



U.S. Department of Justice
United States Marshals Service



MEDIA GUIDE

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PREFACE

Those who serve in law enforcement whether at the federal, state or local level, know that working with the media is part of the job. Arrests, criminal investigations, shooting incidents and other law enforcement matters make news in every community, and reporters will be following up on those stories. Many of the stories will involve the Marshals Service.

Having 94 districts spread across the country and beyond the continental United States, means that the task of *local* media relations in the Marshals Service rests with the district offices. Each district responds, within established guidelines, to media queries from its own local newspapers, television and radio stations, or other media. It is important that employees designated to respond to members of the media do so in an effective, timely, and professional manner.

With that in mind the Office of Public Affairs produced this handbook. In a concise, compact format, we have provided the reader some basic information and tips for working with the media. It is intended to assist those who have a limited or no working knowledge of the media, and to serve as a "refresher" for those with media experience.

This booklet will not provide every answer to every question on working with the media.

It will not make the reader a media expert overnight. But, it will provide valuable information to help build confidence when responding to queries or preparing for an interview. It is a starting point that can be enhanced over time by training and personal, day-to-day experiences with reporters.

The Office of Public Affairs is available to assist you at any time with your media needs at (202) 307-9065, fax (202) 307-8729.

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Introduction

The Office of Public Affairs (OPA) is the primary point of contact for media policy and guidance within the U.S. Marshals Service (USMS). The OPA assists districts, in working with the media, by reviewing news releases or other media materials and providing guidance in formulating such products. Public Affairs is the centralized location for guidance and direction for all USMS employees who work with the media.

For events involving significant national or international coverage, and for national entertainment media projects, OPA also serves as media liaison. This is to ensure appropriate responses and coordination with the Department of Justice (DoJ) and conformity with all applicable policies.

Media matters of local interest are most effectively handled by the districts. Each district should designate individuals to act as media representatives. It is important that these individuals be as well equipped as possible to deal with the media when the opportunities arise.

This book has been prepared as a reference guide to assist USMS employees in working with media. It provides tips for handling some of the most common media situations using basic communication techniques. It is intended as a tool for promoting positive and professional relationships between the USMS and the media.

An addendum to this guide provides sample materials which may also be useful in preparing products for the media. The USMS Media Directive 1.12, Media Policy, provides official guidance concerning the release of information to the media.

The U.S. Marshals Service “Top 10” Media Tips

1. **USMS Media Representative.** Every USMS employee is a potential spokesperson for their own areas of expertise. Before answering any question, ask yourself if you are the appropriate individual to address the issue. If not, find the right person and direct the request to them.

2. **The Right To Know.** The public has a fundamental right to know about USMS activities and operations.

3. **USMS Policy.** Review media requests against agency policy. Remember your response could have regional or national impact and should always reflect the position of the USMS.

4. **Integrity.** Be open, honest and ethical. Your reputation, and that of the USMS, is on the line.

Never show partiality when dealing with media representatives.

5. **Withholding Information.** Don't starve the media. Provide as much information as possible within established guidelines. Be up-front, helpful and proactive. A good principle to follow is “maximum disclosure with minimum delay.”

6. **Protecting Investigations.** Never discuss ongoing investigations or matters that might become evidence in court.

7. **Personal Information.** Withhold the names of deceased or injured until next-of-kin are notified. Never reveal the names of suspects before charges have been filed.

8. **Classified Information.** If you can't respond to a question, tell the reporter why.

9. **Criticism.** Never criticize the USMS, any other law enforcement organization, the government, the public, or the media. Criticism usually reflects only personal opinion.

10. **Just the Facts.** Do not comment on hypothetical situations. Don't speculate. Stick with the facts.

Working with the Media

Credibility is the single most important asset in media relations. It is earned through practicing ordinary, ethical standards of human conduct, honesty and candor. Reporters and other media representatives vary in such areas as tact, level of knowledge and motivation. However, it is important to keep in mind that, in general, they share some common traits with USMS media representatives: they have a job to do; they want to do it; they know how to do it.

To deal effectively with the media it is important to remember that the primary thing they want is information. Information is usually provided in written or spoken form. Regardless of the method by which information is conveyed, a record of what was released should be maintained.

If a release or statement is prepared, simply keep a file copy. With media calls or visits a query sheet provides a good record. A query sheet gives the name and phone number of the caller, organization they represent, and a sketch of the questions and answers, or other information provided. If it is necessary to go to other sources (districts, divisions, agencies) to provide answers, a notation should be made of the source of the information. A sample query sheet can be found as addendum A.

The needs of each branch of the media are somewhat different. It is important to recognize the general requirements of each. Messages and products must be designed to meet specific needs in order to increase the chances that a story will be published or put on the air, via radio or television.

To be a well prepared media liaison get to know the reporters who regularly cover the court and/or police beat in your district. Compile and keep handy a list of telephone numbers for all the important news organizations in your district as well as national news services such as the Associated Press. The list should also include area radio and television stations.

What is News?

Generally speaking, news editors and producers will decide on whether or not to run a story based on six criteria:

1. **IMPACT** - Is this something almost everyone will be talking about?
2. **PROXIMITY** - Is this a matter of local or more far reaching interest?
3. **TIMELINESS** - Did it just happen or is it "old" news?
4. **PROMINENCE** - Does the story involve prominent people, places or events?
5. **CONFLICT** - Is there fighting or contention over something?
6. **NOVELTY** - Is there an unusual "twist" to the story?

The Reporter

Most media contact is with a reporter. Reporters in larger cities usually cover a "beat" - not too different from police officers. In smaller communities, reporters tend to be generalists.

In many cases they will not be very well informed about policing, so use your knowledge to help keep them focused on the real issues. Reporters are curious by nature and may be somewhat skeptical of government institutions. This makes the job of USMS media relations especially challenging.

Despite occasional frustrations the USMS and the media can make a great team. The more we help the media do their job, the more likely they will provide accurate, balanced reporting. A good media representative always works to deliver the USMS point of view to the media. This is important when the USMS is being portrayed in a positive light as well as when it is being criticized.

The News Release

The purpose of sending a news release is to draw attention to a significant incident or development. It is a somewhat overused tool so many news releases end up in the trash rather than being used by the media..Use them sparingly and only when you have something truly newsworthy to announce. It is very likely that a news release that is used will result in additional press queries. So be prepared to answer additional questions about the news release subject.

To determine if what you have is truly newsworthy information ask yourself these questions before writing a news release.

- Who cares? Is this relevant?
- Will the announcement be considered newsworthy, and of wide interest to the public?
- How will the information affect the public?
- Can I provide the 5 Ws and 2 Hs (who, what, where, why, when, how and how much)?
- Do I have all the facts?

Writing a News Release

The following are basic tips for writing an effective news release. See also addendum B.

- Use letterhead with a contact name, phone number, and the date of release.
- Double space the news release text.
- Put the most important information in the first paragraph.
- Answer the 5 Ws and 2 Hs up front.
- Subsequent paragraphs provide details and background for the first paragraph.
- Use short sentences and limit each paragraph to one primary piece of information.
- Limit the length to one page, if possible.
- If using direct quotes be sure to get approval from anyone you quote.

The News Conference

A news conference is an extension of the news release. It is a planned, scheduled meeting with reporters for the purpose of announcing a newsworthy event. Normally, a written statement or news release is prepared in advance for distribution at the start of a news conference. A news conference is a way to summarize the successful outcome of such events as successful fugitive operations, joint operations, etc. Any meeting or interview by two or more competing media representatives may be considered a "news conference." It also applies when the USMS is participating with other law enforcement agencies.

Reasons to Hold a News Conference

The following are some of the primary reasons to hold a news conference.

- To explain a complex or sensitive issue.
- To introduce specific people in the agency such as newly appointed Marshals.
- To get a story out simultaneously without showing favoritism to certain media.
- To avoid numerous individual interviews.

Outline for a News Conference

A news conference typically includes the following six steps.

- Introduction
- Presentation
- Questions and answers
- Conclusion
- Post-conference Interviews
- Follow-up

Planning a News Conference

Before conducting a news conference careful planning and preparation is necessary. Here are some tips for ensuring the success of your news conference.

- Ensure that key personnel are available.
- Set date, time, and place for conference. The most appropriate time for a news conference is mid-morning on Friday. Mondays and late afternoons are not good if you want to see your story on the evening news.
- Check for competing events.
- Ensure that facilities such as electrical outlets and parking
- Prepare media kits or information materials appropriate for various media needs.
- Make sure the place where the news conference is conducted is adequate in size, is at a central location, and meets any other needs. Visit it before the news conference.

The News Briefing

A news briefing is a meeting with reporters that may or may not have been scheduled in advance. Its purpose is to informally describe the facts of a fast-breaking event or complex matter that cannot easily be described in written form. For example, a news briefing may be held at the site of a major arrest or unusual property seizure.

Media Kits

Media kits are used to provide reporters with any pertinent information needed to cover a story. They are handed out at a news conferences, live events, and briefing sessions. They can include any of the following:

- news release
- fact sheet
- question and answer sheets
- map to the event
- parking pass
- media pass
- photos
- charts and graphs

Electronic Media

There are many different types of media formats, and although there are similarities between them, they also have varying needs and requirements. Electronic media such as radio and television have some unique requirements.

Television

Television is a visual medium. Stories are usually no more than 90 seconds long and revolve around a visual component, so they need action. Here are a few tips which may be useful when working with television media.

- Local stories are more appealing to the media because they're closer to home.
- Television uses 10-15 second sound bites so keep your messages clear and concise.
- Television crews always look for something to film. Protect the scene by working with the media to establish an area from which video footage can be safely obtained.

Radio

Radio is conversational. Stories are usually no longer than 30 seconds. Direct quotes are rarely used because "voice clips" of people interviewed are used instead. Radio targets a tighter audience than television, so every story may not appeal to every station's audience. Here are some tips for working with radio media.

- Radio's only advantage over the print media and television is that it is fast. Reporters need only a telephone to report live from a scene.
- Use short, concise sentences in radio interviews. Be conversational with the interviewer.
- Create "pictures" for the listener. Use descriptive words and images.

Interviews

When providing an interview it is important to work effectively with the media to deliver the USMS point of view. The public has a right to know about the USMS and you are responsible for ensuring that they have the information they need. When you are approached for an interview ask the reporter the following questions before agreeing to be interviewed.

- Who are you and where do you work?
- What is the subject of the interview?
- What is the focus of the story?
- How long will the interview be?
- Have you spoken with anyone else about the matter?
- What is your deadline?

If you are unprepared to address a reporter's questions, tell him you will return his call, and try to do so within an hour. Determine exactly what information he wants. Gather the facts and prepare a brief synopsis. Return the reporter's call and relay information within the specified time frame. The better the information provided, the more likely a story will be accurate.

The following seven steps provide an outline for preparing for media interviews.

Step One: Define the Issue

Step Two: Gather facts and prepare organizational messages

Step Three: Anticipate potential questions

Step Four: Answer questions in writing

Step Five: Review questions and answers

Step Six: Set ground rules for interview at beginning of callback

Step Seven: Conduct Interview

Being Proactive

Good media representatives are always looking for opportunities to present their agency in a positive light. It is important to publicize “good news” about an agency, such as service to the community. In order to be effective in getting out the “good news” you must also clearly understand the message you want to relay to the media.

Contact the appropriate editor or reporter to get the message out. Concisely state the central theme of your story and the “hook” that will catch the audience’s interest. Tailor the story to the audiences and provide clear information and possible interview subjects.

If a Story is Wrong

There will be occasions when despite all your work with the reporter a story is wrong.

When that occurs don’t overreact. Instead remain calm, call the reporter and politely point out the error. If the error is significant, ask for a correction. If the story is getting a lot of coverage from other outlets, issue a news release to all media correcting the inaccuracies. If it is a minor media outlet, don’t draw unnecessary attention to it. If the error is not significant, let it go.

If the story is unfairly biased, call up the reporter and say so—politely. You may get a better shake next time. If the story is factual, but not particularly flattering, it is better to leave it alone.

If a Story is Right

When a reporter presents a story in a balanced manner, even if it is not completely favorable to the USMS, let the reporter know that you thought he or she wrote a fair piece. Professional feedback of this nature goes a long way towards building valuable media relationships.

Crisis Situations

Within the USMS, we face “crisis” situations regularly simply because of the nature of our work. The type of crises can range from the capture of dangerous fugitives to courtroom security situations. In most cases we succeed at handling the crisis from a media perspective, but sometimes we falter. One thing we can be assured of, however, is that we will continue to be scrutinized at every level, on every story.

When we fall short in a crisis situation, there are usually two main reasons why:

We fail to react quickly. The first 24 hours are crucial. Of that time, the first two hours are the most crucial.

We prolong the crisis by failing to confront it head-on. We should immediately take control of the real issue, which is often being framed by the media and/or critics.

This forces the USMS into a reactive mode. It’s tough to stay ahead of a messy situation when you have to play catch-up.

Goals in a Crisis

- Provide the media with full and accurate information.
- The information must be based on verifiable facts.
- Communicate at the earliest possible time with the media.
- If it’s bad news, get it all out at once. Don’t wait for the media to find out first.
- Turn media’s attention to what you’re doing to correct the problem.

Tips for Handling a Crisis

When dealing with bad news the best advice is, **mess up, fess up and dress up**. Silence is perceived as guilt. Here are some tips for effectively dealing with the media in a crisis:

- Anticipate how the media will play a story and be ready to respond.
- Create a crisis management team, and a spokesperson to communicate with the media.
- Ensure all appropriate USMS personnel are advised of major announcements.
- Define the issue accurately.
- Inform media quickly, accurately and often about crisis situations.
- Acknowledge responsibility, if applicable, but avoid blaming others.
- State measures you are taking to ensure against the situation happening again.
- Tell the truth. Don't speculate. Never offer personal opinions.
- Give all media the same information at the same time.
- Monitor the media and correct any misinformation.
- Stay calm.

Summary

This media guide provides basic information and helpful tips for USMS personnel working with the media. Common sense and courtesy are also important elements in building positive media relations. Couple these with adequate planning and you will increase the likelihood of a having a successful media program within your districts. The more you work with the media and put these tips to use, the more comfortable you will become when the media approach you.

Another point worth remembering is that when you are working with the media, do not do or say anything you do not want to see in print or hear on radio or television. Rarely should you ever go “off the record” and never deliberately mislead a reporter. Also, return a reporter’s calls, even if only to say that you have nothing to say. Treat all reporters the same.

One last word of advice. Reporters, just like cops, know how to spot a phony. So don’t try to be a “spin doctor”. Be yourself, a USMS media liaison and/or a professional federal law enforcement officer. Ultimately that’s who the reporter really wants to meet.

REMINDER: The Office of Public Affairs is always available to advise USMS employees on any issues regarding the media. Public Affairs has primary responsibility to handle headquarters and/or national public affairs initiatives. However, OPA will make every effort to provide direct support to the field during major events occurring within the districts.

You can contact the OPA by calling (202) 307-9065, fax (202) 307-8729. Additional information is available at the U.S. Marshals Service web site www.usmarshals.gov .

Addendum

Sample Query Sheet

Query Sheet

Taken by _____ Time _____ Date _____

From _____ Of _____

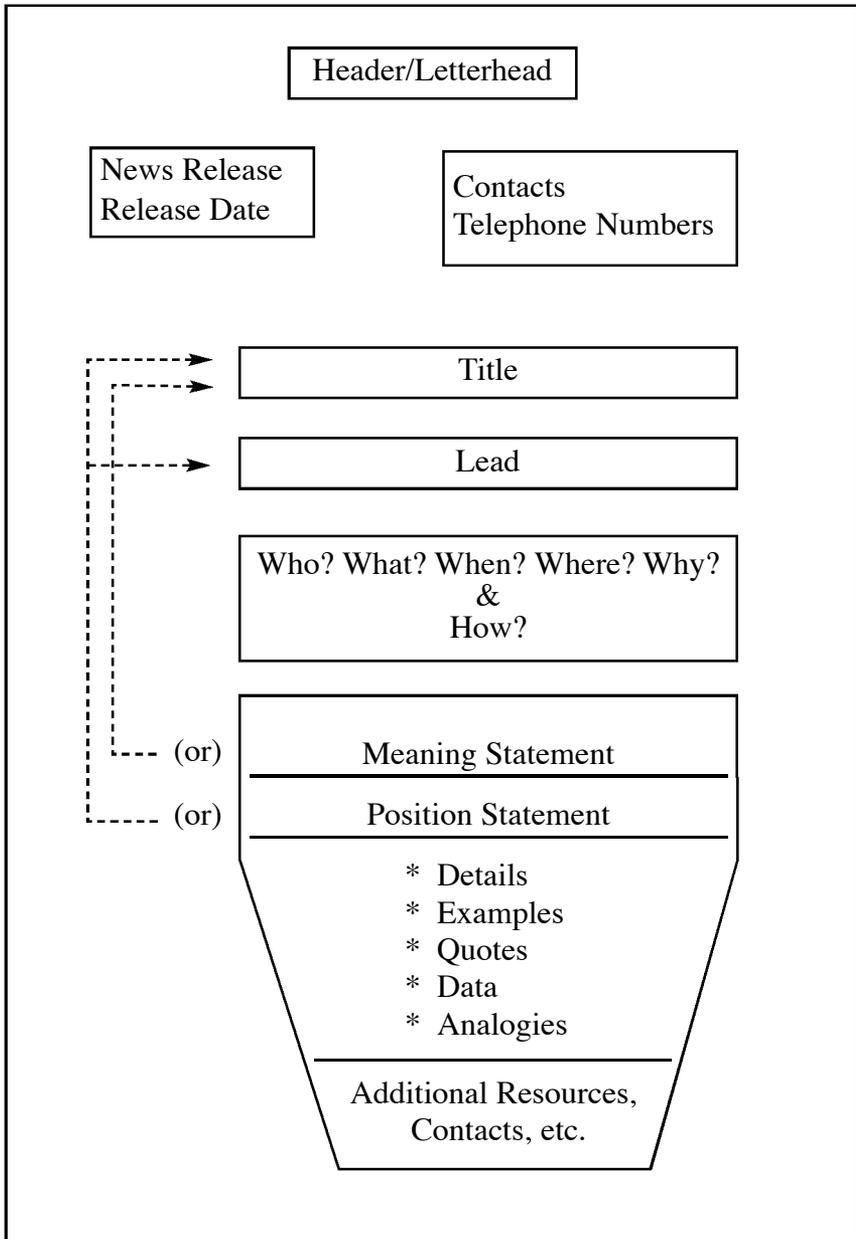
Phone _____ Deadline _____

Question: _____

Response: _____

Source for Response: _____

Sample News Release Diagram



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