

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

1. **APPLICABILITY.** This policy applies to employees of the Maine Department of _____ and is intended to guide their contact with the public and media in their roles as state employees and representatives of the department.
2. **PURPOSE.** As part of its commitment to transparency and to creating and maintaining public understanding and support for its objectives and programs, the Maine Department of _____ will provide the public and media with accurate and consistent information in an accessible, professionally-presented and timely manner. It also ensures the appropriate, coordinated use of Department-related materials, including its logo.
3. **OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICY.** The Department has a fundamental responsibility to communicate consistently, clearly and effectively with all constituents. Working effectively with the public and media is critical to achieving this goal. The Office of Communications within the Commissioner's Office directs all Department communications and education efforts, including the development and dissemination of all official agency announcements including media releases, weekly highlights, educational columns and other documents/materials of interest to the public and regulated community; coordinates, prepares and promotes department staff public presentations and media conferences; responds to requests for public information; and manages all Department web content, including the Department website and social media presence. The Director of Communications serves as the agency spokesperson.
4. **PROCEDURES.**
 - 4.1 Providing Public Access to Departmental Information and Proceedings
 - 4.1.1 The Maine Department of _____ conforms to the letter and spirit of the Freedom of Access Act (FOAA). All files, except enforcement, personnel, and others required by law to be kept confidential, are available for inspection during business hours. Staff must follow the Department's Freedom of Access Act Guidelines in determining the appropriate response to requests for confidential information or consult the Department's FOAA Coordinator or Director of Enforcement for guidance.
 - 4.1.2 Media representatives and members of the public have rights to observe the conduct of state business. The FOAA governs those rights, both regarding "public records" and "public proceedings."
 - 4.1.3 All official state business conducted electronically must be sent through the state's email system, to allow for retention under state archival statutes. Official state business may not be conducted through any other electronic means, including but not limited to unofficial email, text messaging and instant messaging.
 - 4.2 Providing Information to the Public and Media In a Timely Manner
 - 4.2.1 The Maine Department of _____ is committed to providing the highest level of transparency and customer service. A critical element of that commitment is to the extent practicable, to respond to all requests from members of the public or media in a timely

manner. Responding to media inquiries is a high priority, given their deadlines. To the extent possible and in accordance with Sections 4.3 and 4.4 of this Policy, requests from the media will receive a response immediately upon receipt, unless additional time is allowed by the requestor's articulated deadline. If staff cannot return the request, it should be forwarded directly to the Director of Communications.

4.3 Representing the Department on Departmental Policy or Position

The Commissioner and Director of Communications or their approved designee is responsible for articulating Department policy, positions and any public personnel information, including but not limited to budgetary matters, legislative and regulatory positions and staffing/structural decisions. Any media inquiries on these matters should be referred directly to the Director of Communications.

4.4 Responding to Press Inquiries Regarding Specific Projects, Technical Issues (non-policy) or Agency Processes

4.4.1 Upon the approval of the Director of Communications, staff has the authority to respond to a reporter's inquiries regarding specific projects or technical issues within their professional purview. The Director of Communications is always available to advise staff regarding effective communications and if requested, will respond on behalf of those uncomfortable performing this task. Inquiries regarding matters outside the request recipient's jurisdiction should be directly transferred to the appropriate agency contact if it known, or to the Director of Communications, who will either respond to the inquiry or forward it to the appropriate staff person for response.

4.4.2 Responding staff should provide objective facts and never engage in speculation or opinion. When answering questions, staff should take advantage of opportunities to cite additional background or Department-developed reference material, including relevant links to the Department's website.

4.4.3 Under no circumstances is it appropriate for a staff member to disclose a staff recommendation on an Order until it has been reviewed and approved according to Department policy. Typically this process requires bureau director involvement.

4.4.4 Many aspects of pending enforcement cases are not appropriate for discussion with the public or the media. (NOTE: A Notice of Violation that has been issued to the alleged violator is available as a public document. No other enforcement documents are in the public domain until they are final.) Any inquiries related to an active enforcement case should be reviewed with the Director of Enforcement in the Office of the Commissioner prior to a departmental response.

4.4.5 The Media Contact Form (attached and on the Department Intranet) is used to document all calls or interviews with reporters. Copies of completed forms are to be sent electronically within the same day to appropriate bureau management and to the Director of Communications. If the form is inaccessible (for example, the staff person is in the field), a phone call or email to the Director of Communications and appropriate bureau management is an acceptable alternative.

4.5 Initiating Media Contacts

4.5.1 Media relations is the responsibility of the Office of the Commissioner. Suggestions for media releases, events and other public and media activities representing the Department to the public or media are welcomed and should be brought directly to the Director of Communications before any action is pursued with as much advanced notice as possible. If the suggestion is approved, the Director of Communications will delegate roles and responsibilities to move it forward, in consultation with the appropriate bureau management.

4.5.2 All media releases and media-related activities (events/activities orchestrated for the press and public with the intent of heightening awareness) must be approved by the Director of Communications and the Commissioner or their designee. Media releases will conform to Associated Press Style, be distributed by the Director of Communications, and also be displayed on the Department's website newsroom.

4.6 Corrections/Letters to the Editor/Opinion Pieces

When the media seems to have erred or unfairly represented Department staff, their actions or Department policy positions, it is important to correct the misinformation and/or mischaracterization via a request for a correction, letter to the editor, etc. Please contact the Director of Communications who will determine and coordinate the appropriate response in partnership with staff.

4.7 Public Speaking/Presentation Engagements

4.7.1 When a staff member is requested to represent the Department in a public speaking engagement or exhibition or policy-related forum (not including mandated public meetings or hearings), he/she must inform the Director of Communications and the Bureau Director of the engagement, audience, objective, subject matter and resources required before accepting. The Director of Communications in partnership with the Bureau Director will review the request and advise on the response. Staff is not permitted to present on behalf of the Department unless approved.

4.7.2 Requests from external entities for Department speakers may be submitted directly to the Director of Communications & Education or their designee, who will decide whether it is appropriate for the Department to be represented and coordinate and help to prepare the appropriate representatives. Department staff is not to solicit speaking/presentation engagements but can bring suggestions for potential opportunities to the Office of Communications for consideration.

4.7.3 All Department presentations must utilize the Department PowerPoint template (available at location), and be reviewed and approved by the Director of Communications and/or their designee prior to the presentation being given. PowerPoints are to be provided to the Director of Communications no less than three full working days in advance of the staff person's departure for the presentation for review.

4.8 Department Education and Outreach Materials

Any outreach materials –including but not limited to letters, brochures, postcards, technical bulletins, issue profiles, print/broadcast/web advertisements or promotions, reports, etc. – not specific to an individual facility, policy, project, etc. must be approved by the Director of Communications, and as necessary, additionally by the Policy Director. If staff require an outreach piece to be developed or wish to partner on an advertising/promotional campaign, they are to contact the Director of Communications or their designee who will coordinate staff within the Office of Communications to develop the appropriate materials in partnership with the relevant program staff if appropriate advanced notice has been provided. The Office of Communications has Department branded display materials available for use, including banners, tableskirts and general Department brochures and stands.

4.9 Sponsorships/Use of Department Logo

A sponsorship by the Department –whether monetary, in-kind or via logo– suggests endorsement of the sponsored initiative. Therefore, all requests for sponsorship or Department endorsement must be approved by the Office of the Commissioner and by the appropriate Bureau Director. Requests should be reviewed by the appropriate Division Director with the request and a recommendation made concurrently to the Director of Communications and the Bureau Director. If the sponsorship and use of the Department logo is approved, the Director of Communications will provide the correct logo file to the requestor.