits that are not in view of reporters.

The BOP has no control over what reporters do off institution property. If they wish to position themselves near the facility’s entrance to try to interview or photograph an inmate entering or leaving, that is their right. Staff should be courteous to reporters in such situations; they are simply doing their jobs.

## **4. Media Mechanics**

***Initiating Contact***—Building a positive professional relationship begins with the PIO’s initial contact. Prior to initiating contact, you should:

- Identify all reporters in your local area

(listing phone numbers, addresses, e-mail addresses, etc.)

- Telephone each reporter on the list, sending a follow-up letter to introduce yourself.
- Provide each reporter with your name, position and duties, the name of the facility, and a brief description of the institution's operations (particularly important in newer facilities).

This initial contact can include an invitation to tour the facility (preferably without cameras or recorders during the initial visit). First meetings, like first impressions, set the tone. If the invitation to meet or tour the facility is accepted, schedule the day to ensure that you have sufficient time to spend with the reporter.

**Equipment Needs**—The BOP's *News Media Contacts* policy specifies that PIOs can limit the amount of audio, video, and film equipment or number of media personnel entering the institution if the Warden determines that the requested equipment or personnel would create a disruption within the institution. For example, in the case of interviews conducted in visiting rooms which are frequently crowded, or in visiting rooms of maximum security institutions, the Warden may limit the equipment to hand-held cameras or recorders.

The equipment needed for an interview depends on the type of media. The amount of equipment allowed into a facility should be limited to that which can be properly inventoried, inspected for contraband, and monitored by staff. This is usually an issue only when video is involved.

Most television reporters can complete their work with one video camera, one hand-held microphone, and a single light kit. Generally, more equipment is cumbersome and a potential security hazard.

Prior to any scheduled visit, you should request the reporter provide an inventory of all equipment to

be used. This will help the front entrance officer inventory the equipment prior to entry.

In the past, reporters have requested to bring their personal computers (PCs) into institutions to take notes during the inmate interviews. Since PCs have evolved into a common journalist tool, Wardens may approve these type of requests. However, if security concerns exist these requests can be denied.

**Background/Security Checks**—You must be absolutely sure of the identity of the reporter *prior* to his/her entry into the institution. Background/security checks are advised whenever a reporter is not known by institution staff. Checks can be completed by several methods:

- Along with a request to visit, a reporter should provide ID information on all those who plan to enter the facility. ID information allows an NCIC check to be completed. Normally, a driver's license is sufficient. In addition, reporters must produce an appropriate ID issued by their news organization.

Today, foreign journalists are given media credentials by the Foreign Press Centers (FPCs) of the U.S. Department of State. The FPCs are located in Washington, D.C., New York, and Los Angeles. Ordinarily, it is easier for PIOs to consider foreign news representatives requests who have U.S.-based media credentials—primarily because the FPCs issuing the media identifications have completed a comprehensive review of the journalists employment affiliations and journalist backgrounds. Normally, PIOs can verify information with the respective FPCs.

In situations where foreign journalists have no U.S.-based media credentials, a more detailed review must be undertaken by PIOs to verify the authenticity of the non-U.S. media outlet the reporter claims to be representing, as well as the reporter's credentials. PIOs should contact Central Office, OPA staff who can speak directly with

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appropriate FPC Desk Officers to verify credentials.

***Processing into the Institution***—Processing procedures are probably unfamiliar to reporters and should be explained prior to a reporter’s arrival. When reporters arrive at an institution, the following procedures are suggested:

- Make proper notifications to staff working in areas to be toured (if applicable), advising them of the scheduled media visit, including names of reporters, inmates to be interviewed (if applicable), and any special instructions.
- The PIO should arrange a meeting time and meet the reporters and technical staff at the front entrance to introduce him/herself. Take the time to highlight processing procedures again before entering the institution.
- The lobby or entrance officer should process the reporter as any other visitor, including, at a minimum, an ID check, inventory and inspection of all equipment for contraband, signing of all visitor forms and logbooks, processing through the metal detector, and hand stamping (if required).

Remember: Reporters must familiarize themselves with the *News Media Contacts* policy in advance of conducting any interviews. A reporter’s signature on the *Media Representative’s Agreement* form (BP-A232.014) contained in the BOP’s *News Media Contacts* policy reflects that they are familiar with the policy standards governing their conduct during interviews and visits within the institution.

***Press Pools***—In certain rare circumstances the BOP may establish a press pool to allow for the dissemination of information. A press pool is only established in extraordinary circumstances and in all cases the Central Office, Office of Public Affairs should be consulted prior to

implementation.

***Multiple Inmate Interview Requests***—When handling numerous media requests for interviews with high profile inmates, staff may have to make special arrangements that are within policy guidelines and are responsive to the media, but do not place an unreasonable burden on staff resources. For example, staff may limit the number of interviews to those which are administratively feasible for the institution to accommodate at a particular time.

***News Releases vs. News Statements***—Some situations may be better responded to using a “news statement” rather than a “news release.” In a news statement, copies of what is stated are not distributed to the media, and in most cases, no questions are taken. This method is usually used when, during an emergency, something significant happens abruptly. To prevent rumors, a simple statement is read, giving whatever information is available and appropriate. This gives reporters some limited information, yet allows staff time to analyze what has occurred before issuing a full news release.

The most important factor in preparing a news release is how much information it should contain. The first paragraph of a news story tells the reader the major facts by answering the six critical questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? As much as possible, so should the news release.

In the event of an emergency or serious incident, it is important to note that what occurs at one institution may trigger an incident at another institution, depending on the issue and how it is reported by the media. Care should be taken, therefore, in developing news releases and routinely routing them through the Regional PIO and Central Office, OPA staff prior to issuing the release to the media.

When preparing a news release or statement, use the institution’s letterhead for the first page, so

there is no confusion about the source of the information. Remember, most reporters will consider a release simply as the starting point for a more detailed story. But don't be surprised if a well-written release is used word for word or quoted extensively in a story.

News releases should be typed on standard size paper and they should be faxed or e-mailed to radio and television stations, weekly and daily newspapers, and appropriate magazines.

**Talking Points**—In certain situations, you may elect to speak directly with a reporter. In this case you must, after determining the information requested by the reporter, develop written talking points, which have been approved through appropriate channels for use in talking with the reporter. It is important that the PIO not deviate from the approved talking points during their discussion with the reporter. This strategy for response affords PIOs the opportunity to respond to multiple media representatives in a consistent and accurate manner and ensures that the PIO conveys the intended message.

It is also suggested that when issuing a news release, PIOs develop talking points that can assist them in responding to questions that may follow the issuing of the release.

**Record keeping**—All forms required by Program Statement 1480.05 must be completed and maintained.

One of the most important is the *Media Representative Agreement* (BP-A232.014), which documents that the reporter is familiar with Bureau policy governing contact with the media and will abide by the rules. It also provides notice that the Bureau has the right to search the reporter (and any equipment) while on the institution grounds. It establishes that an inmate will not receive any compensation (directly or indirectly) for interviews or correspondence, and advises the media that certain risks or hazards must be assumed when visiting a correctional facility. See **Appendix B**

for a copy of this form.

Another important form is the *News Interview Authorization* (BP-A233.014), which must be signed by the inmate prior to any interviews or photographs. It also serves as an official release of information, allowing staff to respond to any inmate allegations or comments. Specifically, it allows staff to use an inmate's record to respond to media inquiries. No photograph or video should be taken of an inmate unless he or she signs this authorization form. See **Appendix B** for a copy of this form.

Keep in mind that this form requires the inmate's signature (and that of a witness) whether or not the inmate agrees to an interview. The form is then distributed as required, with a copy to the reporter. This procedure verifies that the PIO did, in fact, inform the inmate of a specific media request. It is suggested that copies of signed forms be placed in an inmate's central file and in the PIO file.

## 5. Interviews

Interviews are the most common situation in which PIOs will deal with reporters. As mentioned, reporters have no special right of access to inmates or institutions. As a public agency the BOP takes a balanced approach to media access, allowing the media access if they follow specific procedures and regulations—although access may be limited to ensure that there is no adverse effect on institution operations.

**In-Person Interviews**—If a media request involves an inmate interview, the staff member processing the request should ask the inmate (prior to confirming the interview date) if he or she wants to be interviewed. A signed consent (*News Interview Authorization* form: BP-A233.014) must be obtained prior to an interview.

The inmate's central file should be checked, or a check should be made with the Case Management Coordinator, to determine whether an interview that generates media attention could create any



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institution security concerns.

If the inmate refuses to grant an interview, the signed consent form will document his or her refusal, and the reporter will be provided a copy. If the inmate refuses to sign the form, staff should note this and affix their signature(s) to the form. Both parties (the inmate and the reporter) must understand that the inmate may not be compensated in any manner for an interview.

In accordance with the *News Media Contacts* policy interviews are not subject to auditory supervision. However, inmate interviews will be visually supervised in accordance with operational procedures and visiting policy.

Inmates are not permitted to give news conferences. Inmates must be interviewed alone. Normally, no other inmates or guests should be present for the interview and only one organization should interview an inmate at any one time.

If interviews impose a serious drain on staff or on the facility, the Warden may limit the length or frequency of interviews. For example, in accordance with the *News Media Contacts* policy, the Warden may limit an inmate housed in a special housing status to one 1-hour interview per month, or limit the amount of equipment or number of individuals entering the institution for each interview. Special security, custodial, or supervisory needs allow Wardens to place a reasonable limit on interview frequency and lengths.

Occasionally, institution PIOs have received requests for reporters or book authors to conduct lengthy interviews with inmates – e.g., a newspaper reporter requests several eight hour days to interview an inmate. Interviews of this duration should not normally be granted. In most cases, the length for an in-person inmate interview should range from one to two hours. All institutions adhering to this same standard will ensure agency-wide consistency in the manner in which in-person inmate interview requests are addressed.

***Telephone Interviews***—Inmates are required to sign a *News Interview Authorization* form (BP-A233.014) before staff arrange for them to speak with a reporter over the telephone. Obtaining this signature will authorize PIOs to release documents or information relating to comments or allegations that may arise as a result of an interview.

Although auditory supervision of telephone interviews is not permissible, PIOs should ensure that direct visual supervision occurs when special calling arrangements are made for inmate telephone interviews. When necessary, PIOs or other institution staff members can remain in the office (e.g., counselor's office) where the call to the reporter is being made. Staff presence in the room is solely for supervision purposes, not to take notes or record inmate comments made over the telephone. Additionally, when circumstances permit, staff can stand directly outside an office that has adequate window viewing space for supervision purposes, to afford the inmate a greater degree of privacy for their interview.

***Attorney Involvement in Interviews***—If an inmate requests to have his/her attorney present during an interview, the final decision is at the Warden's discretion. Such requests can be approved as long as there are no institution safety, security or other operational concerns. Additionally, PIOs need to avoid involving an inmate's attorney in the direct coordination of news media requests. Once PIOs become aware of a news media request for an inmate interview, any communications (written or verbal) regarding the request should be solely between institution staff (normally the PIO) and the news media representative. Thus, if an inmate's attorney indicates that he/she wants to facilitate a news media interview with his/her client (inmate), you should specify that once you receive a request directly from the news media organization, you will handle the inquiry in accordance with the BOP's *News Media Contacts* policy and will be contacting the inmate directly about the interview.

***Correspondence***—Unless under special or specific restrictions, an inmate may correspond with

reporters without prior approval.

Inmates can also send “special mail” to representatives of the news media in accordance with the BOP’s *News Media Contacts* and *Correspondence* program statements.

**Staff Interviews**—The Warden and PIO are the two staff members who the media most often seek to interview. The image they give of the Bureau and the institution is key to making a favorable impression on reporters and the public.

Bureau employees who are not authorized spokespersons should avoid direct contact with reporters. Off-duty staff are not authorized to participate in interviews about issues related to the BOP. In some cases, reporters may request to interview other employees. In these instances, the purpose of the interview should be determined before deciding whether to grant it. If an interview is deemed necessary, the interview should be conducted at the institution during normal business hours. The staff member should also receive a briefing from the PIO prior to the interview, outlining what is known about the subject of the interview, the limits of the Privacy Act, and any other relevant information.

Additional points to keep in mind include:

- Anticipate questions and answers and develop talking points for use in the interview. Do not deviate from approved language.
- If the subject is controversial, make an audio recording of the interview—then there will be proof of what was actually said. The reporter will know the recording is being made and will probably be more careful about the way the information is used. If the interview is being videotaped for television, it is advisable that institution staff also videotape the interview. This enables staff to critique the interview afterwards for content and style—and make adjustments for future media contacts.

- Don’t feel obligated to fill a silence by volunteering information—it is perfectly acceptable to remain quiet and wait for another question.
- Never be afraid to say, “I don’t know the answer, but I’ll check and get back to you.”

**Presentence/Pretrial Inmate Interviews**—Many institutions house inmates who are involved in the trial process or in some related legal action after conviction, or require additional special consideration before granting a media interview. While standard procedures should be followed regarding completion of appropriate forms, there are certain restrictions on some inmates in these categories. The following points will help when reporters request interviews with them:

- The PIO should not offer any opinions about inmates in these categories, but should be prepared to respond to inquiries with *releasable* official information.
- Use caution when arranging for interviews of inmates who are still involved in court proceedings. The court having jurisdiction may have issued an order limiting or forbidding interviews. The U.S. Attorney’s Office should be contacted to determine whether such an order is in force or if there are any other objections to this inmate participating in a media interview.

**Competency Studies/Commitments**—Under 18 USC 4244 and 4246, interviews are not authorized until cleared with these categories of commitments. The authorization is generally through the U.S. Attorney’s Office.

**Holdover Interview Requests**—Before arranging an interview for a holdover inmate, the PIO should call the inmate’s previous institution regarding any concerns or problems they may have had. The U.S. Marshals Service should also be notified; it may have security concerns about an inmate speaking to the media while in transit.

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***Federal Boarders (In Public or Private Facilities)***—On occasion, reporters will ask to interview BOP inmates who are housed in public or private contract facilities. In these situations, the interview requests should be directed to the institution of confinement. When necessary, the institution will consult with BOP community corrections staff. The interviewer must abide by the rules of the local, state, or contract facility. In coordinating these requests, it is important to keep in mind that when a federal prisoner is confined in any non-BOP facility, the local, state, or contract facility rules and regulations regarding media access will govern.

***State Boarders in BOP Custody***—Reporters may request to interview inmates who are housed in BOP facilities that are state boarders (non-federal inmates housed under agreement [e.g., contractual or intergovernmental] with state governments), for the service of their state sentences. PIOs can easily identify these inmates via SENTRY since they have been classified by the BOP as Central Inmate Monitoring cases. While BOP rules and regulations regarding media access will govern in these situations, PIOs are encouraged to advise State Department of Corrections officials of any media requests involving their state boarders.

***Witsec Inmates***—Many times, Witsec inmates show little concern regarding their protection status. *Nevertheless, Witsec inmates are not to be identified, interviewed, or photographed.* If media show interest in a Witsec inmate, the Regional PIO and Central Office, OPA staff must be notified immediately.

***501 Rule Cases – Special Administrative Measures***—In certain cases, special administrative measures may be imposed on inmates to protect national security (28 CFR § 501.2) or to prevent acts of terrorism or violence (28 CFR § 501.3). In those cases, inmate communications can be limited, including restricting inmates' communications with the media and others. PIOs should notify the Regional PIO and Central Office,

OPA staff of any media inquiry related to a 501 Rule case.

***High-Profile Inmates***—In order to ensure BOP staff have a standard to use in determining if an inmate is a “high-profile” case, OPA suggests adhering to the Bureau’s Central Inmate Monitoring System policy definition of “broad publicity” cases: “Inmates who have received widespread publicity (for example, national media coverage) as a result of their criminal activity or notoriety as public figures.”

It is important for PIOs to remember that media interest in “high-profile” inmates begins at the time of arrest and intensifies throughout the trial and sentencing. Once a “high-profile” inmate is sentenced, the media will normally focus on two primary areas for future stories: where the inmate will be designated (which is not public information until their arrival at a BOP facility), and their conditions of confinement once in a Bureau institution.

PIOs are reminded of the importance of notifying their Regional PIO and Central Office, OPA staff whenever a high-profile interview request is received. This action is critical since OPA staff have the responsibility to keep the Department of Justice and other affected Federal agencies fully informed on media contacts involving these inmates.

***Juvenile Inmates***—BOP’s *Juvenile Delinquents Program Statement* specifies that no information can be provided to the public/media regarding these type of cases. The release of juvenile offender information is normally limited to only law enforcement officials and immediate family members.

BOP’s *News Media Contacts* policy indicates that interviews with juveniles (under age 18 and sentenced under the Federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act [JJJPA]) are not permitted until written consent has been obtained from the inmate’s parent or guardian. The BOP’s

Office of Public Affairs should be notified prior to the granting of juvenile interviews.

## 6. Public Information

As the BOP has grown, so too has media and public interest in our agency—prompting an increase in the number of requests for information about inmates, staff, facilities, and programs.

The BOP wants to be open and responsive; however, releasing information that is not legally releasable could result in lawsuits, disciplinary action, or both, while not releasing information that is within the public realm could result in criticism of the agency and accusations that the BOP is unresponsive and is “hiding something.” Therefore, it is important to know the rules for releasing information. When in doubt, contact the legal counsel in your institution or Regional PIOs or Central Office, OPA staff.

Remember that one of the best resources for providing the public and news media with public information is the BOP’s website at [www.bop.gov](http://www.bop.gov). Referencing this site provides a wealth of information regarding the BOP’s mission, operations, programs, and services. This site can also serve as a quick reference for reporters seeking information about BOP policy. For example, a reporter looking to review the BOP’s News Media Contacts policy can be directed to access the BOP’s website.

**Freedom of Information/Privacy Act**—The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) of 1966 and its subsequent amendments were created to allow the public access to information regarding the executive branch of the Federal Government. FOIA thus allows the public access to agency records that do not fall within one of the exemptions to its provisions\*.

The Privacy Act of 1974 was created to limit access to information contained in Government files about individuals.

Death, however, extinguishes the privacy rights of an individual. Therefore, in the case of an inmate who has died, after next-of-kin notification, staff are no longer limited by the Privacy Act. An exception to this rule may be in situations where potential litigation exists related to the inmate’s death. PIOs need to work closely with Regional PIOs and Central Office, OPA staff whenever addressing release of information requests in these type of situations.

**What is Public Information?**—The list of publicly releasable information regarding an inmate can be found on Sallyport in the Office of General Council, FOIA, and Privacy Act [Quick Reference Guide](#).

If additional information, other than what has already been given, is requested about an inmate, the requestor should be directed to submit their request to the FOIA office. PIOs who have questions regarding the release of information should contact their Regional PIOs or Central Office, OPA staff.

**National Inmate Locator Services**—The two types of national inmate locator services include: 1) BOP’s national telephone (202-307-3126) inmate locator service; and, 2) BOP’s website inmate locator service ([www.bop.gov](http://www.bop.gov)).

The national telephone inmate locator is available during regular business days from 8:00 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. EST. Requests for information on five or more inmates or for historical inmate data should be sent to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, Attention: FOIA, Room 738, 320 First Street, NW, Washington, DC, 20534, or via the BOP’s website.

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\*Freedom of Information requests, which can be made by any person, can be submitted in writing and addressed to the Freedom of Information/Privacy Act Section, Office of General Counsel, 320 First Street, NW., Washington, DC, 20534. In the lower-left-hand corner of the envelope, the requestor should clearly mark “Freedom of Information Request.” These letters are then forwarded to the Office of General Counsel. Additionally, requests can also be made by an electronic form via the BOP’s website at [www.bop.gov](http://www.bop.gov).

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The national locator database contains information on the current prison population and on inmates released from 1982 - present. For information on inmates released prior to 1982, the public/reporters can write to the Office of Communications and Archives, Office of Public Affairs, Federal Bureau of Prisons, 320 First Street, NW, Washington, DC, 20534; Attn: Historic Inmate Locator Request.

***Use of Inmate Photographs***—Institution photographs of inmates, ordinarily taken during initial intake screening by Receiving and Discharge (R&D) staff, are considered Government documents and are not releasable. Even with the inmate’s written consent accompanying a FOIA request for the photograph, the original photograph cannot be released. Only a photocopy of the original photograph is releasable under FOIA (as long as the inmate has provided written consent.)

During an emergency situation involving an escape, however, photocopies of an escaped inmate’s photograph can be furnished to law enforcement officials and media representatives in order to facilitate apprehension of the inmate.

***Use of BOP Logo/Institution Name***—Production companies and other public entities occasionally ask permission to use the BOP’s logo and/or a specific institution name (e.g., FCI Danbury) in connection with a motion picture or a special community project. Because the names of BOP institutions are within the public domain, the Bureau is without the authority to grant or deny private entities the right to use such names. However, permission to reproduce the BOP seal is made on a case-by-case basis by Central Office, OPA, after consultation with the BOP’s Office of General Counsel and Review.

***Public Information Transaction (PPPI)***—SENTRY transaction, PPPI, is available to display or print all public information concerning an inmate’s record. Normally, the PPPI transaction will not display any data not considered “public

information.” However, PIOs must be careful in their review of the information that appears on the PPPI screens to ensure that they only release what is considered “public information.”

PPPI data includes inmate profile information (date of birth, age, sex, FBI number, etc.); current institution location and past movement within the BOP; and current and past sentence computation data. This transaction is a quick resource for PIOs to use in addressing requests for information.

***Investigative and Legal Concerns***—The PIO may not be able to respond to questions that involve investigative or legal issues. All responses to questions of this type should be cleared through the Warden, Regional Counsel/PIO, and Central Office, OPA staff.

Ordinarily, information gathered in an internal or external investigation cannot be released. However, under some circumstances, basic facts about an investigation are releasable.

*Example:* An inmate was found dead on the recreation yard, and the local news became aware of it by monitoring institution radio transmissions. The institution quickly began receiving calls. Upon the next of kin being notified of the death, the PIO conferred with the Warden and prepared a news release. While reporters had information they wanted to confirm, the PIO released only basic facts, confirming the death, the inmate’s name and register number, type of sentence, sentencing district, and other information covered by the Freedom of Information Act. The PIO emphasized that the case was under investigation and that was why no further information could be released.

This latter point underscores the fact that much information related to criminal investigations or litigation may not be discussed with reporters.

Often, a local PIO will not be aware of the Bureau's approach to a specific legal issue or the facts of a case, and comment would be inappropriate. In all cases of tintype, responses to media requests must be coordinated in advance through Regional PIOs and Central Office, OPA staff.

***Inquiries on Designations***—Media interest in high-profile inmates begins at the time of arrest and intensifies throughout the trial and sentencing, ultimately leading to an inquiry about where these persons will serve their time in the BOP.

While reporters may be aggressive in their pursuit of this information, PIOs must remember that, for security and privacy reasons, designations are not ordinarily releasable until after an inmate arrives at his/her destination. In a self-surrender situation, consideration should be given to inmate requests to make special arrangements for arrival, thus lessening the probability of unwanted media attention outside the main entrance of the institution.

Whenever a high-profile inmate is sentenced, the media will speculate about where the inmate will be designated and to which institution they should send their cameras and reporters. Some institutions have had reporters positioned outside their facilities days in advance of an inmate's reporting date; in some cases, editors may send reporters to several institutions at once in fear of missing the story.

Whatever the case, PIOs must be on guard when speaking with reporters about designations, because they will print or report any hint of confirmation about a specific site. Best advice: don't speculate, be professional, and avoid hypothetical questions.

***Inquiries on Inmate Health***—Normally, specific inmate health issues are not public information. However, there may be situations (especially if

responding to media inquiries related to a high profile case) where after obtaining an inmate's signed release, PIOs can provide the public/media with specific inmate health information. PIOs need to carefully evaluate when this action may be warranted and ensure that the information being released is accurate.

***Research Inquiries***—PIOs who receive calls or correspondence from non-news media sources requesting information for the purpose of research and/or survey responses need to direct those requesters to the BOP's Office of Research and Evaluation at 202-307-3871.

## 7. Meet the Press...or the Public

***Tours***—Tours are an excellent way for the institution to gain favorable media coverage—the Bureau's programs and staff speak well for the agency. Tours are not granted just to satisfy public curiosity, but to inform the public more fully about the Bureau and the facility.

Each institution has an established procedure for tours which considers the specific security needs of the institution. PIOs must be familiar with these procedures and convey them to individuals or tour groups. In addition to reporters and members of the public, community groups may wish to tour. Others who may tour include Members of Congress and their staffs, judges, probation officers, and individuals interested in the criminal justice community. These visits can be arranged when appropriate. The institution always has the option of inviting responsible members of the community to see our operations and meet key staff. Before the tour:

- Determine by phone the date and time of the tour, the size of the group and any special interests the group may have.

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- Arrange for other appropriate staff to assist in escorting the group, and in particular if media are involved, have staff at the front, middle, and end of the group to prevent individual media representatives from wandering without an escort.
- Send a confirmation letter that includes information on any special requirements (identification, etc.) for the group members, directions to the facility, check-in procedures the group will encounter, and who the tour guide will be (if someone other than the PIO).
- Send a memo to all areas on the tour (department heads, control center, etc.), describing the date, time, person supervising the tour, areas to be toured, and any relevant information about the group.
- Make any special arrangements (such as lunch) that may be needed.

For the tour itself, the following steps generally apply:

- Greet the group at the front entrance upon arrival.
- Take the group into a meeting room for a brief introduction and discuss the tour guidelines. The Warden may wish to meet with the group at this point if he or she is not going to accompany the tour.
- Pass out a plan of the facility that will enable tour members to visualize where they're going to go.
- During the tour, it's effective to have department heads or unit managers give a brief talk when the group is in their area.
- Reporters and photographers (or other group members) who arrive together still may

have individual agendas, and may attempt to go their separate ways. If the PIO feels a tour is not under complete control, stop and reemphasize the tour guidelines. If necessary, have another employee assist in supervision.

After the tour, reassemble the group in the meeting room for a question/answer period. The Warden may wish to rejoin the group at this stage.

The Regional PIO and Central Office OPA staff should be consulted when media tours are being considered.

***Employee Speeches and Publications***—BOP's *Employee Speeches and Publications Review Process* policy provides guidance for Bureau staff to obtain approval to make public speeches or publish material developed as a personal or independent project by an employee, i.e. not part of the employee's job duties.

***Speaking Engagements***—Wardens, Associate Wardens, and other staff are often invited to speak to community groups about their institutions and other activities related to corrections. All speaking engagements must be approved by the CEO. Speakers should review the Release of Information section of this handbook prior to the engagement. In addition, Central Office, OPA staff can furnish updated information about the BOP for overviews of the agency.

***Congressional Visits Involving Reporters***—On occasion, Members of Congress have requested to have reporters accompany them on visits to institutions. While elected officials can visit institutions or interview inmates (if the inmate agrees), BOP practice has been to not allow reporters to accompany these officials while they are inside BOP institution. The reason for this action is that reporter access in these situations

resembles a news conference. Wardens have the option of allowing reporters to meet with elected officials after their institution visits (e.g., in the institution's administration building, conference room, or training center). PIOs should contact Regional PIOs and Central Office, OPA staff if a situation arises where they feel an exception to this protocol may be warranted.

## 8. Emergency and Unusual Situations

An emergency or crisis is perhaps the most difficult situation a PIO can encounter. The atmosphere of a news briefing, conference, or large-scale interview can be very intense, and the PIO's response can have a major impact on not only the manner in which the story is conveyed to the public, but also, in some cases, on events inside the institution. While each emergency seems to move on its own unpredictable course, certain general principles apply in working with reporters during these situations.

The media will report the story with or without BOP input. It is better to offer them what we can to ensure accuracy and demonstrate our willingness to openly communicate with the public.

While a crisis or emergency situation can seem overwhelming, it can be taken in stride with some planning in the initial stages.

**Media Emergency Plan**—For general principles, please refer to “Guidelines for Local Institution Media Emergency Plans” in **Appendix C**.

If an emergency occurs, the following steps should be taken immediately regarding media inquiries/contacts:

- Develop a *brief* news release and after appropriate approvals (e.g., Warden, Regional PIO, Central Office, OPA staff),

distribute it as soon as possible.

- Defer media inquiries until the news release is complete; respond to only those questions that will not adversely affect security or the status of the emergency situation.
- Contact Regional PIO and Central Office, OPA staff for assistance. Remember, in today's news culture, local stories can become national issues very quickly. OPA staff are available 24 hours each day, and can be contacted during evening and weekend hours by calling the Department of Justice Operator at 202-514-2000.

**Deaths of Inmates or Staff**—If an inmate or staff death occurs at the institution, either in an emergency or non-emergency situation, great care must be taken to not release information until family members are notified. Additional care must be taken if an investigation is to be conducted. Under these circumstances, Regional PIOs and Central Office, OPA staff should be contacted prior to releasing any news statement.

**Escapes/Assaults**—As in any emergency situation, an escape (either walkaway or break of secure perimeter) or serious assault should be made public as soon as possible, to alert the public and demonstrate our commitment to the safety of the community by being open and responsive during an emergency. In addition, reporting such incidents is critical to maintain the public's trust.

News releases should be short but to the point and include all available information that would not compromise security, violate privacy laws, or jeopardize an investigation.

As noted earlier, inmate photographs may be released to law enforcement officials and media representatives in order to facilitate apprehension of an escaped inmate.



## ***PIO Handbook***

***Staff Misconduct***—Occasionally, staff may become the focus of news stories because of misconduct, either on or off the job. Great care should be taken before releasing a staff member’s name, information about the incident, or any pending or imposed disciplinary action. The possibility of criminal prosecution reinforces this point. Consultation with Regional PIOs and Central Office, OPA staff is recommended prior to releasing any information.

On occasion, reporters will ask PIOs to confirm that staff have been placed on home duty or administrative leave (paid or unpaid) from work as a result of their alleged involvement in criminal activity. Generally, in terms of employment status, we can release whether someone is currently employed by the Bureau. However, additional work status information, such as maternity leave, AWOL, home duty, etc., are not normally releasable. PIOs should contact Regional PIOs and Central Office, OPA staff if a situation arises where the release of this type of information may be warranted.

Guidelines for the release of BOP staff names related to a newsworthy event are included in the BOP’s News Media Contacts Policy.

***Staff Testimony***—Normally, (unless in a Grand

Jury Investigation), a staff member’s comments in court are considered in the “public domain” and will be available for a reporters review. After a judicial hearing, the news media may contact PIOs to arrange an interview with the staff member who provided comments to the court. Since all Privacy Act provisions are back in place after the court proceedings, PIOs normally would not grant this type of request. In addition, in most cases at this juncture, the basis for the court hearing are matters which are still under investigation; thus, any public comments would be inappropriate. PIOs should notify the Regional PIO and Central Office, OPA staff of such interview requests.

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The contents of this handbook provide only a general guide for handling media activities. For additional information or assistance regarding any subject in this publication, or regarding a specific media-related issue or problem, feel free to contact the Bureau’s Office of Public Affairs at 202-307-3198.

## **APPENDIX A & B**

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See Program Statement 1480.04 and its associated attachment.

## **APPENDIX C**

## **Guidelines for Local Institution Media Emergency Plans**

These guidelines will assist local institution staff in responding effectively to emergencies that generate significant media interest, and to effectively coordinate local activities with the Central Office's Office of Public Affairs (OPA) and public information activities of other agencies that may be involved in managing the crisis.

### General:

The Warden has the responsibility for the overall implementation of a local institutional media emergency plan; references to the Warden in this plan also refer to a Regional Director who may be delegated responsibility as on-site commander. The institution's designated Public Information Officer (PIO), who ordinarily is the Executive Assistant to the Warden, will have the principal operational responsibility for implementing this plan. A copy of this plan will be on file with other institutional emergency plans.

### Designated PIO

The Warden will designate one spokesperson for the institution during the crisis, in addition to himself/herself. In the case of a prolonged crisis that necessitates 24-hour PIO coverage, a secondary spokesperson will be identified. In that case, special attention should be paid to thoroughly briefing the oncoming PIO at the designated shift change times.

If a situation requires national level coordination of information and issues on site, and as a result, Central Office, Office of Public Affairs (OPA) staff are detailed to the facility, the senior Central Office, OPA staff member serves as chief spokesperson during the crisis and assumes the lead in coordinating media operations related to the crisis at the facility.

In all institution emergency plans, the PIO will be included in the chain of supervisory notification, including, his or her name, title, phone number in the institution and at home, and pager/cell numbers.

## Initial Response

Staff communicating with the media must avoid releasing too much information during the early hours of a major crisis. Initial statements to the press should be limited to basic information and not contain details that might be subject to change as additional information is developed.

The initial press release must be approved by the Warden before it is disseminated, either directly to reporters on site, or via phone and fax. A copy should be sent to the Central Office, OPA as well. Where national attention is likely, even this initial press release should not be disseminated without Regional PIO and Central Office, OPA coordination.

It is advisable to issue a memorandum to all staff early in a crisis, reminding them they are not authorized to speak to the media.

## Media Center

One of the first tasks to address in the early phases of a major crisis is determining whether a 24-hour Media Center is necessary. If so, it should be established in a location that provides adequate space, electrical power, and telephone access for reporters. Reporters from any one particular news organization may wish to remain on site in shifts throughout the crisis or use the area to prepare related stories for their next report, etc. Ordinarily, this will be outside the perimeter of the institution in the [specify location]. Additionally, if possible, a separate office area should be made available, where individual media interviews can be conducted, as needed and requested. This area, however, should be cleared of all BOP records, sensitive documents, computers, etc.

[If special equipment is to be relocated to the Media Center for the duration of the emergency (e.g., chairs, PA system, etc.), the ordinary location for those items will be specified in the specific institution emergency plan, so they can be retrieved immediately.]

The Media Center will not be accessible to the public or to inmates, and staff will control media personnel access. A parking area should be designated for the media, as well as rest rooms and a storage area for media equipment that might be left in the area while the reporter is away from the Center. If this storage area is made available, it must be made clear that the Government is not responsible for items stored.

If it is not possible to hold briefings in this location, then it should be close to where the briefings are held. Staff will continue to control media access to other areas on the institution grounds, as well as to any area where hostage families are located. Likewise, if possible, the Media Center should not be in an area that provides visibility of tactical preparation areas, in order to prevent untimely release of information about staff actions.

A sign-in log will be established for media representatives, to include the name and phone number of their news organization. This will facilitate contacting reporters for special briefings and other official purposes, as needed.

The following equipment items should be available in the Media Center:

Podium	Amplification Equipment
Chairs	Phones
Video Camera	
Electrical outlets for portable computers, lights, cameras, etc.	

#### PIO Office Area

In addition to the Media Center, and separate from it, there should be an area of conference room size made available for PIO/OPA staff to use for briefing preparation and other activities. Access to this area will be limited only to specific staff, and other government representatives directly involved in the public information process.

In addition to clerical support needed, the following equipment items should be available in the PIO office area:

Fax	Office Supplies
Computer (with internet & GroupWise access)/ Printer	Copy Machine
Portable Radio on Institution Frequency (should not be carried into the Media Center)	Phone
Television and Video Recorder	Tape Recorder
Appropriate Keys to Areas used by PIO Staff	

## News Releases

The confusion of a crisis situation makes it likely that conflicting information will arise on many issues. In compiling news releases, staff should avoid including statistics unless totally confident they are accurate.

As mentioned earlier, where national attention is likely, no news releases should be released without Regional PIO and Central Office, OPA staff coordination. Whenever a news release is prepared by the Central Office (including after any initial release), the release shall be reviewed with the on-site commander prior to issuance, to ensure there are no unfavorable institution-level implications for the release. Hostage negotiator review is recommended, but is at the discretion of the on-site commander.

## News Statement and Briefings

Issuing news releases and holding briefings comprise key activities during the media-related management of a prison crisis. While the following general structure is considered to be a functional starting point for establishing briefings, local circumstances may dictate some deviation from the following points:

- Institution staff should issue an initial media statement within 2-3 hours of the onset of the crisis in order to keep the community fully informed, and to offset rumors.
- Ideally, the initial statement should reflect that Bureau staff are in control and that there is no risk to the public, however, depending on the situation, this type of statement may not be immediately appropriate.
- It is likely that only minimal information will be available at this stage of the crisis, so this initial release probably will contain only basic information, which should be absolutely accurate and verifiable.
- Avoid early statements that contain too much information or the release of names of hostages or those injured, before next of kin can be notified. Guidelines related to the release of staff names to the media in relation to a newsworthy event are included in the BOP's *News Media Contacts* policy.
- Once this initial statement is released, a regular briefing schedule should be established, at least three times a day. A suggested schedule is mid-morning, mid-afternoon, and early evening. Consideration should be given to the Warden holding one of these briefings. In addition, special briefings should be scheduled after major events (e.g., conclusion of emergency situation).

When present, on-site OPA staff will take a lead role in managing the news release and briefing processes at the local level. Their involvement should include:

- Preparing news releases to be used in briefings, in coordination with Regional PIO and Central Office, OPA staff; all staff involved in the preparation of the briefing statement should work to ensure that process is as smooth and timely as possible, to avoid disrupting the briefing schedule at the local site.
- Working with the on-site commander to obtain negotiation team approval for all news releases.
- Briefing the spokesperson (whether an OPA staff member or the Warden) on key issues, prior to each appearance before the media.
- Developing standard responses to questions that cannot be discussed, such as hostage-related information.
- Developing additional prison-related information, fact sheets, and material on “sidebar” issues that can be provided to the media at briefings.
- Responding to questions for about 10 minutes, and when appropriate, granting short interviews after the briefing, to clarify issues without giving additional information beyond the scope of the release.
- Declining to respond to hypothetical questions, keeping the focus of the briefing on issues chosen by the Bureau for that forum.
- Ensuring briefings are recorded, and if possible videotaped.
- Ensuring there is foreign language capability (including translations of the releases) at all briefings if a significant number of reporters present are non-English-speaking.
- Ensuring that the media is briefed in advance regarding major events with no tactical significance, to avoid mis-reporting.
- Conducting media pool tours as needed. PIO’s need to ensure that the media pool selection process is conducted in accordance with the BOP’s *New Media Contacts* policy.



Advance preparation is important for news briefings. Preparatory activity may include: familiarizing the spokesperson with the content of the formal release; providing the spokesperson with all applicable information on internal and external events that may be the basis for questions; developing and posing to the spokesperson possible questions, and preparing answers to those questions; conducting role play exercises; familiarizing the spokesperson with an alternate briefing statement in case the primary statement is not approved for release.

- The spokesperson should be carefully coached to stay with prepared information, and to not go beyond the scope of that material.
- PIO staff should distribute the prepared statement after the actual briefing.
- The spokesperson and other staff present should meet after the briefing, in the PIO office area, to evaluate the session and review the video tape of the session. The information gained by this process will prove valuable in preparing for the next news release and briefing.
- Unusual content/events/information that might have an operational impact should be conveyed to the Warden or on-site commander.

### Press Pools

Guidelines for establishing press pools are included in the BOP's *News Media Contacts* policy.

Press pools are to be considered when a large number of reporters are interested in covering a story in the institution and a tour of part or all of the facility for all media is not feasible.

Bureau staff should not select members of the pool. Ideally, the members of the media present should form a prospective pool (with alternates) early in the situation, to allow a prompt response if a pool situation develops on short notice.

Pools should represent each of the major types of media represented on-site: local media (based on the community where the institution is located), radio, TV, print media, and wire services; if a particular segment of the media is not present, that slot need not be filled in the pool.

## Other

On-site command staff have the final authority for permitting media involvement in negotiations or any form of direct contact with insurgent inmates. PIO/OPA staff should be careful to make no commitments to the media regarding any level of involvement in the crisis.

In general, it is considered unwise to permit live television or radio broadcasts from inside an institution during the crisis itself.

PIO/OPA staff may also be involved in visiting the Family Service Center, if one has been activated, and meeting with community members, if appropriate.

PIO's should establish staff (*Appendix A* of Media Emergency Guidelines) and media representatives (*Appendix B* of Media Emergency Guidelines) contact listings. These lists should be updated routinely.

## **Appendix A**

### **Staff Phone Numbers**

[List staff phone and pager numbers]

## **Appendix B**

### **Media Phone Numbers**

[List local media and wire service phone and fax numbers]

## **APPENDIX D**

# Media Access Checklist

## Inmate Interview Requests

Over the years, news media representatives have requested access to BOP institutions to interview inmates. The elements listed below are factors that PIOs need to consider in developing a strategy for responding to inmate interview requests.

### Our Responsibility:

- To ensure orderly and safe operation of the institution.
- To ensure the safety of the interviewer.
- To protect the rights of staff and inmates.
- Not to provide publicity for the inmates or special privileges for the media.
- Not to restrict the union's role in representing bargaining unit employees via the news media.

### I. Required Elements of Media Request:

- Obtain written request.
- Ensure requestor meets the BOP policy definition of news media representatives. **Remember**, unless under contract with a legitimate news source, independent production companies do not meet our definition as "news media representatives." National new media requests (e.g., ABC News) should be forwarded to Regional PIO and Central Office, Public Affairs staff as soon possible
- Identify other media representatives accompanying the reporter (e.g., light technician) and type of equipment needed for interview (e.g., 2 light stands, 1 camera tripod, etc.).
- Identify type of interview requested (e.g., in-person, telephone); live or taped (for television only).
- Identify if voice or film recording is requested.
- Determine the specific nature of the interview (e.g., regarding the inmate's case).
- Identify requested interview date/story deadline and how much interview time is requested.
- Is the reporter requesting to film other areas of the institution or interview staff?
- Identify reporter contact information (e.g., telephone and numbers, as well as e-mail address).

### III. Considering the Requests:

- Determine if the inmate agrees to the interview. If not, then further consideration of media request is not necessary.
- Identify if the inmate is a broad publicity case. If so, determine if this factor creates any special concerns.
- Identify if the inmate has any restriction from speaking with the media (e.g., 501 Rule case).
- Determine if the inmate has requested that their attorney to be present during the interview. If so, this can occur with approval of the Warden.
- Evaluate the existing volume of media requests and the staff resources available to coordinate such interviews.
- Identify if you have addressed similar media requests. If so, insure you are consistent..
- Determine if the Regional PIO or Office of Public Affairs (Central Office) staff are the primary point of contact for this particular request.
- Determine if Regional PIO and Office of Public Affairs (Central Office) staff notification is necessary - which should occur in situations when interviews can attract national or negative news coverage, or involve broad publicity cases.

## **APPENDIX E**

# Media Access Checklist

## Staff Interview Requests

Over the years, news media representatives have requested access to BOP institutions to interview staff regarding a variety of issues, including institution mission, operations, and programs (e.g., Federal Prison Industries); specific inmate allegations (e.g., conditions of confinement issues); and institution emergency situations (e.g., reasons for institution lock-down). The elements listed below are factors that PIOs need to consider in developing a strategy for responding to staff interview requests. BOP policy specifies that at the institution level only the Warden (or his/her designee) is the authorized media spokesperson. However, in accordance with their duties within the Union, a Union official may speak to reporters as a spokesperson for the Union, however they do not speak on behalf of the institution or its administration.

### I. Once a Request is Made:

- Obtain request for interview in writing.

Once you have the request, advise the media representative that you will carefully review their correspondence, and advise them of your decision after this review. Be careful not to speculate about what your final decision will be – you need to consider a variety of factors before advising the reporter of what has been decided, including discussing the request with the Warden.

- Ensure requestor meets the BOP policy definition of news media representatives. **Remember**, unless under contract with a legitimate news source, independent production companies do not meet our definition as “news media representatives.” National new media requests (e.g., ABC News) should be forwarded to Regional PIO and Central Office, Public Affairs staff as soon as possible.
- Ensure the request clearly identifies the issue(s) the reporter wants to discuss and any whether filming or photographing is requested.
- Identify who the reporter is seeking to interview (e.g., inmates, other prison officials).
- Identify the reporter’s deadline.

### II. Considering the Request:

- Evaluate the factors that may have prompted the request (e.g., a request to interview a staff member about high-security prison operations was prompted based on the recent death of an inmate in a nearby State prison.).
- Determine if Regional PIO or Central Office, Public Affairs staff are the primary point of contact regarding the topic of the interview.

- Identify if request involves multiple BOP institutions - if this is the case, immediately notify Regional PIO or Central Office, Public Affairs staff.
- Evaluate alternative options for responding - e.g., prepared statement, media release, telephonic response. Each staff interview request must be evaluated on a cases-by-case basis. **Remember, we always have the option of declining to participate when circumstances warrant such action.**
- Identify if there are any investigative or legal issues related to the request which would persuade you to decline the interview – e.g., a matter currently under Office of Internal Affairs investigation.

Regional PIO and Central Office Public Affairs staff need to be advised of any requests that may attract national or negative news attention, or that are related to national policy initiatives (e.g., privatization).

### III. Emergency Situations:

Policy specifies that Wardens shall promptly make announcements stating the facts of unusual, newsworthy incidents to local media. Examples are deaths, inside escapes, and institution emergencies (e.g., disturbance).

- Regional PIO and Central Office, Public Affairs staff should be consulted before any staff interviews related to institution emergencies.
- Information released should be short but to the point and include available information that would not compromise security, violate privacy laws, or jeopardize an investigation.