I. PURPOSE
A successful law enforcement agency has the support of the community. Establishing and maintaining effective relationships with the media is crucial to accomplishing this goal. The purpose of this document is to provide agencies with considerations when developing policies and procedures related to media relations and releasing public information to the community through the media.

II. POLICY
Agencies should develop a policy statement to briefly and concisely define the agency’s position on media relations and the release of information.

Sample: Cooperation with the media furthers this agency’s public safety mission. This agency shall release public information in a consistent, impartial, accurate, and timely manner and shall not release information that may jeopardize an active investigation, prejudice an accused person’s right to a fair trial, or violate any law or agency policy.

III. PROCEDURES
A. Agencies are encouraged to develop working relationships with media representatives on an ongoing basis. This may include holding regular meetings with media representatives to discuss issues of mutual interest and concern and any proposed or anticipated changes in agency policy or procedures for interacting with the media.

B. Prior to developing media relations policies and procedures, agencies should identify relevant stakeholders and their needs to determine what information should be released, which communication models should be used to release the information, and any specific procedures that should be implemented. Potential stakeholders include the following:

1. Members of the media, to include
   - print media (newspapers and magazines);
   - broadcast news/journalism (television and radio);
   - Internet media (online newspapers, articles, and magazines; news blogs; and podcasts); and
   - community member bloggers
2. Representatives of special interest groups
3. Community members
4. Elected officials

C. General Guidelines
When developing policies and procedures regarding media relations and the release of information, agencies should consider doing the following:
1. Designating personnel responsible for working with and releasing information to the media, herein referred to as the public information officer (PIO). This may include
   - developing guidelines for PIOs regarding
     o working with and releasing information to the media,
     o availability and on-call status,
     o responding to interview requests;
   - determining who is responsible for responding to media inquiries when the PIO is not on duty;
   - encouraging involvement in professional organizations, including law enforcement-media associations; and
   - incorporating media relations skills and training in standards for agency personnel, especially as they qualify for promotions.
2. Identifying personnel responsible for monitoring social media and encouraging them to work with the PIO to determine how information should be disseminated.
3. Establishing a standard operating procedure for news releases and adhering to these procedures even in major incidents.

4. Documenting how news releases will be written and disseminated, to include identifying
   - what incidents or events are of community interest or concern and necessitate a news release;
   - the platform or official channel by which the news release will be disseminated, such as the agency website or social media account(s);
   - who will receive news releases, such as the media and agency employees;
   - the review and approval procedure of news releases in advance of dissemination; and
   - procedures for coordination with the agency social media personnel.

5. Encouraging all agency personnel, including executives, to utilize established agency news dissemination channels and/or the agency’s coordinated communication strategy when releasing information. This should also pertain to information released on personal social media accounts.¹

6. Instructing all agency personnel on how to interact with media representatives. For instance, assuming all interactions are “on the record” and subject to being quoted.

7. Establishing guidelines for holding news conferences, to include
   - determining
     - which events or categories of events merit news conferences,
     - who should be notified if a news conference is held, and
     - who will facilitate the conference;
   - ensuring that news conferences do not take the place of more timely updates on social media; and
   - video and audio-recording all news conferences.

8. In the event of joint investigations or operations involving another agency, establishing policy guidelines that outline
   - which agency should be responsible for providing or coordinating the release of public information,
   - how the lead agency should share information with all involved agencies in advance of public dissemination, and
   - a coordinated communications plan in which involved agencies can re-share/repost lead agency news and information on social media platforms.

D. Information Release Guidelines

1. Agencies should only release public information and should establish guidelines regarding what information will be released to the public. This should take into account legal restrictions or obligations. Each agency should check for applicable public records and related laws or regulations to determine what information
   - must be released,
   - may be released at the agency’s discretion, and
   - cannot be released.²

2. Agencies should also consider whether the release of information could potentially hamper the successful conclusion of an investigation or jeopardize the safety of affected persons. For example, agencies should consider
   - permitting the release of the following information on a consistent basis, except as excluded by law,
     - the immediate facts and circumstances about a crime or incident;
     - basic information about victims;
     - a description of suspects;
     - a basic description of weapons and vehicles used;
     - a basic description of stolen items;
     - a basic description of injuries and condition of victims;
     - the name, age, address, and other basic information about arrestees and the charges against them;
     - the information contained in arrest affidavits and other applicable crime or incident reports; and
     - booking photographs;
   - prohibiting the release of the following, as governed by applicable law,

¹ For additional information regarding social media guidelines and procedures see the IACP Social Media documents available at https://www.theiacp.org/policycenter.
² For example, the release of public records and other information to the public is regulated in the United States by local, state, and federal laws.
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o names, addresses, and any other information that may identify victims of a sexual offense, child abuse, or any other crime where the privacy of the victim is protected;
o names, addresses, and basic information about juveniles;
o active criminal investigative information, active criminal intelligence information, and surveillance techniques;
o names of informants and information provided by them;
o grand jury testimony and proceedings;
o internal affairs investigations;
o names of witnesses;
o the identity of critically injured or deceased persons before next-of-kin notification;
o home address, telephone numbers, and familial information of law enforcement personnel;
o names of undercover personnel; and
o any other information prohibited from public disclosure; and

regulating the release of public records in compliance with applicable laws.

E. Incident Scenes
Agencies should develop procedures to be followed regarding media relations at incident scenes. This may include working with incident command to establish an appropriate perimeter and determining how interactions with the media should take place during an incident, to include addressing the following questions

1. How much access the media should have to the scene? This may include
   • clarifying that there may be no restrictions on photography or other newsgathering outside the established perimeter, and/or
   • granting media representatives and their equipment closer access as long as they do not interfere with law enforcement operations.
2. To what extent media representatives are allowed to access dangerous areas on their own volition after adequate warnings?
3. How other stakeholders at the scene, such as elected officials, will be managed?
4. Who will be responsible for releasing information to the media at incident scenes?
5. Whether a media briefing area should be established, and how close this area may be established to the scene considering safety and operational requirements?
6. How much information should be released to the media to ensure that live broadcasts do not disclose any information that could endanger law enforcement personnel or the general public, including determining
   • whether to create or implement live coverage agreements to establish voluntary guidelines for the broadcast of live pictures or information emanating from critical incident scenes, and
   • whether to permit live coverage of special situations?

F. Media Ride-Alongs
Guidelines and procedures should be established regarding media ride-alongs. For example, agencies should

1. draft a media ride-along waiver and release forms covering liabilities and setting out expectations; and
2. consider any prohibitions, such as those related to
   • members of the media accompanying officers onto private property or into private homes; and/or
   • officers being prohibited from assisting members of the media in gaining permission for access from property owners.

G. Ethics
Agencies should consider providing personnel with guidance on interacting with the media in a professional, ethical manner. This may include what employees should do if they encounter media personnel who do not follow the ethical guidelines established by their profession.

H. Media Credentials
Guidelines should be developed to distinguish media representatives from the general public, consistent with applicable laws or regulations.

I. Alternative Methods to Disseminate Information
Agencies should consider alternative methods of disseminating information directly to the community—and by acting as a media source. These may include among others

1. social media,
2. community newsletters,

See the IACP Policy Center documents on Social Media available at https://www.theiacp.org/resources/policy-center-resource/social-media.
3. government access cable television shows,
4. websites,
5. public appearances by agency personnel,
6. public area bulletin boards, and
7. podcasts.

J. Training
Agencies should provide training for all personnel, especially those designated to work with the media, so that they are aware of key issues, including risks and benefits, involved with any media interaction. This training may be provided on an initial and ongoing basis and may include instruction on

1. writing,
2. public speaking,
3. media relations, and
4. open records guidelines and other applicable laws governing the release of information.

Every effort has been made to ensure that this document incorporates the most current information and contemporary professional judgment on this issue. Readers outside of the United States should note that, while this document promotes procedures reflective of a democratic society, its legal basis follows United States Supreme Court rulings and other federal laws and statutes.

Law enforcement administrators should be cautioned that each law enforcement agency operates in a unique environment of court rulings, state laws, local ordinances, regulations, judicial and administrative decisions and collective bargaining agreements that must be considered, and should therefore consult its legal advisor before implementing any policy.

This document is not intended to be a national standard.