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Media Relations Essentials

A comprehensive guide for prosecutors and PIOs



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INTRODUCTION

Effective media relations are essential to every prosecutor's office, serving as a key mechanism for shaping public perception, maintaining community trust, and upholding the integrity of the justice system. Whether you are a seasoned Public Information Officer (PIO) managing media across a large jurisdiction or a prosecutor occasionally interacting with reporters, navigating these interactions with skill is vital.

Research shows that clear, consistent communication not only informs the public but also helps build credibility and trust between the community and the justice system. According to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), transparency and accuracy are cornerstones of ethical media relations. This guide draws on these principles, offering you practical strategies to communicate effectively while ensuring legal and ethical standards are maintained.

Purpose of the Guide

This Media Relations Essentials guide is designed to equip prosecutors and PIOs with the tools and strategies necessary to confidently engage with the media. The media acts as a vital bridge between the justice system and the public, making clear, accurate, and consistent communication indispensable. By fostering positive relationships with the media and delivering well-crafted messages, prosecutors can enhance public understanding of their role and reinforce the credibility of the legal system.

Primary Objectives

Enhancing Media Interactions: This guide provides best practices for communicating with journalists, whether you're responding to inquiries, conducting interviews, or holding press conferences. You'll learn how to convey your office's message professionally and clearly, ensuring the public receives accurate and timely information about your work. Research on media engagement underscores the importance of preparation and message discipline, both of which are critical to shaping public perception effectively.

Maintaining Transparency: Transparency builds public trust, which is crucial to the legitimacy of the justice system. This guide offers strategies for openly sharing information without compromising ongoing investigations or infringing on the rights of those involved. The PRSA stresses that transparent communication should be balanced with sensitivity to legal constraints, ensuring the right information is communicated at the right time.

Protecting Case Integrity: Media interactions must be approached with care to safeguard the integrity of investigations and legal proceedings. This guide outlines how to manage sensitive topics, share permissible information, and navigate the legal and ethical boundaries inherent in media relations. Effective communication can prevent misinformation from jeopardizing ongoing cases, while also keeping the public informed.

By following the best practices outlined in this guide, you will be better prepared to manage media relations in a way that aligns with your office's mission, strengthens community trust, and protects the integrity of the justice system.

THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Effective media relations begin with a clear understanding of the different types of media outlets. Each outlet has distinct characteristics, audiences, and expectations that influence how your message is communicated. This section provides an overview of the primary types of media outlets you may encounter and how to approach them strategically.

*“The only thing worse than being talked about
is not being talked about.”
Oscar Wilde*

Types of Media Outlets

Print Media

Print media remains influential, especially within local communities and niche audiences, despite the growing dominance of digital platforms.

Newspapers: National outlets like The New York Times and The Washington Post set broad public agendas, while local newspapers, which often have dedicated crime or public safety sections, are pivotal for reaching community-level audiences. Local coverage can significantly shape public perception of prosecutions and the justice system, making these outlets critical partners in communicating legal updates.

Magazines and Journals: These outlets typically focus on specialized audiences, offering opportunities for deeper, more analytical coverage. Legal journals often provide in-depth analysis of cases and legal trends, requiring proactive and well-researched engagement. The longer lead times of these outlets offer the chance to craft more detailed narratives but also require strategic planning.

Broadcast Media

Broadcast media, including television and radio, reaches large audiences and is effective for conveying urgent or breaking news.

Television

National Networks: Networks like CNN, ABC, and NBC shape national narratives and influence public opinion on high-profile cases and legal trends. Engaging with these outlets requires careful preparation, as national media can amplify both positive and negative aspects of a story.

Local TV Stations: Critical for engaging local audiences, these stations often feature prosecutors discussing specific cases, public safety concerns, or community outreach efforts. Effective television communication relies on delivering clear, concise messages with strong visual elements.

Cable News Channels: Outlets like MSNBC or Fox News often have editorial leanings that may influence coverage. Tailoring your approach to match the interests of these outlets while staying factual and nonpartisan is key.

Radio

Radio remains a trusted source of information, particularly in areas with limited digital access. News and talk radio provide opportunities for in-depth discussion of legal issues, while also allowing you to reach specific demographics.

Digital Media

Digital media, which includes online news websites, blogs, social media, and podcasts, offers both expansive reach and rapid dissemination of information.

Online News Websites: Traditional outlets with digital arms, such as USA Today or Reuters, offer wider, more diverse audiences and quicker turnaround times. Online stories are also more likely to be shared on social media, amplifying their reach.

Blogs and Independent Websites: While some blogs have small audiences, many are highly influential within specific communities or interest groups.

Engaging with these outlets requires assessing their credibility and determining if their audience aligns with your message.

Social Media Platforms: Platforms like X (previously Twitter), Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and TikTok allow for direct engagement with the public, bypassing traditional media filters. Social media can be both a valuable tool and a challenge, as it requires constant monitoring to manage potential misinformation. Strategic engagement helps maintain control over your office's narrative.

Podcasts: With their popularity growing, podcasts provide opportunities for long-form storytelling, allowing prosecutors to discuss complex legal issues in detail. They are particularly effective in reaching a highly engaged, niche audience.

Wire Services

Wire services like the Associated Press (AP) and Reuters serve as content distributors, syndicating stories across multiple outlets. A story picked up by a wire service can reach a broad audience, significantly amplifying its impact.

"The press is not your friend, it's not your enemy, it's your job to engage with the press and make them understand what you're trying to do."

David Axelrod

Journalists' Roles

Understanding the different roles within a newsroom is key to effectively engaging with journalists. Reporters, editors, and producers each have distinct responsibilities that shape how news is gathered, produced, and presented to the public. Familiarity with these roles will help you communicate more strategically and foster stronger relationships with the media.

Reporters

Reporters are the primary point of contact for your office when it comes to communicating with the media. Their job is to gather information, conduct interviews, and produce stories for the public. As a Public Information Officer (PIO)

or prosecutor, it's essential to understand that not all reporters operate the same way. To ensure accurate reporting and avoid misunderstandings, it's helpful to know the different types of reporters and how best to communicate with them.

Beat Reporters: Beat reporters specialize in specific subject areas, such as crime, legal affairs, or local government. Their familiarity with these topics often means they have more knowledge of the legal system than general reporters, but this doesn't mean they fully grasp the complexities of prosecutorial work. Developing a strong professional relationship with beat reporters can help foster more accurate and in-depth coverage of your office's work. These reporters are often eager to engage in the details and may provide more comprehensive reports on your cases or legal reforms. However, because they know more about their subject, beat reporters may scrutinize your office more closely. This level of scrutiny can be beneficial when their coverage highlights the significance of your efforts, but it can also mean they are more critical of mistakes or missteps. While beat reporters generally have a better understanding of legal matters, they don't always get it right, so clear communication and providing context is key to preventing misrepresentation.

Investigative Reporters: Investigative reporters focus on uncovering deeper, often systemic issues, and their stories usually take longer to develop. They are known for diving into complex topics, sometimes spending months on a single report. Engaging with investigative reporters can be daunting as their work often brings intense scrutiny to public officials and institutions. However, when handled properly, working with investigative reporters can also present an opportunity to show the depth and impact of your office's work. These reporters can provide a platform for exposing wrongdoing or corruption, allowing your office to demonstrate its role in addressing serious issues like organized crime or civil rights violations. On the other hand, if investigative reporters feel they are being stonewalled, they may dig deeper elsewhere, potentially leading to sensationalism or negative coverage from not fully understanding the legal system. Transparency along with providing detailed and accurate information can help establish trust. Managing this relationship carefully and offering a clear legal context is vital to ensuring balanced reporting.

General Assignment Reporters: General assignment reporters cover a wide range of topics and often lack specialized knowledge of legal matters. They might cover a crime story one day and a local festival the next, making it difficult for them to grasp the intricacies of the judicial system. Prosecutors may find working with general reporters frustrating because these journalists often jump to conclusions or misunderstand legal procedures, leading to oversimplified or inaccurate reporting. That said, general reporters provide an essential service by reaching a broad audience, and working with them can help inform the public about your office's work. The key to success with general reporters is offering clear, concise explanations that avoid legal jargon. By simplifying complex issues, you help ensure that they accurately report the story, even with their limited legal expertise. Since general assignment reporters work on tight deadlines, they may not have time to investigate every angle of a case, which can result in superficial coverage. To mitigate this, it's important to provide timely, accessible information to guide their reporting and avoid misunderstandings.

Editors

Editors are responsible for deciding what stories get covered and how they are presented. Understanding their priorities can help in getting your stories published.

Assignment Editors: These editors assign stories to reporters based on newsworthiness. A well-timed, compelling pitch can increase the chances of your story being covered.

Section Editors: Specialized section editors, such as those overseeing crime or legal reporting, are critical contacts for in-depth or ongoing coverage. Engaging with section editors ensures your legal matters are accurately represented.

Managing/Executive Editors: These senior editors determine the overall editorial direction and are involved in high-profile or sensitive stories. While you may not interact with them frequently, their influence over major story decisions is significant.

Producers

Producers play a crucial role in broadcast and digital media, deciding which stories make it to air and how they are presented.

News Producers: They manage the flow of a news program, prioritizing visually compelling stories that fit within time constraints. Providing concise, clear soundbites and strong visual elements increases your chances of getting coverage.

Segment Producers: These producers focus on specific segments within a program, such as interviews or special reports. If you are scheduled for an interview, the segment producer will guide the direction of the conversation.

Digital Producers: With the rise of digital-first content, digital producers are increasingly important. Their goal is to drive online engagement, so providing multimedia content can help your story gain more visibility.

*"It is always a risk to speak to the press:
They are likely to report what you say."
Henry Kissinger*

Media Trends

The media landscape is evolving rapidly due to technological advances and shifting audience behaviors. These trends have significant implications for prosecutors' offices and require adaptive media strategies.

The Rise of Social Media

Social media has become a dominant force in news dissemination, offering both opportunities and challenges for legal communications.

Instant News: Social media enables immediate sharing of news, making it crucial for prosecutors' offices to monitor platforms and respond quickly. A single post can go viral, affecting public opinion and, potentially, legal proceedings.

Direct Public Engagement: Social media allows you to communicate directly with the public. While this bypasses traditional media filters, it requires careful management to maintain accuracy and prevent missteps.

Misinformation: Social media's speed makes it fertile ground for misinformation. Being proactive in addressing inaccuracies is vital for maintaining public trust.

The 24-Hour News Cycle

The relentless 24-hour news cycle has increased the demand for constant updates, putting pressure on prosecutors' offices to provide information quickly and accurately.

Content Demand: The need for continuous content means more frequent inquiries and shorter deadlines. PRSA recommends being prepared with key messages to avoid releasing incomplete or inaccurate information.

Heightened Scrutiny: High-profile cases can remain in the spotlight for extended periods, increasing public scrutiny and the potential for misinterpretation. Staying consistent and transparent in your communications is essential.

Media Fragmentation

With more media outlets than ever before, audiences are consuming news from a diverse range of sources, including partisan outlets and niche platforms.

Tailored Communication: Prosecutors must adapt their messages to reach different audience segments effectively, maintaining factual and nonpartisan communications to preserve credibility.

Multimedia Storytelling

Digital platforms are increasingly leveraging video, podcasts, and interactive content to tell stories. Prosecutors' offices should be prepared to supply multimedia materials to enhance media coverage.

Video and Interactive Content: Visual content is becoming more dominant. Supplying video interviews, B-roll, and data visualizations can make your story more compelling to digital producers and online platforms.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MEDIA

Establishing and maintaining strong relationships with the media is essential for effective communication and public engagement. This chapter will explore key strategies for proactively and reactively managing media relations, the importance of maintaining an up-to-date media contact list, and tips for cultivating long-term, positive relationships with journalists. Building trust through consistent, ethical communication is central to media relations.

*"Publicity is absolutely critical. A good PR story is infinitely more effective than a front-page ad."
Richard Branson*

Proactive vs. Reactive Media Relations

Engaging with the media can be approached in two primary ways: proactively or reactively. Both strategies have their place in a prosecutor's media relations toolkit and understanding when and how to use each approach is crucial for managing public perception and ensuring that your office's messages are communicated effectively.

Proactive Media Relations

Proactive media relations involve taking the initiative to engage with the media before news breaks or in anticipation of potential stories. This strategy allows prosecutors' offices to shape the narrative, highlight important work, and build a positive public image.

Why Proactive Engagement Matters

Shaping the Narrative: By engaging proactively, you can ensure that your office's perspective is included in media coverage from the outset, helping to frame the story in a way that aligns with your objectives.

Highlighting Positive Initiatives: Proactive outreach provides an opportunity to showcase your office's achievements, such as successful prosecutions, community outreach programs, or new initiatives aimed at improving public safety.

Building Trust: Regular communication with the media fosters trust and credibility, making journalists more likely to reach out to your office for future stories.

Strategies for Proactive Media Relations

Press Releases and Media Advisories: Regularly distribute press releases or media advisories to inform the media about significant cases, upcoming events, or new initiatives. Ensure that these documents are clear, concise, and newsworthy.

Media Briefings: Hold regular media briefings or press conferences to provide updates on high-profile cases, discuss new policies, or address community concerns. This gives you the chance to set the tone for coverage and provide key information directly to journalists.

Opinion Pieces and Editorials: Contribute op-eds or guest columns to local or national publications to share your office's perspective on legal issues, public safety, or criminal justice reform. This helps to establish your office as a thought leader in the legal community.

Social Media Engagement: Use your office's social media platforms to share news, provide updates, and engage with the public in real-time. This allows you to reach a broader audience and control the timing and content of your messages.

Reactive Media Relations

Reactive media relations involve responding to media inquiries or addressing news stories that have already broken. This approach is essential for managing crises, clarifying information, and ensuring accurate coverage.

Why Reactive Engagement is Critical

Managing Crises: When a crisis occurs, reactive media relations are vital for controlling the narrative, providing accurate information, and addressing public concerns quickly and effectively.

Correcting Misinformation: The media may sometimes report inaccurate or incomplete information. Reactively engaging with the media allows your office to correct the record and ensure that the public receives the right information.

Responding to Inquiries: Journalists frequently seek comments or interviews on ongoing cases or legal issues. Responding promptly and thoughtfully to these inquiries helps maintain your office's reputation for transparency and responsiveness.

Strategies for Reactive Media Relations

Media Response Protocol: Develop a clear protocol for responding to media inquiries, including who within your office is authorized to speak to the media and how responses should be coordinated. This ensures that your office's messaging is consistent and accurate.

Rapid Response Team: Consider establishing a rapid response team within your office to handle media inquiries during crises or high-profile cases. This team can ensure that media requests are handled promptly and that the appropriate information is shared.

Statement Preparation: Prepare written statements in advance for potential scenarios, such as the outcomes of high-profile cases or responses to legal controversies. Having these statements ready can expedite your response time and help control the narrative.

Monitoring Media Coverage: Regularly monitor media coverage of your office and its cases. This allows you to quickly identify and address any inaccuracies or negative stories that could impact public perception.

*"Next to doing the right thing, the most important thing is to let people know you are doing the right thing."
John D. Rockefeller*

Media Contact List

An up-to-date and well-maintained media contact list is a critical tool for any prosecutor's office aiming to build and sustain effective media relationships. This list serves as a direct line of communication to journalists and media outlets that can help amplify your messages, clarify information, and ensure accurate coverage of your office's activities.

Importance of a Media Contact List

A comprehensive media contact list is more than just a directory of names and numbers; it is a strategic asset that facilitates timely and targeted communication with the right journalists and media outlets.

Targeted Communication: Different journalists and media outlets have specific beats or areas of focus, such as crime, legal matters, or community issues. By having a detailed contact list, you can target your communications to those who are most likely to be interested in and accurately cover your stories.

Efficient Response: In times of crisis or when managing high-profile cases, quick and efficient communication is crucial. An up-to-date contact list allows your office to promptly reach out to key journalists, ensuring that accurate information is disseminated rapidly.

Strengthening Relationships: Regularly updating and using your media contact list helps in building strong, long-term relationships with journalists. Consistent and relevant communication fosters trust and ensures that journalists view your office as a reliable source of information.

Ensuring Accurate Coverage: By directly engaging with journalists who cover your office's work, you can provide them with the necessary context, background, and facts. This reduces the risk of misinterpretation or inaccuracies in media coverage.

Building and Maintaining Your Media Contact List

Creating and maintaining a media contact list requires careful attention to detail and ongoing updates. Here's how to build and keep your list effective:

Identify Key Media Outlets and Journalists: Start by identifying the media outlets that are most relevant to your office's work. This includes local newspapers, TV and radio stations, online news platforms, and niche publications that cover legal and criminal justice issues. Within these outlets, identify specific journalists who cover the crime or legal beat, as well as those who report on community issues, public safety, or government affairs.

Gather Contact Information: Collect detailed contact information for each journalist, including their name, title, email address, phone number, and preferred method of communication. Make sure to include editors and producers who may be decision-makers in what stories get covered.

Segment Your List: Organize your contact list into categories based on the type of media (print, broadcast, digital), the journalist's beat, and the outlet's reach (local, regional, national). This segmentation allows for more targeted outreach and ensures that you're communicating with the most relevant contacts for each story or press release.

Regularly Update the List: Media professionals frequently change jobs, move to different beats, or leave the industry altogether. Regularly review and update your contact list to ensure that it remains accurate and up-to-date. Consider setting a schedule for periodic reviews, such as every quarter, to keep your list current.

Leverage Technology: Use a contact management system or customer relationship management (CRM) tool to organize your media contact list. These tools allow you to easily update contact information, track interactions, and manage outreach efforts. Many CRM tools also offer features like email templates and scheduling, which can streamline your communication efforts.

Personalize Your Communications: When reaching out to journalists, personalize your communications based on their interests and past coverage. Mention specific stories they've written or beats they cover to show that you understand their focus. Personalization increases the likelihood that your message will resonate and be covered.

Respect Journalists' Preferences: Some journalists may prefer to be contacted by email, while others may be more responsive to phone calls or direct messages on social media. Respect their preferences and ensure that your communication style aligns with their preferred methods.

*"If I was down to my last dollar,
I would spend it on public relations."
Bill Gates*

Developing Media Partnerships

Building strong, long-term partnerships with journalists and media outlets is essential for sustaining effective media relations. These relationships go beyond simply responding to media inquiries; they involve proactive engagement, mutual trust, and collaboration that benefits both the prosecutor's office and the media. This section will provide tips on how to cultivate these relationships and ensure they are positive, productive, and lasting.

The Importance of Media Partnerships

Media partnerships are not just about getting your story in the news—they are about creating a reliable network of journalists who understand your office's mission, trust your information, and are committed to fair and accurate reporting.

Enhanced Coverage: Journalists who have established relationships with your office are more likely to provide balanced and comprehensive coverage. They may also reach out to you for comments or insights on related stories, increasing your office's visibility.

Trust and Credibility: Trust is the foundation of any strong relationship. By consistently providing accurate, timely, and valuable information, your office

can build a reputation as a credible source. Journalists will be more inclined to rely on your input when covering legal matters.

Crisis Management: In times of crisis, having established relationships with key journalists can be invaluable. They are more likely to approach your office first for clarification or comments, allowing you to manage the narrative more effectively.

Mutual Understanding: Over time, journalists who regularly cover your office will gain a deeper understanding of legal processes, challenges, and the significance of your work. This can lead to more informed and nuanced reporting that accurately reflects the complexities of the justice system.

Tips for Cultivating Long-Term Media Partnerships

Be Accessible and Responsive

Open Lines of Communication: Ensure that journalists know how to reach you or your office's designated media contact. Be responsive to their inquiries, even if it's just to acknowledge receipt and provide a timeline for when you can provide more information.

Availability: Make yourself or your spokesperson available for interviews, even on short notice, when possible. Demonstrating a willingness to engage increases journalists' confidence in your office's commitment to transparency.

Provide Value-Added Content

Exclusive Information: When appropriate, offer journalists exclusive content, such as first access to a press release, an interview with a key figure, or behind-the-scenes insights. Exclusives can help build strong relationships and encourage more in-depth coverage.

Context and Background: Don't just provide the facts—offer context and background information that can help journalists understand the bigger picture. This is particularly important in legal reporting, where complex issues often require additional explanation.

Resources and Expertise: Offer to connect journalists with legal experts or provide additional resources, such as case studies, statistics, or legal documents, that can enrich their reporting.

Engage Beyond Breaking News

Regular Updates: Don't limit your interactions with the media to crisis situations or major announcements. Regularly update your media partners on your office's initiatives, community programs, or other newsworthy activities.

Invite Journalists to Events: Invite journalists to attend relevant events, such as press briefings, community outreach programs, or open court sessions. This not only provides them with story material but also helps them gain a deeper understanding of your office's work.

Build Personal Relationships

Meet in Person: When possible, meet with journalists in person for coffee, lunch, or an informal meeting. Personal connections can strengthen professional relationships and make future interactions smoother and more productive.

Understand Their Perspective: Take the time to understand the pressures and challenges journalists face, such as tight deadlines, editorial constraints, or the need for compelling visuals. Being empathetic to their needs can help you tailor your approach to better meet their expectations.

Be Honest and Transparent

Admit When You Don't Know: If you don't have the answer to a journalist's question, be honest about it. Offer to find out the information or connect them with someone who can help. Transparency builds trust and credibility.

Address Mistakes: If your office makes a mistake in its communications, acknowledge it promptly and correct the error. This honesty will be appreciated by journalists and can prevent small issues from escalating.

Provide Feedback and Recognition

Offer Constructive Feedback: If a journalist covers a story about your office, provide constructive feedback if appropriate. If they did an excellent job, let them know. Positive reinforcement helps reinforce good practices and builds goodwill.

Acknowledge Their Work: Publicly acknowledge or thank journalists for their coverage, especially if it was particularly insightful or fair. This can be done through social media, a personal note, or during public events.

Stay Consistent

Consistency in Messaging: Ensure that your office's messaging is consistent across all communications. Journalists appreciate clarity and consistency, which makes it easier for them to report accurately.

Regular Engagement: Don't let relationships lapse. Regularly check in with your media contacts, even if it's just a brief email or phone call to touch base. Consistent engagement keeps your office top of mind for future stories.

CRAFTING KEY MESSAGES

Crafting key messages is a fundamental component of effective media relations. Clear, concise, and consistent messaging ensures that your office's communications align with its objectives and resonate with the public. This chapter guides you through developing key messages, creating talking points for common issues, and preparing spokespeople to deliver these messages confidently and effectively

*"Speak clearly, if you speak at all;
carve every word before you let it fall."
Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.*

Message Development

Developing key messages is the foundation of any successful communication strategy. These messages should be clear, concise, and consistent, reflecting your office's goals and values. Well-crafted messages ensure that your office speaks with one voice, regardless of who is delivering the information.

Developing Effective Key Messages

Key messages are essential for maintaining control over your office's narrative. They help ensure that the information conveyed to the public and media is accurate, aligned with your office's objectives, and consistent across all channels. Whether addressing the media, speaking at public events, or communicating internally, these messages serve as the backbone of your communication efforts.

Identify Your Office's Core Objectives

Start by clearly defining your office's core objectives. These might include upholding the rule of law, ensuring public safety, protecting victims' rights, or promoting transparency and justice. Your key messages should align with these objectives to ensure that all communications support your office's mission.

Understand Your Audience

Tailor your messages to the needs and concerns of your target audience, which may include the public, victims, law enforcement, the legal community, and the media. Understanding your audience helps you craft messages that resonate and drive the desired response.

Focus on Clarity and Simplicity

Key messages should be straightforward and easy to understand. Avoid legal jargon or complex terminology that could confuse your audience. Instead, use plain language to ensure that your message is accessible to everyone.

Ensure Consistency

Consistency is crucial in building trust and credibility. Once your key messages are developed, ensure they are used consistently across all communications—press releases, interviews, social media, and internal communications. This helps reinforce your office's identity and objectives.

Incorporate Supporting Evidence

Back up your key messages with data, statistics, or examples that provide credibility and context. Supporting evidence strengthens your message and makes it more persuasive to your audience.

Test and Refine Your Messages

Before rolling out your key messages, test them with a small group, such as staff members or trusted colleagues. Gather feedback on clarity, tone, and impact, and refine your messages as needed to ensure they are effective.

Be Prepared to Adapt

While consistency is important, flexibility is also key. Be prepared to adapt your messages in response to changing circumstances or new information. However, any changes should still align with your core objectives and maintain the integrity of your communication strategy.

*"The single biggest problem in communication
is the illusion that it has taken place."
George Bernard Shaw*

Talking Points

Talking points are a set of concise, standardized statements that help ensure everyone in your office communicates consistently on common issues or cases. They serve as a quick reference guide for spokespeople, enabling them to stay on message and provide clear, uniform responses to media inquiries.

Talking points are essential for maintaining message discipline. They help prevent the dissemination of conflicting or inaccurate information, which can undermine your office's credibility. By equipping your team with clear talking points, you ensure that everyone is on the same page, regardless of who is speaking.

Creating Effective Talking Points

Identify Common Issues and Scenarios

Start by identifying the topics, issues, or cases that are most likely to attract media attention. These could include ongoing investigations, legal reforms, community initiatives, or high-profile cases. Develop talking points for each of these scenarios to ensure preparedness.

Keep It Simple and Direct

Talking points should be brief, straightforward, and to the point. Avoid long, complicated sentences or unnecessary details. The goal is to convey your message quickly and clearly.

Focus on Core Messages

Each set of talking points should align with your office's key messages. Reinforce the core objectives of your office, such as ensuring justice, maintaining public safety, or upholding the law.

Anticipate Questions

Think about the questions the media is likely to ask and develop talking points that address these queries. This includes both expected questions and potential curveballs. Being prepared for tough questions ensures that your spokesperson remains calm and confident during interviews.

Include Bridge Statements

Bridge statements help redirect the conversation back to your key messages if an interview goes off track. Examples of bridge statements include, "What's important to remember is..." or "Let's focus on the key issue, which is..."

Update Regularly

Regularly review and update your talking points to reflect new developments, changes in public sentiment, or lessons learned from previous media interactions. Outdated talking points can lead to inconsistencies or missed opportunities to convey important information.

Distribute to Relevant Staff

Ensure that all relevant staff members, including spokespeople, public information officers, and other key personnel, have access to the latest talking points. Consider holding briefings to discuss the talking points and address any questions or concerns.

"By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail"
Benjamin Franklin

Designating Spokespeople

Designating the appropriate spokesperson for different types of media inquiries is critical to ensuring that your office's communications are effective, consistent, and aligned with its strategic goals. In many offices, the DA may serve as the default spokesperson because there is no formal PIO or structured media team. However, effective media relations require careful consideration of who should represent your office in different situations. Whether it's the DA, a senior prosecutor, or another staff member, designating the appropriate spokesperson ensures that your office's messaging is clear, consistent, and aligned with its strategic goals. While many DAs or prosecutors may not have formal media training and often learn on the job, it's still critical to select the right person for each situation to maintain public trust and ensure accurate representation of your office's work.

Selecting the Right Spokesperson

The choice of spokesperson can significantly shape how your message is received by the media and the public. While the DA often takes on this responsibility in offices without a designated PIO, not every media inquiry requires or benefits from the DA's involvement. It's important to identify spokespeople who can communicate clearly, confidently, and accurately—whether that's the DA, another senior prosecutor, or a staff member with relevant expertise. In some cases, additional preparation, such as media training or consultation, may be necessary to ensure the spokesperson is ready to handle media inquiries effectively with strategic and consistent messaging. Different situations may call for different spokespeople depending on the complexity of the issue, so it's important to match the spokesperson's skills and expertise with the demands of the media inquiry.

High-Profile Cases or Policy Announcements

For high-profile cases, significant legal decisions, or policy announcements, the primary spokesperson should be the District Attorney (DA) or Chief Prosecutor. Their authority lends credibility to the message, signaling the importance of the issue. However, DAs who lack formal media training should be equipped with talking points and key messages in advance to ensure they can communicate effectively under pressure. Preparation is key in these situations to ensure that the message is delivered confidently and consistently.

Routine or Procedural Inquiries

In offices without a PIO, routine media inquiries—such as requests for case updates or procedural explanations—may be handled by the DA or another prosecutor. Delegating these inquiries to a trusted staff member who is comfortable with media interactions can free up the DA to focus on more complex or high-stakes cases. If no PIO is available, it can be helpful to identify a “go-to” person, such as a senior prosecutor or legal advisor, who can be trained to manage routine inquiries effectively and consistently.

Technical or Specialized Inquiries

For inquiries requiring technical expertise—such as questions on forensic evidence, cybercrime, or juvenile justice—it’s important to have a subject matter expert available if possible. In offices without formal media relations staff, this might mean designating a senior prosecutor or unit chief with specialized knowledge to serve as the spokesperson. Even if the DA is the default spokesperson, consulting with experts before responding can help ensure that complex legal or technical topics are communicated accurately and understandably.

Confidential or Legally Sensitive Information

When handling inquiries that involve confidential or legally sensitive information, it’s important to have a spokesperson who fully understands the legal and ethical implications of public disclosure. In most cases, this responsibility falls to the DA or a senior legal advisor. These individuals should be cautious when discussing sensitive topics and may need to consult with other legal experts before speaking to the media. Ensuring the spokesperson is aware of legal constraints and has guidance on what can and cannot be shared publicly is crucial in these situations.

Crisis Situation

In a crisis—such as a legal controversy, public backlash, or a high-profile incident—the spokesperson must be someone who can remain calm and authoritative under pressure. In smaller offices without a designated crisis communications team, the DA often steps into this role. While many DAs lack formal crisis communications training, preparation is vital to managing these

situations effectively. Developing a crisis communication plan ahead of time and offering media training to the DA or senior staff members can mitigate the risks of poorly managed communications during a crisis.

Local Media and Community Issues

For inquiries from local media or those that involve community-specific issues, it can be advantageous to designate a spokesperson who is familiar with local concerns and dynamics. While larger offices may have a Community Relations Officer or PIO, in smaller offices, this role often falls to the DA or a trusted senior prosecutor. These individuals should be prepared to tailor the office's messaging to resonate with local audiences, addressing community-specific concerns in a relatable and effective way.

National Media or Broad-Reaching Platforms

For inquiries from national media outlets or those with a broad reach, the DA or another senior official should serve as the spokesperson. National media coverage often has higher stakes, as the message will reach a wider audience and may shape the public's perception of your office on a larger scale. Even if the DA has limited media training, their involvement in these situations adds credibility. It's important to ensure the DA is well-prepared with talking points and key messages to avoid missteps in such a highly visible setting.

Additional Situations to Consider

In some cases, the relationship between the journalist and potential spokesperson plays a critical role in deciding who should handle a media inquiry. If a particular journalist has a positive working relationship with a specific spokesperson—whether that's the DA or another staff member—it may be beneficial to maintain that relationship for consistency and trust. Additionally, maintaining consistency in spokespeople for ongoing cases can help reinforce the office's narrative and prevent mixed messages.

Spokesperson's Experience and Comfort Level

Whether your office has a PIO or not, it's important to assess the experience and comfort level of the designated spokesperson. In many cases, the DA or

senior prosecutors find themselves in the spokesperson role by default, but that doesn't always mean they feel fully prepared for media interactions. Media training, particularly in high-stakes situations, can greatly improve their ability to handle tough questions and stay on message. Comfort with the subject matter is equally important; a spokesperson who understands the issues deeply can speak confidently and provide clear, credible responses to media inquiries.

Availability and Timing

I In offices where the DA is the primary spokesperson, it's essential to have a backup plan in place for times when the DA is unavailable. Delays in responding to media inquiries can result in missed opportunities or negative media coverage. Identifying a trained backup spokesperson—whether that's another senior prosecutor or a staff member with some media experience—can help prevent these delays. Additionally, spokespeople should be prepared to handle follow-up inquiries, as media engagement often extends beyond the initial interview or press conference.

Developing a Spokesperson Roster

To streamline the process of designating spokespeople, it's helpful to maintain a roster of potential spokespeople within your office, categorized by their areas of expertise, media experience, and availability. This roster should be regularly updated and include:

Name and Title: The official title and role within the office.

Areas of Expertise: Specific legal or procedural areas where the individual has specialized knowledge.

Media Experience: Previous media appearances or training in media relations.

Preferred Media Outlets: Any specific media outlets or types of media the spokesperson has experience with.

Availability: General availability, including any known periods of unavailability due to vacations, court schedules, or other commitments.

How to Prepare Spokespeople

Message Familiarization: Ensure that your spokesperson is thoroughly familiar with the key messages and talking points. They should understand not only what the messages are but also why they are important and how they align with your office's goals.

Media Training: Provide regular media training sessions for your spokespeople. Training should cover essential skills such as handling tough questions, staying on message, controlling the narrative, and using body language effectively during interviews.

Mock Interviews: Conduct mock interviews to simulate real media interactions. This allows your spokesperson to practice delivering key messages, responding to difficult questions, and using bridge statements to steer the conversation. Provide constructive feedback to help them improve.

Briefing Before Interviews: Before any media engagement, brief your spokesperson on the specifics of the interview, including the topic, the outlet, the journalist's background, and any potential challenges. Review the relevant talking points and key messages to ensure they are well-prepared.

Staying Composed: Train your spokesperson to remain calm and composed, even in the face of aggressive questioning or challenging situations. Composure is key to maintaining credibility and ensuring that the office's message is conveyed effectively.

Post-Interview Debrief: After each media interaction, conduct a debrief with the spokesperson to review what went well and identify areas for improvement. This helps to refine their skills and improve future media engagements.

RESPONDING TO MEDIA INQUIRIES

Responding to media inquiries effectively is a critical aspect of maintaining control over your office's narrative and ensuring that accurate information is conveyed to the public. This chapter will provide detailed guidance on the process for handling media requests, designating appropriate spokespeople, and organizing media briefings or press conferences.

“The most important thing to do if you find yourself in a hole is to stop digging.”
Warren Buffet

Handling Requests

Media inquiries can range from routine questions to urgent requests for information during a crisis. Handling these requests promptly and professionally is essential for maintaining your office's credibility and ensuring that accurate information reaches the public. This section outlines a clear, step-by-step process for managing and responding to media inquiries, along with recommended timelines to ensure efficiency.

Suggested Process for Handling Media Inquiries

Initial Receipt of Inquiry:

Designated Point of Contact: In offices with limited staff, it's especially important to designate a single point of contact for media inquiries. While larger offices may have a PIO or communications team to handle these requests, in smaller offices, this responsibility often falls to the DA, a senior prosecutor, or an administrative staff member. Whoever is designated should be responsible for logging and managing inquiries to ensure consistency. This helps centralize the process, even if the person handling the inquiries also has other duties. The key is to have a clear process so that inquiries don't get lost or mishandled, ensuring a timely and appropriate response.

Immediate Acknowledgment: Upon receiving an inquiry, promptly acknowledge receipt. This can be done via email or phone, depending on how the inquiry was received. A simple acknowledgment such as, “Thank you for reaching out. We have received your inquiry and have begun processing. We will respond as soon as possible,” reassures the journalist that their request was received and is being handled.

Logging the Inquiry: Document the details of the inquiry in a media request log. This log should include the journalist’s name, media outlet, contact information, the nature of the request, the deadline, and any specific questions they have asked. This log helps track inquiries and ensures that none are overlooked.

Assessing the Inquiry

Determine the Urgency: Assess the urgency of the inquiry. Inquiries related to breaking news or ongoing investigations may require immediate attention, while others, such as requests for background information, may have more flexible timelines.

Identify the Topic: Determine the specific topic or issue being addressed in the inquiry. This will help you decide who within the office is best suited to provide the necessary information or response.

Clarify the Request: If the inquiry is unclear or too broad, reach out to the journalist for clarification. Understanding exactly what information they need will help you provide a more accurate and relevant response.

Consulting Internal Stakeholders

Engage Relevant Departments: Depending on the nature of the inquiry, you may need to consult with internal stakeholders, such as the lead prosecutor on a case, legal advisors, or department heads. Ensure that they are informed of the inquiry and can provide the necessary input or context for the response.

Gathering Information: Collect the relevant information or data needed to respond to the inquiry. This might include case details, legal interpretations,

or policy explanations. Ensure that all information is accurate, up-to-date, and cleared for public release.

Crafting the Response

Align with Key Messages: Ensure that the response aligns with your office's key messages and talking points. Consistency is crucial in maintaining a clear and coherent narrative.

Review for Accuracy and Clarity: Before finalizing the response, review it for accuracy, clarity, and conciseness. Avoid legal jargon or complex terminology that could confuse the journalist or the public. The response should be straightforward and easy to understand.

Approval Process: Depending on the complexity or sensitivity of the inquiry, the response may need to be reviewed and approved by senior staff, such as the District Attorney or Chief Prosecutor. Ensure that the approval process is efficient to avoid unnecessary delays.

Responding to the Inquiry

Timely Delivery: Deliver the response to the journalist within the agreed-upon timeframe. If the inquiry is time-sensitive, prioritize a rapid response. For less urgent inquiries, aim to respond within 24 to 48 hours. If more time is needed, communicate this to the journalist, providing a revised timeline.

Method of Communication: Use the method of communication preferred by the journalist, whether it be email, phone, or another channel. Ensure that the response is clear and that any necessary follow-up is outlined.

Follow-Up

Offer Additional Information: After sending the initial response, offer to provide any additional information or clarification if needed. This shows your office's commitment to transparency and helps build a positive relationship with the journalist.

Monitor Coverage: Once the story is published or aired, monitor the coverage to ensure that the information provided was used accurately and

contextually. If there are inaccuracies, consider reaching out to the journalist to request a correction or clarification.

Update the Media Log: Document the outcome of the inquiry in the media request log, noting whether the response was provided on time, how the information was used, and any follow-up actions taken. This log serves as a valuable record for future reference.

Evaluating the Process

Debriefing: After responding to a significant or challenging inquiry, consider holding a brief debrief with the relevant staff to evaluate the process. Discuss what went well, any challenges encountered, and how the process could be improved in the future.

Continuous Improvement: Use insights from the debrief and media log to refine your office's process for handling media inquiries. Continuous improvement ensures that your office remains responsive and effective in its media relations.

Recommended Timelines for Responding

Breaking News Inquiries: Respond as soon as possible, ideally within hours. Time is critical in these situations, and delays can result in the media publishing a story without your office's input, potentially leading to inaccuracies.

Routine Inquiries: Aim to provide a response within 24 to 48 hours. This timeframe allows for gathering accurate information while still meeting the journalist's deadline.

Complex or Sensitive Inquiries: If the inquiry requires extensive internal consultation or involves sensitive information, communicate with the journalist about the need for additional time. Provide an estimated timeline for your response, typically within 48 to 72 hours.

*“In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do
is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing,
and the worst thing you can do is nothing.”*

Theodore Roosevelt

Media Briefings and Press Conferences

Media briefings and press conferences are essential tools for communicating important information to the public and the media, especially during significant events, high-profile cases, or crises. Conducting these events effectively requires careful planning, clear communication, and attention to detail to ensure that your office's messages are conveyed accurately and that the event runs smoothly. This section provides best practices for organizing and conducting media briefings and press conferences, tailored to the needs of prosecutors' offices.

When to Hold a Media Briefing or Press Conference

Deciding when to hold a media briefing or press conference is crucial. These events are typically reserved for situations where the information being communicated is of high importance, requires immediate dissemination, or benefits from being delivered directly by a spokesperson in a controlled environment.

High-Profile Cases: When a case has garnered significant public interest, a press conference can help provide accurate information, address public concerns, and manage the narrative.

Crisis Situations: In the event of a crisis, such as a legal controversy, public safety threat, or major incident involving your office, a press conference allows you to address the situation promptly, demonstrate leadership, and provide clear, authoritative information.

Policy Announcements: Major policy changes, legal reforms, or new initiatives that impact the community or the legal system may warrant a press conference to ensure that the public and media fully understand the implications.

Responding to Misinformation: If there is widespread misinformation or public confusion about an issue related to your office, a press conference can help set the record straight and provide a definitive statement.

Best Practices for Organizing Briefings and Press Conferences

Pre-Event Planning

Define Objectives: Clearly define the objectives of the briefing or press conference. What message do you want to convey? What do you want the public to understand or do as a result? Having a clear goal helps guide the content and structure of the event.

Select the Right Spokesperson(s): Choose the most appropriate spokesperson(s) based on the nature of the event. The District Attorney or Chief Prosecutor is typically the lead spokesperson for high-profile or sensitive issues. Depending on the topic, you may also include subject matter experts or other senior officials to provide additional context.

Timing and Location: Choose a time and location that maximizes attendance and media coverage. The location should be easily accessible to the media, with adequate space for reporters, cameras, and equipment. Timing should consider media deadlines and the urgency of the information being shared.

Prepare the Agenda: Develop a clear agenda that outlines the key points to be covered, the order of speakers, and the expected duration of the event. This agenda should be shared with all participants and support staff in advance to ensure everyone is aligned.

Crafting the Message

Develop Key Messages and Talking Points: Prepare key messages and talking points that align with your office's strategic objectives. These should be concise, clear, and focused on the main points you want to communicate. All spokespersons should be fully briefed on these messages and how they fit into the overall narrative.

Anticipate Questions: Think through the questions that the media are likely to ask and prepare answers that align with your key messages. This preparation helps ensure that your spokespersons are not caught off guard and can maintain control of the narrative.

Create Supporting Materials: Consider preparing handouts, fact sheets, or press releases that summarize the key information. These materials should reinforce the main messages and provide additional details that may not be covered during the briefing.

Logistics and Setup

Venue Setup: Arrange the venue to facilitate effective communication. Ensure that the speaker's podium or table is prominently positioned, with adequate lighting and sound equipment to ensure that all attendees can see and hear clearly. Set up a backdrop with your office's branding or the official seal, which adds professionalism and reinforces your office's identity.

Media Accommodations: Provide seating for journalists, with designated areas for cameras and microphones. If possible, arrange for a mult box (a device that allows multiple media outlets to connect their audio recording devices to a single sound source) to ensure that all media outlets can capture clear audio.

Registration and Access: If the event is open to the public or a larger group of media representatives, consider implementing a registration process to manage attendance. Provide clear instructions on access, parking, and any security protocols that may be in place.

Conducting the Event

Opening the Briefing or Press Conference: Begin with a brief introduction from the DA, PIO or other moderator, who will outline the agenda, introduce the speakers, and set the tone for the event. The introduction should also address any housekeeping items, such as the format for Q&A and the expected duration of the event.

Delivering Key Messages: The lead spokesperson should deliver the prepared statement, focusing on the key messages. This should be done confidently and clearly, with an emphasis on the most important points. It's important to maintain a steady pace and avoid rushing through the content.

Managing the Q&A Session: After the prepared statements, open the floor to questions from the media. The moderator or PIO should manage this session,

calling on reporters and ensuring that questions remain on topic. Spokespersons should use bridge statements as needed to steer the conversation back to the key messages if the discussion begins to veer off course.

Concluding the Event: After the Q&A session, the moderator should wrap up the event by thanking the media for their attendance and reiterating any final points. Provide information on where reporters can access additional materials or contact the office for follow-up questions.

Post-Event Follow-Up

Distribute Materials: After the event, distribute any prepared materials, such as press releases, fact sheets, or video recordings, to the media. These materials should reinforce the key messages and provide additional context or details that may not have been covered during the event.

Monitor Media Coverage: Track how the media covers the event, noting whether the key messages were accurately conveyed and how the public responded. This monitoring helps assess the effectiveness of the briefing or press conference and provides insights for future events.

Evaluate and Debrief: Conduct an internal debrief with all participants to evaluate the event's success. Discuss what went well, any challenges encountered, and areas for improvement. This debrief should also consider feedback from the media and any public reactions to refine future media engagements.

Best Practices for Virtual or Hybrid Press Conferences

In situations where an in-person event is not feasible, virtual or hybrid press conferences can be an effective alternative. Here are some additional best practices for these formats:

Technology Preparation: Choose a reliable platform for the virtual or hybrid event, such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or a similar service that supports large meetings and media access. Be sure to select a platform that offers encryption and privacy controls to protect the event from unauthorized access. Test all technology in advance, including internet connections, audio,

and video equipment, to avoid technical issues during the event. Ensure that your platform's security settings are in place—such as using password protection, enabling waiting rooms, or requiring pre-registration for attendees. This will help prevent disruptions like "Zoombombing" or uninvited participants gaining access.

Visual and Audio Quality: Ensure that the visual and audio quality is high, with good lighting and clear sound. Virtual events should be conducted in a professional setting with a neutral or branded background. Check that your audio and video equipment is functioning properly, and that background noise is minimized.

Engagement Strategies: Encourage engagement by using interactive features such as live Q&A, chat functions, or polls. However, ensure that these features are moderated to prevent inappropriate or off-topic comments. Designating a team member to monitor the chat and Q&A can help maintain the focus and flow of the event. This moderation also provides an additional layer of security by preventing participants from sharing disruptive or harmful content. This helps maintain media interest and ensures that the event remains dynamic and interactive.

Recording and Accessibility: Record the event and make the recording available to the media and the public afterward. This allows those who couldn't attend live to access the information and ensures that your messages have a broader reach. However, consider the security of the recording itself—use a secure platform for storage and sharing, and set appropriate access controls to prevent unauthorized distribution.

Security Considerations With virtual press conferences, it's important to take security seriously. Use the following precautions to ensure your event runs smoothly:

- Password Protection: Always protect the event with a password and only share it with invited participants.
- Waiting Rooms: Enable waiting rooms to control who enters the event, allowing only approved attendees to participate.
- Limit Screen Sharing: Restrict screen sharing to the host or designated speakers to prevent participants from taking control of the meeting.

- Monitoring and Moderation: Assign a team member to monitor the event, manage participants, and handle any security issues that may arise, such as removing disruptive attendees.

MANAGING CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

Crisis communications are a critical aspect of media relations, particularly for a prosecutor's office where public trust and the integrity of the justice system are paramount. A well-prepared crisis communication plan enables your office to respond swiftly, maintain control over the narrative, and minimize potential damage to your office's reputation. This chapter will guide you through the process of managing communications during a crisis, including the development of a comprehensive crisis communication plan.

*“Don’t be afraid to lead with bad news
but always follow it up with a solution.”*
Dana White

Crisis Communication Plan

A crisis communication plan is an essential tool that outlines how your office will manage communication during a crisis. This plan ensures that your office is prepared to respond quickly, effectively, and consistently, maintaining public trust and upholding the integrity of the justice system. A well-developed crisis communication plan includes clear protocols for internal coordination, media engagement, and post-crisis evaluation.

Key Components of a Crisis Communication Plan

Crisis Definition and Scenarios

Define What Constitutes a Crisis: Start by defining what your office considers a crisis. This could include a variety of scenarios such as legal controversies, misconduct allegations, major incidents involving law enforcement, data breaches, or any situation that threatens public safety or your office's reputation.

Identify Potential Crisis Scenarios: Develop a list of potential crisis scenarios specific to your office. These could range from high-profile case mishandlings to unexpected legal rulings, or public backlash against a decision made by

your office. Identifying these scenarios in advance helps in tailoring the plan to address the unique challenges each situation may present.

Crisis Communication Team

In larger offices, establishing a dedicated Crisis Communication Team is a critical step in managing communication during a crisis. However, in smaller jurisdictions, where resources and staff are more limited, it's important to adapt this concept to fit the reality of the office. Even if your office doesn't have a full team dedicated to crisis communications, having a plan and assigning key roles during a crisis is essential to maintaining public trust and managing media inquiries effectively.

Establish a Crisis Communication Team: Ideally, your office would form a dedicated crisis communication team responsible for handling the communication aspects of a crisis. In larger offices, this might include key members such as the District Attorney (DA) or Chief Prosecutor, the Public Information Officer (PIO), legal advisors, and other senior staff with expertise relevant to the crisis. However, in smaller jurisdictions where there may not be a formal PIO or additional staff available, the DA may need to take on multiple roles, supported by one or two senior prosecutors or legal advisors. While the team may be smaller, the focus should remain on clear, consistent, and coordinated communication.

Assign Roles and Responsibilities: Regardless of the size of your office, it's critical to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each person involved in crisis communication. In a smaller jurisdiction, the DA or Chief Prosecutor will likely serve as the lead spokesperson by default, particularly if no PIO is available. In these cases, the DA must be prepared to handle both the public messaging and media relations aspects of the crisis. Legal advisors—whether in-house or external—should review all public statements to ensure they comply with legal and ethical standards. If your office just has one staff member who is familiar with media relations, they can help coordinate messaging and provide support. Assigning these roles ahead of time ensures there is a plan in place when a crisis hits.

Ensure Availability: In a crisis, time is of the essence. All crisis communication team members—whether a full team or just the DA and one or two staff members—must be readily available. Smaller offices often lack the infrastructure of larger organizations, but you can still establish a protocol for

immediate activation of the crisis communication team. This may include after-hours contact information, a clear chain of command, and specific guidelines for when and how the team should be mobilized. Even if your team is small, having an organized process ensures that communication happens quickly and efficiently.

Internal Coordination and Communication

Develop Internal Communication Protocols: Internal communication during a crisis is just as important as external communication. Establish protocols for how information will be shared within the office, including regular briefings, secure communication channels, and clear instructions for all staff on what to do during a crisis.

Confidentiality and Information Flow: Ensure that sensitive information is handled securely, with strict confidentiality protocols in place. Determine who has access to certain information and how it will be disseminated to avoid leaks or misinformation.

Staff Training and Awareness: Regularly train all staff members on the crisis communication plan. Ensure that everyone understands their role and knows how to respond if a crisis arises. This training should include simulations and drills to reinforce procedures and readiness.

Crisis Assessment and Response Planning

Assess the Situation Quickly: When a crisis occurs, the first step is to assess the situation quickly. Determine the facts, the potential impact, and the likely public and media reaction. This assessment should involve input from all relevant departments, including legal, communications, and any other areas affected by the crisis.

Develop a Crisis Response Strategy: Based on the assessment, develop a crisis response strategy that outlines the key messages, the communication channels to be used, and the timeline for media engagement. This strategy should be flexible enough to adapt to new information as the crisis unfolds.

Prepare Initial Statements and Q&A: Draft an initial public statement that addresses the situation clearly and concisely. Additionally, prepare answers

to anticipated questions from the media and the public. These materials should be reviewed by legal advisors to ensure accuracy and compliance with legal requirements.

Media Engagement During a Crisis

Centralize Media Inquiries: During a crisis, all media inquiries should be directed to the PIO or a designated spokesperson. This centralization ensures that the information provided to the media is consistent and accurate. The PIO should maintain close coordination with the crisis communication team to stay updated on the situation.

Timely and Transparent Communication: Speed is crucial in crisis communication. Respond to media inquiries as quickly as possible while ensuring that the information provided is accurate. Transparency is also key—provide as much information as legally and ethically permissible to avoid speculation and misinformation.

Organize Media Briefings or Press Conferences: Depending on the severity of the crisis, consider holding a media briefing or press conference to address the situation directly. This allows your office to present its side of the story, answer questions, and demonstrate leadership. Ensure that the spokesperson is well-prepared and that the key messages are clear and consistent.

Monitoring and Adaptation

Monitor Media Coverage and Public Response: Continuously monitor media coverage and public reaction to the crisis. This helps you gauge the effectiveness of your communication efforts and identify any emerging issues that need to be addressed. Use tools like media monitoring services, social media analytics, and public sentiment analysis to stay informed.

Adapt Communication Strategies as Needed: Be prepared to adapt your communication strategies as the crisis evolves. This might involve updating key messages, issuing additional statements, or shifting the focus of your communication efforts to address new developments or public concerns.

Post-Crisis Evaluation and Follow-Up

Conduct a Post-Crisis Debrief: Once the crisis has subsided, conduct a thorough debrief with the crisis communication team and other relevant stakeholders. Review what worked well, what challenges were encountered, and what could be improved. This evaluation should result in actionable insights that can strengthen future crisis communication efforts.

Document the Crisis Response: Keep a detailed record of the crisis response, including timelines, key decisions, communications, and outcomes. This documentation serves as a valuable resource for learning and future reference.

Follow-Up Communication: After the crisis, maintain open lines of communication with the public and the media. Provide updates on any ongoing investigations, policy changes, or corrective actions being taken. This follow-up helps rebuild trust and demonstrates accountability.

*“Tell it all. Tell it early. Tell it yourself.
Gaffes can be excused – Americans are a forgiving lot. But it requires an
authentic admission, ‘I screwed up’ – and let’s move on.”
Lanny J Davis*

Rapid Response

In a crisis, time is of the essence. The ability to respond quickly and effectively to breaking news or emergencies can significantly influence the outcome of the situation and the public’s perception of your office. A rapid response ensures that your office maintains control over the narrative, provides accurate information, and mitigates potential damage to your reputation. This section outlines the steps to quickly and effectively respond to a crisis, emphasizing the importance of preparation, coordination, and clear communication.

Key Elements of a Rapid Response

Immediate Activation of the Crisis Communication Team

Pre-Established Protocols: Your crisis communication plan should include pre-established protocols for activating the crisis communication team. This activation should be immediate, with team members being alerted as soon as a potential crisis is identified. All team members should know their roles and

Internal Notification: As soon as the crisis is identified, notify all relevant internal stakeholders, including senior leadership, legal advisors, and department heads. Clear internal communication ensures that everyone is aware of the situation and understands the steps being taken to address it.

Initial Fact-Finding and Situation Assessment

Gather Accurate Information: Quickly gather all available facts about the situation. This includes understanding the scope of the crisis, identifying the key issues involved, and determining the potential impact on your office and the public. Inaccurate or incomplete information can lead to missteps, so it's crucial to get the facts straight before making any public statements.

Assess the Urgency: Determine the urgency of the situation. Some crises may require an immediate public response, while others may allow for a brief period of information gathering before responding. The assessment will guide your next steps in the response process.

Crafting the Initial Response:

Develop Key Messages: Based on the initial assessment, develop key messages that address the core issues of the crisis. These messages should be clear, concise, and aligned with your office's values and strategic objectives. The initial response should focus on providing accurate information, reassuring the public, and demonstrating that your office is in control of the situation.

Prepare a Holding Statement: If time is needed to gather more information before a full response can be provided, prepare a holding statement. A holding statement acknowledges the situation, commits to transparency, and assures the public that your office is actively addressing the issue. For

example, "We are aware of the situation and are currently gathering all the facts. We will provide more information as soon as it becomes available."

Coordinated Media Engagement

Centralize Communication: Ensure that all media inquiries are directed to the Public Information Officer (PIO) or another designated spokesperson. Centralizing communication helps maintain message consistency and prevents conflicting information from being disseminated.

Issue the Initial Statement: Once the key messages and initial statement are prepared, issue them to the media through appropriate channels, such as a press release, social media, or a press conference. Timing is critical—aim to issue the initial response as quickly as possible to prevent misinformation or speculation from taking hold.

Monitor Media Coverage: Continuously monitor how the media is covering the crisis and how the public is reacting. This monitoring allows you to identify any inaccuracies, emerging issues, or shifts in public sentiment that may require additional responses or adjustments to your messaging.

Adaptive Response and Ongoing Communication

Update Key Messages as Needed: As new information becomes available, update your key messages and communicate these updates promptly to the public and the media. Flexibility is essential; your initial response may need to evolve as the situation develops.

Use Multiple Channels: Utilize a variety of communication channels to reach different segments of your audience. This may include press releases, social media updates, email newsletters, and direct outreach to community leaders. Consistent messaging across all platforms helps reinforce your office's position and ensures that your message reaches a broad audience.

Address Misinformation: Actively counter any misinformation or rumors that may arise during the crisis. This can be done through direct communication with the media, corrections on social media, or additional public statements.

Addressing misinformation quickly helps maintain your office's credibility and prevents the spread of false information.

Engaging with Stakeholders and the Public

Direct Communication with Key Stakeholders: In addition to engaging with the media, directly communicate with key stakeholders such as law enforcement partners, community leaders, elected officials, and legal professionals. Keeping these stakeholders informed helps build a unified response and ensures that they are aligned with your office's messaging.

Public Reassurance: During a crisis, the public looks to your office for reassurance. Regular updates and transparent communication help alleviate public concerns and demonstrate that your office is handling the situation responsibly. Public reassurance is particularly important in maintaining trust during a crisis.

Post-Crisis Analysis and Continuous Improvement

Evaluate the Rapid Response: After the crisis has been managed, conduct a thorough evaluation of the rapid response process. Assess the effectiveness of the initial response, the coordination of the crisis communication team, and the overall management of media engagement. Identify any gaps or challenges that arose and develop strategies for improvement.

Update the Crisis Communication Plan: Use the insights gained from the post-crisis analysis to update and refine your crisis communication plan. Continuous improvement ensures that your office is better prepared for future crises and can respond even more effectively.

*"The public is the only critic whose opinion
is worth anything at all."
Mark Twain*

Maintaining Public Trust

During a crisis, public trust in your office can be tested. How you handle communications and engage with the community plays a crucial role in either preserving or eroding that trust. Balancing transparency with legal and ethical obligations is key to maintaining public confidence in your office's ability to manage the crisis and uphold justice. This section outlines strategies for effectively maintaining public trust while navigating the complex landscape of crisis communications.

Strategies for Maintaining Public Trust

Commit to Transparency

Provide Clear and Honest Information: Transparency is fundamental to building and maintaining public trust, especially during a crisis. Provide as much clear, accurate, and timely information as possible without compromising ongoing investigations or legal obligations. Avoid withholding information that the public has a right to know, as this can lead to speculation, rumors, and a loss of trust.

Acknowledge Uncertainties: It's important to acknowledge when certain aspects of a situation are still uncertain or under investigation. Instead of speculating, be upfront about what is known and what remains unclear. This honesty helps manage public expectations and demonstrates your office's commitment to integrity.

Balance Transparency with Legal and Ethical Obligations

Protect Confidential Information: While transparency is crucial, it must be balanced with the need to protect confidential or sensitive information, particularly in ongoing legal matters. Clearly explain why certain details cannot be disclosed to avoid perceptions of secrecy or cover-up. For example, stating, "We are unable to comment on specific aspects of the case due to legal restrictions, but we are committed to sharing information as soon as it is appropriate to do so," helps maintain trust while respecting legal boundaries.

Adhere to Ethical Standards: Ensure that all communications during the crisis adhere to the highest ethical standards. This includes avoiding any statements that could prejudice a case, violate privacy rights, or mislead the public. Legal advisors should review all public statements to ensure compliance with ethical and legal requirements.

Demonstrate Accountability and Leadership

Take Responsibility: If mistakes were made or if your office is partially responsible for the crisis, acknowledge this openly and take responsibility. The public is more likely to forgive errors when they see that your office is willing to admit fault and take corrective action. For example, a statement such as, "We recognize that mistakes were made, and we are taking immediate steps to address them and prevent similar issues in the future," demonstrates accountability and a commitment to improvement.

Show Strong Leadership: In times of crisis, the public looks to leaders for guidance and reassurance. Ensure that the designated spokesperson—often the District Attorney or Chief Prosecutor—demonstrates calm, decisive, and empathetic leadership. Strong leadership helps reassure the public that the situation is under control and that your office is capable of handling the crisis effectively.

Engage with the Community

Maintain Open Lines of Communication: Keep communication channels open with the community throughout the crisis. This can be done through regular updates, public forums, or social media engagement. Being accessible and responsive to public concerns helps build trust and demonstrates that your office values community input.

Listen to Public Concerns: Actively listen to the concerns and questions of the community. Acknowledge these concerns in your communications, and where possible, address them directly. Showing that you are attuned to the public's needs and concerns fosters a sense of partnership and mutual respect.

Provide Reassurance Through Consistent Messaging

Reinforce Key Messages: Throughout the crisis, consistently reinforce your office's key messages. These messages should emphasize your office's commitment to justice, transparency, and public safety. Consistency in messaging helps ensure that the public receives a clear and unified narrative, reducing confusion and reinforcing trust.

Use Multiple Communication Channels: Reach your audience through multiple communication channels, including press releases, social media, public statements, and community meetings. Different segments of the community may prefer different forms of communication, so a multi-channel approach ensures broader reach and engagement.

Monitor and Respond to Public Sentiment

Track Public Opinion: Continuously monitor public sentiment through media coverage, social media, and direct community feedback. Understanding how the public is reacting to the crisis and your office's response allows you to make adjustments to your communication strategy as needed.

Respond Proactively to Concerns: If negative public sentiment or criticism arises, respond proactively rather than waiting for the situation to escalate. Addressing concerns early and openly can prevent them from growing into larger issues and helps maintain control over the narrative.

Demonstrate Long-Term Commitment to Accountability

Outline Post-Crisis Actions: Once the immediate crisis has passed, outline the steps your office will take to address the underlying issues and prevent future occurrences. This might include policy changes, staff training, or new initiatives aimed at improving transparency and accountability. Publicizing these actions shows that your office is committed to long-term solutions, not just short-term damage control.

Follow Through on Promises: It's critical to follow through on any commitments made during the crisis. Failing to do so can severely damage public trust. Provide regular updates on the progress of these initiatives and be transparent about any challenges or setbacks encountered.

Evaluate and Learn from the Crisis

Conduct a Post-Crisis Review: After the crisis has been managed, conduct a comprehensive review of how the situation was handled, with a focus on communication strategies. Identify what worked well and where improvements are needed. This evaluation should involve input from all relevant stakeholders, including staff, community leaders, and legal advisors.

Incorporate Lessons Learned: Use the insights gained from the post-crisis review to improve your crisis communication plan and overall approach to media relations. Continuously learning from each crisis ensures that your office is better prepared for future challenges and can maintain public trust even in difficult situations.

LEGAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Navigating the legal and ethical landscape of media relations is critical for any prosecutor's office. Maintaining confidentiality and protecting privacy are fundamental responsibilities, particularly when dealing with sensitive legal matters. This chapter provides guidelines on how to handle these issues, ensuring that your office communicates effectively without compromising cases, violating laws, or infringing on the rights of individuals involved.

*"The right to privacy... is a fundamental right
that has been woven into the fabric of human dignity."
Justice Sonia Sotomayor*

Confidentiality and Privacy

When interacting with the media, it is essential to carefully manage the information that is shared to uphold the integrity of ongoing cases, comply with legal restrictions, and protect the privacy of victims, witnesses, and defendants. This section outlines the guidelines and considerations for maintaining confidentiality and privacy, taking into account legal obligations, and the rights of victims.

Legal Restrictions on Information Sharing

Protecting the Integrity of Ongoing Cases

Avoiding Prejudicial Publicity: Industry recommendations on pre-trial publicity emphasize the need to avoid statements that could prejudice a case or influence the outcome of a trial. This includes refraining from making public statements about the guilt or innocence of the defendant, discussing the credibility of witnesses, or revealing evidence that has not yet been presented in court. Prosecutors must ensure that any information shared with the media does not compromise the defendant's right to a fair trial.

Gag Orders and Court Mandates: In some cases, courts may issue gag orders that prohibit parties involved in a case from making public statements. It is crucial to comply with these orders and ensure that all staff members are

aware of the restrictions. Violating a gag order can result in legal consequences and jeopardize the case.

Managing Confidential Information

Sealed Documents and Evidence: Certain documents and evidence may be sealed by the court, meaning they are not available to the public or the media. Prosecutors must be vigilant in ensuring that sealed information remains confidential and is not inadvertently disclosed. Sharing sealed information can lead to legal penalties and undermine the integrity of the judicial process.

Grand Jury Proceedings: Grand jury proceedings are typically conducted in secret, and information related to these proceedings must be kept confidential. This includes testimony, evidence presented, and the identities of witnesses. Disclosing grand jury information without authorization is a violation of legal and ethical standards.

Compliance with Legal and Ethical Guidelines

Pre-Trial Publicity: Prosecutors should avoid making statements that have a substantial likelihood of materially prejudicing an adjudicative proceeding. Preserving the fairness of the legal process should be paramount when making public statements.

Jurisdiction-Specific Rules: Be aware of and comply with any jurisdiction-specific rules and regulations governing pre-trial publicity and information sharing. These may vary by state and should be thoroughly understood by all staff involved in media relations.

Protecting Victims' Rights and Privacy

Victim Confidentiality and Privacy

Respecting Victims' Rights: Victims have specific rights to privacy and confidentiality that must be respected in all public communications. This includes avoiding the disclosure of personal information, such as names, addresses, or any details that could lead to their identification, particularly in sensitive cases like sexual assault or domestic violence. The Victims' Rights

and Restitution Act and similar state laws provide clear guidelines on protecting victim privacy.

Anonymizing Information: When discussing cases that involve victims, it is important to anonymize information to prevent the identification of the victim. This can include using general terms like “the victim” or “the individual” instead of names and avoiding details that could inadvertently reveal the victim’s identity, such as specific locations or personal characteristics.

Balancing Public Interest with Privacy Concerns

Public Right to Know vs. Privacy: Prosecutors often face the challenge of balancing the public’s right to know with the need to protect individual privacy. In cases of high public interest, there may be pressure to release more information than is advisable. It is important to resist this pressure and prioritize the protection of victims and other vulnerable parties, while still providing the public with necessary and appropriate information.

Consulting with Victims: Where appropriate, consult with victims or their representatives before releasing information that pertains to them. This consultation ensures that their preferences are respected and that any potential harm from public disclosure is minimized. In some cases, victims may wish to speak publicly, and their wishes should be considered carefully within the legal and ethical framework.

Guidelines for Sharing Information

Information That Can Be Shared

Public Records: Information that is part of the public record, such as indictments, charges, and court schedules, can generally be shared with the media. However, it is important to ensure that the information is accurate and up to date.

Basic Case Details: Basic details such as the nature of the charges, the name of the defendant (if it is public information), and the status of the case can typically be shared, provided that doing so does not violate any confidentiality agreements or court orders.

Information That Should Not Be Shared

Confidential Legal Strategies: Do not share details of legal strategies, plea negotiations, or any discussions that have taken place within the prosecutor's office or with the defense. This information is protected and sharing it could compromise the case.

Non-Public Evidence: Avoid discussing evidence that has not been presented in court or made part of the public record. This includes physical evidence, witness testimony, and forensic analysis that are not yet public. Premature disclosure could prejudice the case or influence public opinion improperly.

Consulting Legal Advisors

When in Doubt: If there is any uncertainty about what information can be shared, it is essential to consult with legal advisors before making any public statements. Legal advisors can provide guidance on the potential risks and ensure that your office remains compliant with all relevant laws and ethical standards.

*"Trust is the glue of life.
It's the most essential ingredient in effective communication.
It's the foundational principle that holds all relationships."
Stephen R. Covey*

Media Policies

Establishing clear media policies is essential for guiding how your office interacts with the media. These policies help ensure that communications are consistent, legally compliant, and aligned with your office's strategic goals. This section outlines recommended media policies, including the use of embargoes, off-the-record comments, and other key practices that protect your office's integrity and the fairness of the legal process.

Establishing Media Interaction Policies

Centralized Communication Protocol

Designated Spokespersons: One of the most critical components of any media policy is the centralization of communication through designated spokespersons. This ensures that all public statements are consistent, accurate, and reflective of your office's position. Typically, the Public Information Officer (PIO) or another designated spokesperson should handle media inquiries. Only individuals authorized to speak to the media should do so, and this authorization should be clearly communicated to all staff.

Clear Chain of Command: Establish a clear chain of command for approving public statements. Before any information is shared with the media, it should be reviewed and approved by senior staff, including legal advisors if necessary. This process ensures that all communications are vetted for accuracy, legal compliance, and alignment with office policies.

Use of Embargoes

What is an Embargo? An embargo is a request to the media to withhold the publication of specific information until a predetermined time. Embargoes can be useful in managing the release of sensitive information, coordinating the timing of announcements, or ensuring that the media has sufficient time to prepare accurate and thorough coverage.

When to Use an Embargo: Embargoes can be used in various situations, such as when announcing significant legal decisions, policy changes, or the resolution of high-profile cases. For example, your office might use an embargo when releasing a major report or when coordinating a simultaneous announcement across multiple media outlets.

Establishing Embargo Terms: When issuing an embargo, clearly communicate the terms, including the specific time and date when the information can be published. Ensure that all media outlets receiving the embargoed information agree to the terms in advance. Be aware that while most reputable media outlets will honor embargoes, there is no legal obligation for them to do so, so use this tool judiciously.

Handling Off-the-Record and Related Media Terms:

When interacting with the media, it's essential to understand the different types of communication agreements that govern how your statements can be used. Terms like "on the record," "off the record," and "on background" are commonly used, but they carry different levels of disclosure and risk. Clear communication with journalists about these terms is critical to ensure your comments are handled appropriately and as intended.

On the Record: This is the default mode of communication with reporters. Any comments made on the record are fully attributable to you or your office and can be published. It is important to assume that everything you say in a media interaction is on the record unless explicitly agreed otherwise. This promotes transparency and clarity.

Off-the-Record: Off-the-record comments are statements made to a journalist that are not intended for publication or public disclosure. While these comments can provide context or background, they carry significant risks if not handled properly. It is important to remember that the definition of "off-the-record" can vary between reporters and outlets, and misunderstandings can lead to unintended disclosure. To minimize risk, off-the-record discussions should be used sparingly and only by senior staff or those explicitly authorized to do so.

On Background: Comments made on background provide information to a reporter that may be used in the story, but the identity of the source will not be disclosed. Instead, the reporter might attribute the information to a "senior official" or "a source familiar with the matter." Like off-the-record comments, background discussions should be approached with caution, and the terms should be clearly agreed upon beforehand to avoid any misunderstandings.

Guidelines for Off-the-Record and Background Interactions: If off-the-record discussions are necessary, establish clear guidelines for their use. Only senior staff or individuals specifically authorized to engage in off-the-record discussions should do so. Before making any off-the-record comments, confirm with the journalist that they understand and agree to the terms. It is advisable to document these agreements when possible to prevent any disputes or confusion later on.

Minimizing Off-the-Record Use: While off-the-record and on-background comments can provide valuable context to journalists, they should be used sparingly. Over-reliance on these modes of communication can lead to confusion, mistrust, and potential legal complications. Encourage staff to keep communications on the record whenever possible, as this promotes transparency, reduces the risk of miscommunication, and helps maintain public trust. When comments are on the record, they can be fully attributed, creating a clearer narrative and fostering accountability.

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Media Access to Information

Public Information and Records Requests: Develop a clear policy for handling public records requests from the media. This policy should outline the types of information that can be released, the process for requesting records, and the timeline for responding to such requests. Ensure that the policy complies with local and state public records laws and that all staff are trained on these procedures.

Media Briefings and Press Releases: Regularly scheduled media briefings and press releases are an effective way to manage media access to information. These briefings provide a controlled environment for sharing information and allow your office to present a consistent narrative. Press releases should be carefully crafted to include key messages and relevant details while adhering to legal and ethical guidelines.

Social Media and Digital Communication: In today's media landscape, social media and digital platforms are essential tools for communication. Establish a policy for social media use that outlines how information will be shared, who is authorized to post on behalf of the office, and how to handle interactions with the public and the media online. This policy should also address the management of official social media accounts, including security protocols to prevent unauthorized access.

Exclusive Stories

Offering exclusive stories to specific media outlets can be an effective way to manage the release of sensitive or high-profile information. However, this should be done with careful consideration of the potential impact on relationships with other media outlets and the broader public. Exclusive

stories can help ensure accurate and favorable coverage, but they should be used judiciously to avoid the perception of favoritism.

Media Relations Training for Staff

Regular Training Sessions: Provide regular media relations training for all staff, particularly those who may interact with the media. Training should cover the office's media policies, legal and ethical considerations, and best practices for engaging with journalists. This training helps ensure that all staff members understand the importance of consistent and accurate communication and are equipped to handle media interactions appropriately.

Scenario-Based Training: Incorporate scenario-based training that simulates real media interactions, including press conferences, interviews, and handling difficult questions. These exercises help staff practice responding to media inquiries while adhering to the office's policies and guidelines.

Monitoring and Enforcement of Media Policies

Monitoring Media Interactions: Establish a process for monitoring media interactions to ensure compliance with office policies. This can include reviewing press releases, tracking media coverage, and evaluating the outcomes of media engagements. Monitoring helps identify any deviations from established policies and provides opportunities for corrective action.

Enforcing Compliance: Clearly communicate the consequences of non-compliance with media policies to all staff. This can include disciplinary measures for unauthorized disclosures or failure to adhere to confidentiality guidelines. Enforcing compliance is essential for maintaining the integrity of your office's communications and protecting legal processes.

UTILIZING SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has become an essential tool for media relations, providing a direct channel to communicate with the public, share important information, and engage with the media. For a prosecutor's office, effective use of social media can enhance transparency, build public trust, and manage the narrative around high-profile cases or issues. This chapter outlines best practices for using social media, strategies for engagement, and approaches for handling crises on social media platforms.

*"Social media is the ultimate equalizer.
It gives a voice and a platform to anyone willing to engage."
Amy Jo Martin*

Social Media Guidelines

Establishing clear guidelines for social media use is critical for ensuring that your office's online presence is consistent, professional, and legally compliant. These guidelines should be followed by all staff members who manage or contribute to your office's social media accounts. This section provides best practices for using social media as a tool for media relations.

Establishing a Professional and Consistent Presence

Defining Your Office's Social Media Voice

Tone and Style: The tone and style of your office's social media presence should reflect its professional and authoritative role in the justice system. This means maintaining a formal yet approachable tone that conveys competence, integrity, and respect for the community. Avoid using casual language, slang, or humor that could be misinterpreted or seen as unprofessional.

Consistency Across Platforms: Ensure that your office's voice and messaging are consistent across all social media platforms. Whether it's Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, or another platform, the content should align with your office's key messages and overall communication strategy. Consistency

reinforces your office's credibility and helps build a recognizable and trustworthy brand.

Content Planning and Approval Process

Content Calendar: Develop a content calendar that outlines planned social media posts, key messages, and important dates (e.g., awareness campaigns, community events, case updates). This planning helps ensure that your office's social media presence is proactive rather than reactive and that messaging is timely and relevant.

Approval Workflow: Establish a clear approval workflow for social media content. This process should involve reviewing all posts for accuracy, legal compliance, and alignment with office policies before they are published. Depending on the content's sensitivity, it may require approval from senior staff or legal advisors. This step is especially important for posts related to ongoing cases, policy announcements, or any content that could impact the public's perception of your office.

Legal and Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality and Privacy: Social media posts must adhere to all legal and ethical guidelines regarding confidentiality and privacy. Avoid sharing any information that could compromise an ongoing investigation, violate the privacy rights of victims or defendants, or prejudice a case. If there is any doubt about the appropriateness of a post, consult legal advisors before proceeding.

Compliance with Public Records Laws: Be aware that social media posts may be considered public records under state or federal law. Ensure that all posts are archived in compliance with public records retention requirements. This includes documenting the content, the date and time of posting, and any relevant interactions, such as comments or replies.

Intellectual Property and Attribution: Respect intellectual property rights when sharing content on social media. This includes properly attributing any third-party content, such as articles, images, or videos, and ensuring that you have the necessary permissions to share or use such content.

Crisis Preparedness and Social Media Policy:

Pre-Approved Crisis Content: Develop pre-approved content for use during a crisis, such as holding statements or key messages that can be quickly adapted to the situation. This preparation ensures that your office can respond promptly and

Social Media Policy: Create a comprehensive social media policy that outlines the rules and expectations for social media use within your office. This policy should cover who is authorized to post on behalf of the office, the types of content that are appropriate, and the procedures for handling sensitive or controversial issues. Ensure that all staff members are trained on this policy and understand their responsibilities.

Engaging Effectively with the Public and Media

Social media provides an invaluable platform for prosecutors' offices to build stronger connections with their communities by fostering open communication, increasing transparency, and promoting public education. By utilizing social media effectively, offices can engage directly with the public, share important updates, clarify the role of prosecutors, and build trust within the community.

Proactive Communication

Regular Updates: Use social media to provide regular updates on your office's activities, such as case outcomes, policy changes, community initiatives, and public safety information. Consistent communication helps keep the public informed and reinforces your office's role as a transparent and accountable institution.

Timely Responses to Inquiries: Social media is a two-way communication channel. Be prepared to respond promptly to inquiries from the public and the media. While it's important to engage, ensure that responses are accurate, professional, and consistent with your office's messaging and legal obligations.

Public Education and Awareness

Educational Content: Social media is an excellent platform for educating the public about legal processes, victims' rights, and public safety issues. Consider creating content that explains complex legal topics in simple terms, promotes awareness of community resources, or highlights the importance of civic engagement. This type of content helps build trust and fosters a more informed community.

Campaigns and Initiatives: Use social media to support public awareness campaigns and initiatives, such as National Crime Victims' Rights Week or Domestic Violence Awareness Month. These campaigns can be amplified through partnerships with community organizations, law enforcement, and other stakeholders.

Managing Interactions and Moderation

Comment Moderation: Establish clear guidelines for moderating comments and interactions on your office's social media pages. While it's important to allow for open dialogue, it's also necessary to remove any comments that are inappropriate, defamatory, or violate the platform's terms of service. Clearly communicate your moderation policy to the public and enforce it consistently.

Handling Negative Feedback: Negative feedback is inevitable on social media. When it occurs, respond professionally and calmly. Address valid concerns with factual information and avoid engaging in arguments or responding defensively. If the feedback is unfounded or based on misinformation, politely correct the record while maintaining a respectful tone.

Collaboration with Media Outlets

Sharing News and Updates: Collaborate with media outlets by sharing news releases, press statements, and updates directly through social media. Tag relevant journalists or media organizations to ensure they see your content and consider including links to more detailed information on your office's website.

Leveraging Social Media for Press Conferences: Use social media to live-stream press conferences or briefings, making these events accessible to a broader audience. This approach not only increases transparency but also allows the

media and public to engage in real-time, asking questions and receiving immediate responses.

Monitoring and Measuring Social Media Impact

Social media monitoring is a valuable tool for understanding how your office is being discussed online and for responding to issues in real time. However, it's important to recognize that for many offices, resource and personnel constraints make extensive social media monitoring challenging. While larger offices may have the capacity to dedicate staff or use specialized tools, smaller offices can still benefit from more targeted or periodic monitoring efforts.

Monitoring Social Media Activity

Real-Time Monitoring: Ideally, implementing tools for real-time monitoring of your office's social media accounts allows you to track mentions, comments, and direct messages as they happen. This level of monitoring enables timely responses to both positive opportunities and potential issues. However, in many offices, real-time monitoring may not be feasible due to limited staff or budget. For smaller offices, consider setting up alerts for key terms or hashtags related to your office and scheduling regular check-ins to review social media activity. Even if you can't monitor constantly, periodic checks can help you stay informed about how your office is being discussed across platforms.

Crisis Monitoring: During a crisis, social media monitoring becomes even more critical. Real-time insights allow your office to quickly identify and respond to emerging issues or misinformation before they escalate. In larger offices, this might involve increasing the frequency of monitoring or using specialized crisis communication tools. In smaller offices with limited resources, designating one person to focus on social media during a crisis, even on a temporary basis, can help manage the situation more effectively. If full-time crisis monitoring isn't possible, focus on key platforms where misinformation or public concern is most likely to spread and prioritize responding to the most urgent issues.

Measuring Success and Adjusting Strategy

Analytics and Reporting: Use social media analytics tools to measure the success of your office's social media activities. Track key metrics such as engagement rates, follower growth, reach, and the impact of specific posts or campaigns. Regularly review these metrics to assess the effectiveness of your social media strategy and identify areas for improvement.

Adjusting Strategy: Based on the insights gained from analytics, adjust your social media strategy as needed. This might involve changing the types of content you post, experimenting with different formats (e.g., videos, infographics), or adjusting the frequency and timing of your posts. Continuously refining your approach ensures that your office remains responsive to the needs of the community and the evolving media landscape.

*"We don't have a choice on whether we do social media,
the question is how well we do it."
Erik Qualman*

Engagement Strategies

Engagement on social media is about more than just sharing information; it's about creating meaningful interactions with the public, media, and other stakeholders. Effective engagement strategies can help your office build stronger relationships with the community, enhance transparency, and manage public perceptions. This section provides guidance on how to interact with the public and media through social media platforms, ensuring that your office's communications are both impactful and aligned with its strategic goals.

Building a Two-Way Communication Channel

Active Listening and Social Media Monitoring

Understanding Public Sentiment: Regularly monitor social media to understand public sentiment regarding your office and its activities. This involves tracking mentions, hashtags, and comments related to your office, key cases, or relevant legal issues. By actively listening to what people are saying, you can gauge public opinion, identify emerging issues, and respond appropriately.

Identifying Trends and Concerns: Monitoring social media also allows you to identify trends and common concerns within the community. For example, if there is a surge in discussions about a specific case or legal issue, your office can address these concerns through targeted communications. Being responsive to public concerns helps build trust and demonstrates that your office is engaged with the community.

Encouraging Public Interaction

Promoting Engagement: Encourage public interaction by asking questions, inviting comments, and prompting discussions on relevant topics. For example, you might post about a new community initiative and ask followers for their thoughts or suggestions. Engagement prompts can also be used during awareness campaigns to involve the public in important conversations.

Responding to Comments and Questions: Responding to comments and questions shows that your office values public input and is committed to transparency. Aim to respond promptly and thoughtfully, providing clear and accurate information. Even when comments are critical, responding respectfully can help defuse tension and foster a more positive dialogue.

Leveraging Multimedia Content

Using Visual Content: Visual content such as images, infographics, and videos tend to generate higher engagement on social media. Use these formats to convey important information in a way that is accessible and engaging. For example, an infographic explaining the legal process or a short video highlighting a community event can help make complex information more understandable.

Live Streaming and Interactive Content: Consider live streaming important events, such as press conferences, community forums, or educational workshops. Live streaming allows real-time interaction with the public, enabling them to ask questions and receive immediate responses. Interactive content like polls or Q&A sessions can also increase engagement and make your office's social media presence more dynamic.

Engaging with Media Outlets and Journalists

Building Relationships with Journalists

Connecting on Social Media: Social media provides an opportunity to build and maintain relationships with journalists. Follow and engage with journalists who cover legal issues, criminal justice, and community affairs. Sharing their work, commenting on their posts, and tagging them in relevant content can help establish a positive relationship and keep your office on their radar.

Providing Exclusive Content: Occasionally offer exclusive content or early access to information to journalists with whom you have established relationships. This could include advance notice of a press release, an invitation to a behind-the-scenes event, or an exclusive interview. Providing value to journalists can lead to more favorable and accurate coverage of your office's activities.

Sharing News and Updates

Timely News Dissemination: Use social media to quickly disseminate news and updates that are relevant to the public and the media. This includes announcements about case developments, policy changes, or public safety alerts. Timely dissemination of information helps control the narrative and ensures that your office's perspective is included in media coverage.

Amplifying Positive Coverage: When your office receives positive media coverage, share it on your social media platforms. This not only reinforces the positive message but also shows appreciation for the journalist's work. Tag the media outlet and journalist to acknowledge their contribution and further build the relationship.

Handling Media Inquiries on Social Media

Public vs. Private Responses: Decide whether to respond to media inquiries publicly (in the comments or replies) or privately (via direct message or email). Public responses can demonstrate transparency, but sensitive or complex inquiries are often better handled privately to ensure accuracy and confidentiality.

Providing Official Statements: If a media inquiry requires an official response, consider posting the statement publicly on your social media platforms. This ensures that your office's position is clearly communicated and easily accessible to the public and the media. Official statements can be shared as text posts, images, or linked documents.

Expanding Reach and Influence

Collaborating with Community Organizations

Partnerships and Cross-Promotion: Partner with community organizations, local governments, and other stakeholders to expand your reach on social media. Cross-promotion of events, initiatives, or campaigns can help both parties reach a wider audience. For example, co-hosting a live stream with a community organization can draw in followers from both accounts and create a more engaged audience.

Highlighting Community Voices: Feature guest posts or shared content from community leaders, advocates, or organizations that align with your office's mission. This not only diversifies your content but also demonstrates your office's commitment to collaboration and community engagement.

Using Hashtags and Keywords

Relevance and Reach: Utilize relevant hashtags and keywords to increase the visibility of your posts. Hashtags like #CriminalJustice, #PublicSafety, or #CommunityEngagement can help your content reach users interested in these topics. Be sure to research trending hashtags to stay current and join broader conversations.

Creating Branded Hashtags: Consider creating branded hashtags for specific campaigns, events, or initiatives. Branded hashtags help track engagement and create a cohesive narrative around your office's activities. Encourage the public and partner organizations to use these hashtags to amplify your message.

Engaging with Influencers and Thought Leaders

Identifying Key Influencers: Identify influencers and thought leaders in the legal, criminal justice, or community sectors who have a significant following on social media. Engaging with these individuals through likes, comments, shares, or direct messages can help elevate your office's profile and reach new audiences.

Collaborating on Content: Consider collaborating with influencers on content that aligns with your office's goals. This could involve co-creating a video, participating in a joint livestream, or contributing to a discussion on relevant legal issues. Influencer partnerships can enhance your office's credibility and expand its influence.

Maintaining Professionalism and Ethical Standards

Professional Conduct Online

Always communicate respectfully and professionally on social media, even when faced with criticism or challenging questions. Avoid engaging in arguments or using language that could be perceived as inflammatory or unprofessional. Maintaining a calm and measured tone reinforces your office's authority and commitment to justice.

Avoiding Bias and Prejudice: Ensure that all social media communications are free from bias, prejudice, and discriminatory language. This is especially important when discussing cases, policies, or community issues. Upholding these standards helps maintain public trust and ensures that your office's messaging is inclusive and fair.

Compliance with Legal and Ethical Guidelines

Adhering to Confidentiality Rules: Continue to adhere strictly to confidentiality rules, even in the more informal and fast-paced environment of social media. Do not disclose any information that could compromise ongoing cases, violate the privacy of individuals, or conflict with legal obligations.

Transparency and Accountability: Be transparent about your office's actions, decisions, and communications on social media. If mistakes are made,

acknowledge them promptly and take corrective action. Demonstrating accountability on social media helps build public trust and shows that your office is committed to ethical conduct.

MEASURING AND EVALUATING MEDIA RELATIONS

Effective media relations are not just about engaging with the media but also about understanding and assessing the impact of those interactions. Tracking and analyzing media coverage provides valuable insights into how your office's messages are being received and whether they are influencing public perception as intended. This chapter will guide you through the process of measuring and evaluating your media relations efforts, starting with tracking media coverage.

“If you can’t measure it, you can’t improve it.”
Lord Kelvin

Tracking Media Coverage

Tracking media coverage is essential for understanding how your office is portrayed in the media, identifying trends in public discourse, and measuring the reach and impact of your communication efforts. This section outlines the tools and techniques you can use to monitor and analyze media coverage, ensuring that your office stays informed and can respond effectively to emerging issues.

Tools for Monitoring Media Coverage

Media Monitoring Services

Professional Media Monitoring Tools: Consider subscribing to professional media monitoring services like Cision, Meltwater, or LexisNexis if resources are available. These platforms provide comprehensive tracking of print, broadcast, and online media, offering real-time alerts and detailed reports. They can track mentions of your office, key cases, and relevant legal issues across a wide range of media outlets.

Customizable Tracking: These tools allow you to customize tracking based on specific keywords, phrases, or topics. For example, you can set up alerts for mentions of your office's name, the District Attorney, high-profile cases, or specific legal terms. This ensures that you are notified whenever your office is mentioned in the media, enabling prompt responses when necessary.

Social Media Monitoring: In addition to traditional media, many media monitoring services also track social media platforms. This is crucial for understanding how your office is discussed in real-time on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Social media monitoring helps identify emerging public sentiment and can alert you to potential crises before they escalate.

Google Alerts and Free Monitoring Tools

Google Alerts: Google Alerts is a free tool that allows you to monitor the web for specific keywords or phrases. You can set up alerts for mentions of your office, key personnel, or significant cases, and receive email notifications when new content is published online. While not as comprehensive as paid services, Google Alerts can be a useful supplement for tracking online coverage.

Social Mention and Other Free Tools: Other free tools like Social Mention can help you monitor social media mentions and sentiment. While these tools may not offer the depth of analysis provided by paid services, they are useful for smaller offices with limited budgets or for supplementing more comprehensive monitoring efforts.

Manual Tracking and Clipping

Internal Tracking Efforts: For offices with limited resources, manual tracking of media coverage can be effective, though more time-consuming. This might involve assigning staff to monitor specific newspapers, websites, and broadcast media for mentions of your office. Staff can manually clip articles, record broadcast segments, and track social media interactions.

Tracking Local and Niche Media: While national media often dominates the conversation, local and niche media are also important. Manually tracking

coverage in these outlets can provide insights into community-level concerns and how your office's actions are perceived by specific audiences. This approach ensures that you don't miss important coverage that may not be picked up by automated tools.

*"Communication works for those who work at it."
John Powell*

Evaluating Success

Evaluating the success of your media relations efforts is essential for understanding how well your office's communications are achieving their intended goals. By assessing various metrics, you can determine whether your messages are resonating with the public, influencing media narratives, and supporting your office's broader objectives. This section outlines key metrics to assess the effectiveness of your media relations efforts, providing a comprehensive approach to evaluating success.

Key Metrics for Assessing Media Relations

Reach and Impressions

Understanding Reach: Reach refers to the total number of unique individuals who have been exposed to your office's media coverage. This metric is crucial for understanding the potential audience size for your messages. High reach indicates that your office's communications are being disseminated widely, increasing the likelihood of influencing public perception.

Measuring Impressions: Impressions refer to the total number of times your office's media coverage has been viewed or encountered, including repeat views by the same individual. While impressions can give an indication of the visibility of your coverage, it's important to interpret this metric in conjunction with reach to understand the overall impact of your media efforts.

Message Penetration and Consistency

Assessing Message Penetration: Message penetration refers to how effectively your key messages are being communicated through media coverage. This involves analyzing how often your office's core messages, such as commitments to justice, public safety, or transparency, are included in articles, broadcasts, and social media posts. High message penetration indicates that your communications are successfully influencing the narrative.

Ensuring Consistency: Consistency in messaging is crucial for reinforcing your office's key themes and building a coherent public image. Evaluate whether your messages are being conveyed consistently across different media outlets and platforms. Inconsistent messaging can dilute your office's impact and create confusion among the public.

Engagement and Interaction

Measuring Public Engagement: Public engagement metrics, such as the number of comments, shares, likes, and retweets on social media, provide insights into how well your office's messages are resonating with the public. High levels of engagement indicate that your content is connecting with your audience and prompting them to take action, whether that's sharing your message or participating in a discussion.

Analyzing Media Interaction: Consider the level of interaction your office has with journalists and media outlets. This includes the frequency and quality of media inquiries, the extent to which journalists follow up on your press releases, and the depth of coverage your office receives. Strong media relationships often lead to more comprehensive and favorable coverage.

Media Outlet Analysis

Evaluating Outlet Influence: Not all media outlets have the same influence. Evaluate which outlets are most effective at reaching your target audiences and shaping public opinion. Metrics such as the outlet's readership, viewership, or social media following can help you understand the relative impact of coverage in different publications or channels.

Targeting High-Impact Outlets: Use this analysis to prioritize outreach to high-impact outlets. If your office is consistently featured in outlets with large or highly engaged audiences, this is a positive indicator of successful media relations. Conversely, if your coverage is concentrated in lower-impact outlets, it may be necessary to adjust your strategy to reach more influential platforms.

Crisis Response Effectiveness

Speed and Accuracy of Responses: In crisis situations, the speed and accuracy of your media responses are critical. Evaluate how quickly your office was able to respond to media inquiries, issue statements, and correct misinformation during a crisis. Timely and accurate communication can help mitigate the impact of a crisis and protect your office's reputation.

Crisis Sentiment Analysis: After a crisis, assess the sentiment of media coverage and public reactions. Positive or neutral coverage during a crisis suggests that your office managed the situation effectively, while negative coverage may indicate areas for improvement. Analyzing crisis communication outcomes can provide valuable insights for refining your approach in future situations.

Long-Term Impact on Public Perception

Tracking Perception Over Time: Media relations are not just about short-term outcomes; they also have long-term implications for public perception. Use surveys, public opinion polls, and sentiment analysis over time to track how your office is viewed by the public. This long-term data can reveal trends and shifts in perception that result from sustained media relations efforts.

Correlation with Office Objectives: Evaluate how well your media relations efforts are supporting your office's broader objectives, such as increasing community trust, promoting public safety, or influencing policy. If media coverage aligns with and reinforces these goals, it indicates that your media relations strategy is contributing to the success of your office.

Using Media Coverage Insights to Drive Strategic Decisions

Identifying Communication Gaps

Gaps in Coverage: Analyzing media coverage can reveal gaps in your office's communication efforts. For example, if certain key messages are not being picked up by the media, it may indicate a need to adjust your outreach strategy, enhance media briefings, or provide additional context in press releases.

Underrepresented Issues: If certain issues or aspects of your office's work are underrepresented in the media, consider focusing future media relations efforts on these areas. This might involve pitching stories to journalists, creating targeted press releases, or holding media briefings on specific topics.

Refining Media Relations Strategies

Refining Message Delivery: Use insights from media coverage analysis to refine how your office delivers key messages. This might involve tailoring messages to better align with the interests of specific media outlets or audiences, simplifying complex legal language, or providing more compelling narratives that resonate with the public.

Targeting Key Outlets and Journalists: If your analysis reveals that certain media outlets or journalists are more influential in shaping public perception of your office, consider prioritizing these outlets in your media relations strategy. Building stronger relationships with these key players can enhance your office's ability to influence the narrative and ensure accurate, positive coverage.

Adapting to Media Landscape Changes: The media landscape is constantly evolving, with new platforms, technologies, and trends emerging regularly. Use the insights gained from your metrics to adapt your media relations strategies to these changes. For example, if social media engagement is driving significant reach, consider increasing your focus on digital platforms and content that resonates with online audiences.

Setting Future Goals: Use your evaluation metrics to set specific, measurable goals for future media relations efforts. These goals might include increasing the reach of your media coverage, improving sentiment by a certain percentage, or achieving greater consistency in message penetration. Setting clear goals helps guide your media relations activities and provides benchmarks for measuring future success.

Reporting and Accountability

Regular Reporting: Establish a regular reporting schedule for your media relations metrics. This might involve monthly, quarterly, or annual reports that track key metrics and provide an overview of your office's media relations performance. Regular reporting ensures that your office remains accountable for its media strategy and allows for ongoing adjustments based on data-driven insights.

Communicating Success to Stakeholders: Share the results of your media relations evaluations with key stakeholders, including senior leadership, staff, and community partners. Highlighting successes and demonstrating the impact of your media relations efforts can help build support for continued investment in communication strategies and enhance the overall credibility of your office.

*"Without continual growth and progress,
such words as improvement, achievement,
and success have no meaning."
Benjamin Franklin*

Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement is the cornerstone of effective media relations. By regularly evaluating your media interactions and outcomes, your office can refine its strategies, enhance its messaging, and adapt to the evolving media landscape. This section outlines how to use evaluations to drive continuous improvement in your media relations efforts, ensuring that your office remains responsive, proactive, and effective in communicating with the public and the media.

Incorporating Feedback into Media Strategies

Soliciting Internal and External Feedback

Internal Debriefs: After significant media interactions, such as press conferences, major announcements, or crisis communications, conduct internal debriefs with your team. These debriefs should focus on what went

well, what challenges were encountered, and what could be improved. Encourage open and constructive feedback from all team members, including those involved in planning, execution, and follow-up.

Seeking External Input: In addition to internal feedback, consider seeking input from external stakeholders, such as media professionals, community leaders, or legal experts. Their perspectives can provide valuable insights into how your office's communications are perceived and how they can be improved. For example, journalists can offer feedback on the clarity and accessibility of your messages, while community leaders might provide insights into how your communications resonate with the public.

Learning from Past Experiences

Analyzing Successes and Failures: Regularly review past media interactions to identify both successes and failures. Successes can serve as models for future efforts, while failures provide learning opportunities. For example, if a particular press release received extensive positive coverage, analyze what elements contributed to its success—whether it was the clarity of the message, the timing, or the media outlets targeted.

Documenting Lessons Learned: Create a repository of lessons learned from past media interactions. This can include case studies, detailed debrief notes, or best practices guides. Documenting these insights ensures that your team has a reference point for future media relations efforts and helps institutionalize the knowledge gained from experience.

Adapting to Emerging Trends

Staying Informed: The media landscape is constantly changing, with new platforms, technologies, and trends emerging regularly. Stay informed about these changes by following industry news, attending relevant conferences, and engaging with media professionals. Understanding trends such as the rise of social media influencers, the increasing importance of video content, or shifts in public trust can help your office adapt its media strategies effectively.

Experimenting with New Approaches: Be open to experimenting with new approaches to media relations, especially in response to emerging trends. For

example, if data shows that video content is gaining traction with your audience, consider incorporating more video messages, live streams, or multimedia press releases into your strategy. Experimentation allows your office to stay ahead of the curve and continuously improve its media engagement.

Refining Messaging and Communication Tactics

Enhancing Message Clarity and Consistency

Legal and policy matters can be complex, making it challenging to convey clear messages to the public. Continuously work on simplifying your office's messaging without losing the nuance and accuracy required in legal communication. Use plain language, clear examples, and accessible analogies to help the public and media understand your office's actions and positions.

Ensuring Consistency Across Channels: Consistency in messaging across all communication channels—whether press releases, social media, or public statements—is essential for reinforcing your office's key messages. Regularly review your communications to ensure that the same core messages are being conveyed across different platforms and address any discrepancies that may arise.

Tailoring Messages to Different Audiences

Audience Segmentation: Recognize that different segments of the public may require different messaging approaches. Tailor your communications to resonate with specific audiences, such as legal professionals, community members, victims' advocacy groups, or the public. For instance, while legal professionals might appreciate detailed explanations of legal principles, the public may benefit from more straightforward, impactful messages.

Localized Messaging: Consider the geographical and cultural context of your audience when crafting messages. For example, if your office serves a diverse community, ensure that your messaging reflects and respects that diversity. This might involve translating key messages into different languages or addressing specific community concerns.

Improving Crisis Communication Preparedness

Conduct regular crisis communication simulations to test your office's preparedness. These simulations should mimic real-world scenarios, allowing your team to practice their response strategies in a controlled environment. Regular drills help identify potential weaknesses in your crisis communication plan and ensure that your team remains sharp and ready to act swiftly during an actual crisis.

Updating Crisis Communication Plans: Based on the outcomes of simulations and real-world crises, continuously update your crisis communication plans. This includes refining pre-approved statements, updating contact lists, and revising response protocols. A regularly updated plan ensures that your office can respond effectively to any crisis, minimizing the impact on your reputation and maintaining public trust.

Leveraging Data and Analytics for Improvement

Data-Driven Decision Making

Leverage the data and analytics gathered from tracking media coverage, social media interactions, and public sentiment to inform your media relations strategy. This data can reveal which messages resonate most with your audience, which platforms are most effective for reaching key demographics, and how your office is perceived over time. Use these insights to refine your strategies and make informed decisions that enhance your media relations efforts.

Establish key performance indicators (KPIs) that align with your office's communication goals. These might include metrics such as media reach, message penetration, engagement rates, sentiment scores, and crisis response times. Regularly track and evaluate these KPIs to measure the effectiveness of your media relations efforts and identify areas for improvement.

Benchmarking Against Industry Standards

Comparative Analysis: Benchmark your office's media relations performance against industry standards or similar organizations, when able. This can

provide valuable insights into how your office's efforts compare to others and highlight areas where you may need to step up your game. For example, if other prosecutor's offices are achieving higher media reach or more favorable sentiment, analyze their strategies to identify best practices that could be adopted.

Setting Targets for Improvement: Based on your benchmarking analysis, set realistic targets for improvement. These targets might involve increasing media coverage in high-impact outlets, improving public sentiment by a certain percentage, or reducing response times during crises. Setting specific, measurable targets helps focus your media relations efforts and provides a clear path for continuous improvement.

RESOURCES AND TEMPLATES

Having well-crafted press releases is essential for ensuring that your office's announcements are clear, professional, and effectively communicate your key messages. This chapter provides sample press releases for different types of announcements, serving as templates that can be adapted for various situations. These templates will help streamline the process of drafting press releases and ensure consistency in your office's communications.

*"A lack of communication breeds assumptions
of what the other person is thinking or feeling."
Misty Lynn Walker*

Sample Press Releases

Announcement of a High-Profile Case Filing

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

[Name]

Public Information Officer

[Office Name]

Phone: [Phone Number]

Email: [Email Address]

[Date]

[OFFICE NAME] ANNOUNCES FILING OF CHARGES IN [CASE NAME]

[City, State] – The [Office Name] today announced the filing of charges in the case of [Case Name], involving [brief description of the crime or incident]. [Defendant's

Name], [age], has been charged with [list of charges] in connection with [specific details of the case].

“The charges filed today reflect the serious nature of the crimes committed,” said [District Attorney’s Name], District Attorney of [Jurisdiction]. “Our office is committed to ensuring that justice is served for the victims and that the defendant is held accountable for their actions.”

[Additional information about the case, such as the investigation process, cooperation with law enforcement agencies, or any relevant legal details.]

[Office Name] reminds the public that [Defendant’s Name] is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. The next court appearance is scheduled for [Date] at [Time] in [Court Name].

For more information, please contact [Public Information Officer’s Name] at [Phone Number] or [Email Address].

Announcement of a Community Initiative or Program

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

[Name]

Public Information Officer

[Office Name]

Phone: [Phone Number]

Email: [Email Address]

[Date]

[OFFICE NAME] LAUNCHES NEW COMMUNITY INITIATIVE TO [DESCRIPTION OF INITIATIVE]

[City, State] – The [Office Name] is pleased to announce the launch of a new community initiative aimed at [brief description of the goal of the initiative, e.g.,

reducing crime, supporting victims, etc.]. The program, titled [Program Name], will [briefly describe the main activities or components of the program].

“This initiative reflects our commitment to working closely with the community to address [specific issue],” said [District Attorney’s Name], District Attorney of [Jurisdiction]. “By [describe the impact of the program], we hope to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those affected and contribute to a safer, more just community.”

[Provide additional details about the program, such as partnerships with local organizations, funding sources, or expected outcomes. Include any quotes from community partners if applicable.]

The [Program Name] will officially launch on [Date] and will be accessible to [describe the target audience or participants]. For more information about the program or to get involved, please contact [Public Information Officer’s Name] at [Phone Number] or [Email Address].

Announcement of a Policy Change or Legal Reform

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

[Name]

Public Information Officer

[Office Name]

Phone: [Phone Number]

Email: [Email Address]

[Date]

[OFFICE NAME] ANNOUNCES NEW POLICY TO [DESCRIPTION OF POLICY CHANGE/LEGAL REFORM]

[City, State] – Today, the [Office Name] announced a significant policy change aimed at [brief description of the goal of the policy change or legal reform]. The new policy, which will take effect on [Effective Date], seeks to [briefly explain the objectives or benefits of the policy change].

“Our office is dedicated to pursuing policies that promote fairness and justice in [Jurisdiction],” said [District Attorney’s Name], District Attorney of [Jurisdiction]. “This new policy [or legal reform] will [describe the expected impact or improvements], ensuring that [specific groups or the general public] are better served and protected under the law.”

[Include additional details about the policy change, such as the rationale behind the decision, any relevant data or research, and the expected benefits. Mention any consultations with stakeholders or the public.]

The policy will be implemented on [Date], and [Office Name] will provide further guidance to [affected groups, such as law enforcement, legal professionals, or the public] in the coming weeks. For more information, please contact [Public Information Officer’s Name] at [Phone Number] or [Email Address].

Announcement of a Press Conference

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

[Name]

Public Information Officer

[Office Name]

Phone: [Phone Number]

Email: [Email Address]

[Date]

MEDIA ADVISORY: [OFFICE NAME] TO HOLD PRESS CONFERENCE ON [SUBJECT]

[City, State] – The [Office Name] will hold a press conference on [Date] to address [brief description of the subject matter, such as a high-profile case, a new initiative, or a significant legal development]. The press conference will take place at [Location] at [Time].

[District Attorney's Name], District Attorney of [Jurisdiction], will deliver remarks on [specific topics to be covered], followed by a Q&A session with members of the media.

Media representatives are encouraged to attend. Please RSVP to [Public Information Officer's Name] at [Phone Number] or [Email Address] by [RSVP Date].

DETAILS OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE:

Date: [Date]

Time: [Time]

Location: [Location]

Topic: [Subject of the Press Conference]

Speakers: [List of Speakers, including titles]

For more information or to schedule interviews, please contact [Public Information Officer's Name] at [Phone Number] or [Email Address].

*"In crisis management, be quick with the facts,
slow with the blame."
Leon Panetta*

Crisis Communication Checklist

In a crisis, clear, timely, and well-coordinated communication is essential for managing the situation effectively and maintaining public trust. A crisis communication checklist ensures that all critical aspects of crisis communication are covered, helping your office respond quickly and effectively. This checklist serves as a practical tool to guide your team through the crisis communication process, from initial response to post-crisis evaluation.

Immediate Response

Activate Crisis Communication Team

- ☐ Notify all members of the crisis communication team immediately.
- ☐ Confirm roles and responsibilities for managing the crisis.
- ☐ Establish a primary point of contact for internal coordination.

Gather Facts and Assess the Situation

- ☐ Collect all available information about the crisis.
- ☐ Verify the accuracy of the information before dissemination.
- ☐ Assess the potential impact on your office, the public, and stakeholders.

Prepare Initial Holding Statement

- ☐ Draft a brief holding statement acknowledging the crisis.
- ☐ Include key messages: what is known, what is being done, and a commitment to transparency.
- ☐ Review and approve the holding statement through the established chain of command.

Notify Key Internal Stakeholders

- ☐ Inform senior leadership, legal advisors, and relevant departments.
- ☐ Provide regular updates as the situation evolves.
- ☐ Ensure that all internal communications are consistent and aligned with the crisis communication plan.

Monitor Media and Social Media

- ☐ Begin real-time monitoring of media coverage and social media mentions.
- ☐ Identify emerging issues, misinformation, and public sentiment.
- ☐ Set up alerts for key terms related to the crisis.

Media Engagement

Issue Initial Public Statement

- ☐ Release the holding statement via appropriate channels (press release, social media, website).
- ☐ Ensure the statement is distributed to all relevant media outlets.
- ☐ Post the statement on the office's official social media accounts.

Coordinate Media Inquiries

- ☐ Centralize all media inquiries to the designated spokesperson or PIO.
- ☐ Log all incoming media requests in the media inquiry log.
- ☐ Provide consistent responses, adhering to the approved key messages.

Organize Press Conference (if necessary)

- ☐ Schedule a press conference to address the crisis, if appropriate.
- ☐ Prepare spokespersons with talking points and anticipated questions.
- ☐ Ensure that all logistical arrangements (venue, timing, equipment) are in place.

Update Public and Media Regularly

- ☐ Provide regular updates as new information becomes available.
- ☐ Ensure that updates are clear, accurate, and consistent with previous communications.
- ☐ Continue monitoring media coverage and public response.

Stakeholder Communication

Inform Key External Stakeholders

- ☐ Notify key external stakeholders, such as law enforcement partners, community leaders, and government officials.
- ☐ Provide tailored updates to each stakeholder group, addressing their specific concerns.
- ☐ Offer opportunities for stakeholders to ask questions or seek clarification.

Engage with the Public

- ☐ Use social media to engage directly with the public, answering questions and addressing concerns.
- ☐ Monitor public comments and feedback, responding promptly and professionally.

- ❑ Correct any misinformation circulating on social media platforms.

Coordinate Internal Communications

- ❑ Ensure all staff members are informed of the crisis and understand the communication strategy.
- ❑ Provide guidance on how to handle inquiries from the public or media.
- ❑ Maintain open lines of communication with staff throughout the crisis.

Post-Crisis Evaluation

Conduct a Post-Crisis Debrief

- ❑ Hold a debrief with the crisis communication team and key stakeholders.
- ❑ Review what worked well, what challenges were encountered, and what could be improved.
- ❑ Document lessons learned and incorporate them into the crisis communication plan.

Analyze Media Coverage and Public Sentiment

- ❑ Assess the tone, reach, and accuracy of media coverage during the crisis.
- ❑ Evaluate public sentiment and feedback received through social media and other channels.
- ❑ Identify any ongoing communication needs or concerns that require follow-up.

Report on Crisis Management Outcomes

- ❑ Prepare a report summarizing the crisis, the communication response, and the outcomes.
- ❑ Share the report with senior leadership and relevant stakeholders.
- ❑ Use the findings to update and refine your crisis communication plan.

Restore Public Trust

- ❑ Continue engaging with the public and media post-crisis to maintain transparency.
- ❑ Highlight any corrective actions taken or improvements made as a result of the crisis.
- ❑ Reinforce key messages and the office's commitment to serving the public.



NAVIGATING MEDIA RELATIONS

A QUICK REFERENCE SHEET FOR PROSECUTORS

INTRODUCTION

Effective media relations are essential for prosecutors to ensure accurate public understanding of the justice system and maintain community trust. This reference sheet provides guidance aligned with the criminal justice standards on pretrial publicity and incorporates best practices for Public Information Officers (PIOs) and prosecutors.

BEST PRACTICES FOR PROSECUTORS

- **Designate a Spokesperson/ PIO:** Identify a knowledgeable and media-trained individual as the primary spokesperson to ensure consistent messaging. If a dedicated PIO is not available, the chief prosecutor or another designated prosecutor should take on the role.
- **Stay Informed:** Keep abreast of high-profile cases and potential media interest areas to proactively manage media relations.
- **Craft Clear Messages:** Prepare clear, concise, and factual statements for public release, avoiding legal jargon and inflammatory language.
- **Engage Proactively:** Build relationships with local media through regular briefings and background information sessions, fostering trust and understanding.
- **Coordinate with Law Enforcement:** Ensure that all public statements are coordinated with law enforcement agencies to present a unified message.

BEST PRACTICES FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICERS (PIOs)

- **Establish Clear Protocols:** Develop and adhere to protocols for media interactions, ensuring consistency and accuracy in all communications.
- **Provide Training:** Regularly train staff on media relations, focusing on ABA guidelines and the importance of maintaining the integrity of the judicial process.
- **Prepare Media Kits:** Create comprehensive media kits that include background information, fact sheets, and contact details to facilitate accurate reporting.
- **Monitor Coverage:** Track media coverage to identify inaccuracies and address them promptly, maintaining the office's credibility.

GUIDANCE ON PRETRIAL PUBLICITY

Industry standards for criminal justice outline the following key principles:

- **MAINTAIN PROFESSIONALISM:** All interactions with the media should be conducted with the utmost professionalism to uphold the integrity of the judicial process.
- **PROTECT CONFIDENTIALITY:** Sensitive information, particularly related to ongoing investigations, should be kept confidential to protect the rights of all parties involved.
- **AVOID PREJUDICIAL STATEMENTS:** Prosecutors should refrain from making public statements that could prejudice the trial's fairness ([ABA Rule 3.6](#))

AVOIDING PREJUDICIAL STATEMENTS WHILE KEEPING THE PUBLIC INFORMED

— Use Neutral Language

- **Fact-Based Reporting:** Stick to verifiable facts without implying guilt or innocence. For example, use statements like "The defendant has been charged with..." rather than "The defendant committed..."
- **Avoid Speculation:** Do not speculate on outcomes or evidence. Stick to what has been officially filed and discussed in court.

— Provide General Information

- **Legal Process Overview:** Educate the public about the legal process. Explain steps such as arraignment, trial, and sentencing without referencing specific details of the case at hand.
- **Role of the Prosecutor:** Clarify the prosecutor's role in seeking justice and upholding the law, which includes protecting the rights of both victims and defendants.

— Limit Comments on Ongoing Cases

- **Public Records:** Reference only information that is part of the public record, such as indictments, charges, and court decisions.
- **Future Updates:** Indicate when further updates will be available, emphasizing the importance of allowing the judicial process to unfold without undue influence.

— Utilize Press Releases and Statements

- **Prepared Statements:** Issue prepared statements that are carefully reviewed to ensure compliance with legal standards and avoid prejudicial content.
- **Press Releases:** Provide written press releases that outline the facts of the case, legal procedures, and relevant law without delving into specifics that could be seen as prejudicial.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- **BALANCE TRANSPARENCY & CONFIDENTIALITY:** While transparency is crucial, safeguarding the confidentiality of ongoing investigations and the rights of the accused is paramount.
- **RESPECT FOR ALL PARTIES:** Communicate with respect and sensitivity towards victims, defendants, and their families, avoiding any statements that could be perceived as prejudicial or biased.
- **CRISIS MANAGEMENT:** Have a crisis communication plan in place to address unexpected events or media scrutiny, ensuring timely and accurate responses.

THE ROLE OF THE PROSECUTOR

AN OVERVIEW FOR JOURNALISTS

As prosecutors, we appreciate the important role of journalists in informing the public about the justice system. This reference guide provides key points about the legal process, the role of the prosecutor, and best practices to ensure justice is served fairly and accurately, and that public trust in the legal system is maintained.

KEY POINTS ABOUT THE LEGAL PROCESS

Presumption of Innocence: All individuals charged with a crime are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Stages of the Legal Process:

- **Arraignment:** The defendant is formally charged and enters a plea.
- **Pretrial Hearings:** Motions and other legal issues are addressed.
- **Trial:** Evidence is presented before a judge or jury to determine guilt.
- **Sentencing:** If the defendant is found guilty, the judge imposes a sentence.
- **Appeals:** The defendant may appeal the conviction or sentence.

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THE ROLE OF THE PROSECUTOR

Seeking Justice: The primary duty of the prosecutor is to seek justice for both the community and victims, not merely to convict.

Representing the Public: Prosecutors represent the interests of the public and victims, ensuring that justice is served while protecting the rights of the accused.

Ethical Obligations: Prosecutors must adhere to strict ethical guidelines, including avoiding prejudicial statements and ensuring a fair trial.



Watch this
explainer video

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IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS FOR REPORTING ON CRIMINAL CASES

Accuracy and Verification: Ensure that all information reported is accurate and verified. Contact our office to confirm details when in doubt.

Avoiding Prejudicial Reporting: Refrain from making assumptions about a defendant's guilt or innocence. Use neutral language and avoid sensationalism.

Impact on Fair Trial: Be mindful that reporting can impact the fairness of a trial. Avoid publishing information that could influence jurors or the judicial process.

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GUIDELINES FOR MEDIA

- **Designated Spokesperson:** Our office has a designated spokesperson for all media inquiries. Please direct your questions to _____, who can be reached at _____.
- **Press Releases:** Official statements and updates will be disseminated through press releases. These will be available on our website and distributed to media contacts.
- **Interview Requests:** To request an interview with a prosecutor, please contact our media relations point person _____. We will do our best to accommodate requests in a timely manner.
- **Public Records:** Information that is part of the public record, such as charges, indictments, and court decisions, can be freely reported. Please refer to the court's public records for this information.
- **Confidential Information:** Certain information, particularly related to ongoing investigations, is confidential and cannot be disclosed or confirmed to ensure the integrity of the judicial process and protect the rights of all parties involved.

CONTACT INFORMATION

UNDERSTANDING PRETRIAL PUBLICITY

AN OVERVIEW FOR JOURNALISTS

Pre-trial publicity refers to the media coverage of a criminal or civil case before the trial has commenced. This coverage can include news reports, interviews, opinion pieces, and other forms of media dissemination about the case, the defendant, the victim, and related events.

WHY YOU SHOULD BE AWARE OF YOUR ROLE IN PRE-TRIAL PUBLICITY

Impact on Fair Trial

- **Prejudicial Effect:** Intense media coverage can influence public opinion and potentially prejudice the jury pool, making it difficult to ensure a fair trial for the defendant.
- **Juror Bias:** Prospective jurors exposed to extensive media coverage may form preconceived notions about the case, impacting their impartiality.

Rights of the Accused

- **Presumption of Innocence:** Every individual charged with a crime is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. Pre-trial publicity can undermine this fundamental principle by creating a bias against the defendant.
- **Right to a Fair Trial:** The accused has the right to a fair and impartial trial. Excessive or unbalanced media coverage can jeopardize this right by swaying public opinion and the potential jury.

Judicial Integrity

- **Maintaining Trust:** The integrity of the judicial process must be maintained to ensure public trust in the legal system. Media coverage that appears to pre-judge the outcome of a case can erode this trust.
- **Balancing Act:** The judiciary must balance the public's right to know with the necessity of conducting a fair trial. This involves managing media access and coverage in a way that does not compromise the trial's fairness.

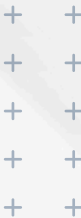
Media's Role

- **Informing the Public:** The media plays a crucial role in keeping the public informed about criminal and civil cases and the justice system. Responsible reporting helps ensure transparency and accountability.
- **Ethical Reporting:** Media outlets have a responsibility to report accurately and ethically, avoiding sensationalism and speculation that can harm the judicial process.

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR NAVIGATING PRETRIAL PUBLICITY

Accurate and Fair Reporting

- **Verify Facts:** Ensure all reported information is accurate and verified. Avoid spreading unconfirmed rumors or speculative information.
- **Balanced Coverage:** Provide balanced coverage that includes perspectives from both the prosecution and the defense, avoiding bias.



Avoiding Prejudicial Statements

- **Neutral Language:** Use neutral language that does not imply guilt or innocence. Avoid terms and phrases that can prejudice the public or potential jurors.
- **Limit Speculation:** Refrain from speculating on the outcome of the trial or the credibility of evidence and witnesses.

Educational Reporting

- **Legal Process Overview:** Educate the public about the legal process, explaining the significance of each stage of the trial and the importance of the presumption of innocence.
- **Judicial System Integrity:** Highlight the importance of maintaining the integrity of the judicial system and the role responsible media coverage plays in this.

Protecting Minors: Why Confidentiality Matters

- **Legal and Ethical Obligations:** Prosecutors are bound by confidentiality laws that prevent them from disclosing the identities of minors involved in legal proceedings. These laws are designed to protect the privacy and future prospects of young individuals who may be victims, witnesses, or defendants. Even if a minor's identity becomes known through other sources, reporters should refrain from publishing or broadcasting this information.
- **Balancing Public Interest and Privacy:** While the public has a legitimate interest in understanding the workings of the justice system, this must be balanced against the need to protect minors. Confidentiality ensures that the justice system can operate fairly and justly.



RESPECTING LEGAL BOUNDARIES

Confidential Information: Do not disclose information that is confidential or not part of the public record. This includes details from sealed documents or private communications.

Gag Orders and Court Directives: Journalists must adhere to gag orders or other court directives which restrict the dissemination of certain information to protect the integrity of the trial. Violating these orders can result in being held in contempt of court.

Defamation Risks: In the context of pre-trial publicity, irresponsible reporting can lead to defamation lawsuits if it damages the reputation of the defendant, witnesses, or other parties involved. To avoid defamation, journalists must adhere to legal standards of accuracy and fairness. This includes verifying facts, providing balanced coverage, and avoiding sensationalism or speculation.

APPENDICES

The appendices provide valuable resources to support your office's media relations efforts. This section includes a glossary of media terms, offering clear definitions of common media-related terms that your team may encounter in their work. Understanding these terms is essential for effective communication with the media and for navigating the complexities of media relations.

Glossary of Media Terms

Attribution: The process of identifying the source of information or a quote in a news story. Proper attribution is essential for credibility and transparency in journalism.

Background: Information provided to a journalist that is not for direct publication but helps the reporter understand the context of a story. Background information may be used to inform the reporter's analysis without being directly quoted.

Beat: A specific area of news coverage assigned to a reporter, such as crime, politics, or education. A reporter who covers legal affairs or law enforcement may be said to work the "legal beat" or "crime beat."

Boilerplate: A standardized text that provides a brief description of an organization, often included at the end of press releases. Boilerplates provide consistent information about the organization's mission, history, and key functions.

Byline: The name of the journalist who wrote the article, typically placed at the beginning of a news story. The byline gives credit to the author and helps readers identify who is responsible for the content.

Circulation: The number of copies a newspaper or magazine distributes on an average day. Circulation figures are used to gauge the reach of print media and determine advertising rates.

Copy: The text of a news story, article, or press release. In the context of media relations, "copy" refers to the written content that is submitted for publication or broadcast.

Dateline: The line at the beginning of a news story that indicates the location where the story was reported. The dateline helps readers understand the geographical context of the news.

Embargo: A request to the media to withhold publication or broadcasting of information until a specified date and time. Embargoes are often used to coordinate the release of important announcements or reports.

Exclusive: A story that is given to one media outlet on the condition that it will not be shared with others before publication. Exclusives are often used to build strong relationships with specific journalists or media outlets.

Fact Sheet: A document that provides key information about an organization, event, or issue in a concise, easy-to-read format. Fact sheets are often distributed alongside press releases to provide journalists with additional context.

Feature: A type of news story that goes beyond the basic facts to explore a topic in greater depth. Features often include analysis, background information, and interviews, and are usually longer than standard news articles.

Flagging: The practice of drawing attention to a specific part of an interview or statement that the spokesperson wants to emphasize. Flagging helps ensure that key messages are highlighted and not overlooked by the reporter.

Freelancer: A journalist or writer who works independently and is not employed by a specific media outlet. Freelancers often pitch stories to multiple outlets and are paid per article or assignment.

Lead (or Lede): The opening paragraph of a news story, which summarizes the most important information. A strong lead captures the reader's attention and sets the tone for the rest of the article.

Media Advisory: A short notice sent to the media to inform them of an upcoming event, such as a press conference or public appearance. Media advisories provide essential details, such as the date, time, location, and purpose of the event.

News Cycle: The period during which a news story develops and is reported on by the media. In the digital age, the news cycle has shortened significantly, with updates often occurring in real-time.

Off the Record: Information provided to a journalist that cannot be published or attributed to the source. Off-the-record comments provide context or additional understanding to the reporter but cannot be quoted, published, or used in any way without the express permission of the source. This type of communication should be used sparingly due to the potential for misunderstanding.

On Background: Information provided to a journalist that may be used in the story but without attribution to a specific individual or source by name. Instead, the information might be attributed to a "senior official" or a "source familiar with the matter." While the journalist can use the details, the identity of the person providing the information remains confidential to the public.

On the Record: Information provided to a journalist that can be quoted and attributed to the source. On-the-record statements are the most common form of communication in media relations and are used in official statements and interviews.

Pitch: A proposal made to a journalist or media outlet suggesting a story idea. Effective pitches are tailored to the interests of the journalist and provide a compelling reason for covering the story.

Press Kit: A collection of materials provided to the media to support the coverage of a news story, event, or announcement. Press kits often include a press release, fact sheet, background information, photos, and contact details.

Press Release: An official statement issued by an organization to the media, announcing news or providing information on a specific topic. Press releases are a primary tool for communicating with the media and are written in a journalistic style.

Soundbite: A short, memorable quote or statement extracted from a longer interview or speech. Soundbites are often used in broadcast media to convey key points quickly and effectively.

Spin: A term used to describe the attempt to influence public perception by presenting information in a biased or favorable way. "Spin" is often seen in political communications, where messaging is carefully crafted to achieve a specific outcome.

Talking Points: Key messages or statements prepared in advance to guide a spokesperson during an interview or public appearance. Talking points ensure that the spokesperson stays on message and addresses important topics clearly.

Wire Service: A news agency that supplies news reports to multiple media outlets. Major wire services, such as the Associated Press (AP) or Reuters, distribute news stories to newspapers, television stations, and online platforms around the world.

Under Embargo: A term used to indicate that information is being shared with the media before the official release date, with the understanding that it will not be published until the embargo is lifted.

Visuals: Images, graphics, or video content that accompany a news story or press release. Visuals are important for enhancing the appeal of a story and making it more engaging for the audience.

White Paper: An authoritative report or guide that provides detailed information on a specific issue or topic. White papers are often used to present research findings, policy recommendations, or in-depth analysis.

*"If you can't explain it simply,
you don't understand it well enough."
Albert Einstein*

Legal References

Understanding the legal framework that governs media relations is essential for any prosecutor's office. This section provides an overview of key legal statutes and regulations that impact how your office interacts with the media. These references will help ensure that your office's communications are legally compliant, protect the rights of individuals involved in legal proceedings, and uphold the integrity of the justice system.

Key Legal Statutes and Regulations

First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

The First Amendment protects the freedom of speech, press, assembly, and the right to petition the government. It guarantees that the media can operate without government interference, which is a foundational principle for media relations in the United States.

Relevance to Media Relations: The First Amendment ensures that the press can report on matters of public interest, including legal proceedings, without undue restrictions. However, it also requires careful balancing with other legal considerations, such as the right to a fair trial and the protection of privacy.

Sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

The Sixth Amendment guarantees the right to a fair and public trial, the right to an impartial jury, the right to be informed of the charges, the right to confront witnesses, and the right to legal counsel.

Relevance to Media Relations: Media coverage of criminal trials must be balanced against the defendant's right to a fair trial. Publicity that could influence jurors or prejudice the trial must be managed carefully to avoid violating the Sixth Amendment rights of the accused.

Confidentiality and Privacy Laws

Federal laws like the Privacy Act of 1974 and HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) protect personal information and govern the collection, use, and

dissemination of this information. These laws establish rules for how personal data is handled and provide individuals with the right to access and correct their records.

Relevance to Media Relations: Prosecutors must ensure they do not release private or protected information to the media, particularly regarding victims, witnesses, or minors. Breaches of confidentiality can lead to legal repercussions and damage public trust.

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) - 5 U.S.C. § 552

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) provides the public with the right to request access to records from any federal agency. It is designed to promote transparency and accountability in government.

Relevance to Media Relations: Journalists frequently use FOIA to obtain information from government agencies, including prosecutor's offices. Understanding FOIA's requirements and exemptions is crucial for responding to media requests for information, while also protecting sensitive or confidential data.

Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure - Rule 6(e)

Rule 6(e) of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure addresses the secrecy of grand jury proceedings. It prohibits the disclosure of matters occurring before the grand jury, except as authorized by the court.

Relevance to Media Relations: Prosecutors must be extremely cautious when dealing with media inquiries related to cases that involve grand jury proceedings. Unauthorized disclosures can lead to legal consequences and undermine the integrity of the judicial process.

Libel, Defamation, and Slander Laws

These laws protect individuals from false public statements that could harm their reputations. Public officials, including prosecutors, have some leeway in making public comments, but they must avoid knowingly spreading falsehoods. The specifics of these laws vary by state, but guided by principles from *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*, 376 U.S. 254 (1964).

Relevance to Media Relations: Prosecutors should ensure that all public statements are truthful and well-founded to avoid potential defamation lawsuits. Misstatements that harm a person's reputation can lead to legal action and damage credibility.

Marcy's Law

Marcy's Law is a victims' rights law that exists in various forms across multiple states. It provides constitutional protections for crime victims, ensuring they have the right to be informed, present, and heard during criminal proceedings. Marcy's Law generally includes the right to privacy, the right to protection from the accused, and the right to refuse to disclose personal information.

Relevance to Media Relations: Prosecutors must ensure that media interactions respect victims' rights under Marcy's Law. This includes protecting victims' privacy, avoiding unnecessary disclosure of personal information, and consulting with victims before making public statements that could impact them. Violating these rights could lead to legal consequences and erode public trust in the prosecutorial office. Marcy's Law can impose limitations on what prosecutors disclose to the media to ensure victims are protected, emphasizing the need for careful consideration of what is shared publicly.

Juvenile Records Confidentiality

Juvenile court records and proceedings are often sealed to protect the privacy of minors. States have specific statutes regarding what information can be disclosed.

Relevance to Media Relations: Prosecutors must refrain from releasing any identifying information about juvenile offenders. Unauthorized disclosure of juvenile records can result in legal penalties and undermine public trust in the system.

State-Specific Public Records Laws

In addition to FOIA, each state has its own public records laws that govern access to state and local government records. These laws vary by state and provide different levels of access and exemptions.

Relevance to Media Relations: Prosecutors must be familiar with their state's public records laws when responding to media requests. Understanding what information can be disclosed and what must be withheld is crucial for complying with the law and protecting sensitive information.

The Crime Victims' Rights Act (CVRA) - 18 U.S.C. § 3771

The CVRA provides victims of federal crimes with specific rights, including the right to be reasonably protected from the accused, the right to be treated with fairness and respect for their dignity and privacy, and the right to be informed of court proceedings.

Relevance to Media Relations: When dealing with media inquiries involving crime victims, prosecutors must ensure that the victim's rights are upheld, particularly in terms of privacy and dignity. This may involve limiting the disclosure of certain details to protect the victims.

The Lanham Act (Trademark Act of 1946) - 15 U.S.C. § 1051 et seq.

The Lanham Act governs trademarks, service marks, and unfair competition. It protects the integrity of trademarks and prevents false advertising and misrepresentation in commerce.

Relevance to Media Relations: Prosecutors must be mindful of the Lanham Act when making public statements or providing information that could be construed as advertising or that could potentially involve trademarks. Ensuring that no misleading or false claims are made in official communications is critical. In cases where a prosecutor's office might engage in public awareness campaigns (e.g., anti-crime campaigns, public service announcements), it's important to ensure that all claims are truthful and not misleading. The Lanham Act could come into play if a third party accuses the prosecutor's office of unfairly competing or making false claims in such public-facing statements.

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