

## **GSA ORDER**

SUBJECT: Contact with News Media

1. Purpose. This Order outlines the procedures General Services Administration (GSA) employees will use when interacting with representatives of the news media in their official capacities.

2. Background.

a. In October 1991, the authority to conduct media relations on behalf of GSA was stated in GSA Order OHR P 5440.1, GSA Organization Manual -- Ch. 15, OCSC, as delegated to the Office of Citizen Services and Communications (OCSC). This authority included the provision of information on GSA activities to the media as well as agency customers, stakeholders, and the public, with OCSC serving as the official point of contact for press inquiries.

b. In May 2010, through GSA Order ADM 5440.627, Changes in GSA Organization (OCSC), GSA divided OCSC into the Office of Citizens Services and Innovative Technologies (OCSIT) and the Office of Communications and Marketing (OCM), which, through its Public Affairs Division, maintained the authorities, functions, positions, and other resources to continue its media relations function.

c. In August 2016, through GSA Order ADM 5440.706, Changes in the Office of Communications and Marketing, GSA reorganized OCM into the Office of Strategic Communication (OSC), which included a Media Affairs Division that maintained all the authorities, functions, positions, and other resources as OCM's Public Affairs Division.

d. In November 2018, through GSA Order ADM 5450.39D CHGE 11, Delegations of Authority Manual, Chapter 10, Office of Strategic Communication, GSA delegated to OSC the authority to issue press releases, official communications, speak on behalf of the agency, and review and approve all official statements and talking points of significant agency policy.

### 3. Scope and Applicability.

a. This Order sets forth policy governing the release of public information from GSA to the news media. The term “news media” is generally defined as individuals and organizations that publish or broadcast information to targeted or general audiences and will be determined by OSC. “Public Information” is defined as official information in any form provided to news media, especially information that has the potential to generate significant media or public interest or inquiry. Examples include but are not limited to the following:

- (1) Press statements,
- (2) Press releases,
- (3) Media advisories,
- (4) News features,
- (5) Blog postings,
- (6) Official social media updates and postings (whether made through an official GSA social media account or in an official capacity per OSC Directive 2106.2, GSA Social Media Policy),
- (7) Interviews with a member of the news media (formal or informal), and
- (8) Any public information communicated (whether on the record, on background, or off the record) by a GSA employee while serving in their official capacity to a member of the news media.

Not included under this definition are publicly released agency reports and plans, web postings of publicly-releasable information through GSA’s official web presence regarding routine business (not making news breaking announcements), and scientific information including that presented at professional meetings or in professional journals.

b. Contact with the news media is an integral and ongoing part of the overall GSA effort to communicate its mission activities to the public and earn confidence in agency activities. Before employees (and contractors, as applicable) speak to or correspond with the news media on topics within their areas of expertise, all news media contacts must first be coordinated and approved by the OSC Media Affairs team and any other appropriate representative designated by OSC.

Any GSA employee in Central Office who receives a request from a member of the news media should immediately contact OSC by emailing the request or information about the request to [press@gsa.gov](mailto:press@gsa.gov). Similarly, any GSA employee in a regional office who receives a request from a member of the news media should immediately contact the regional public affairs officer, who will coordinate the response and alert the Central Office OSC media affairs team at [press@gsa.gov](mailto:press@gsa.gov) as needed.

c. The procedures in this Order are intended to ensure a well-coordinated, accurate, and timely release of information on GSA's projects, programs, priorities, and activities.

d. This Order does not authorize or require disclosure of information that is exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. § 552) or otherwise restricted by statute, regulation, Executive Order, or other Executive Branch policy or GSA Orders. Examples of information not releasable under this Order include:

- (1) Information, without limitation, that is or is marked as classified information,
- (2) Controlled Unclassified Information (e.g., procurement sensitive information, trade secrets, and proprietary information)
- (3) Sensitive building information,
- (4) Attorney-client communication,
- (5) Privacy Act protected information, and
- (6) Pre-decisional information.

e. This Order applies to all GSA Services, Staff Offices, and Regions. This Order does not apply to the Office of Inspector General and the Civilian Board of Contract Appeals, except as delineated below:

(1) GSA contractors must adhere to the applicable contractual provisions and regulations when speaking concerning GSA services, and must adhere to this *Contact with News Media* Directive as set out in the applicable GSA contracts or when representing or speaking on behalf of GSA as part of their GSA-related duties.

(2) This Order also applies to the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to the extent that the OIG determines it is consistent with the OIG's independent authority under the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App. 3) and does not conflict with other OIG policies or the OIG mission.

(3) This Order applies to the Civilian Board of Contract Appeals (CBCA) only to the extent that it is consistent with the CBCA's requisite independence as defined by the Contract Disputes Act (CDA) and its legislative history. 41 U.S.C. §§ 7101-7109 (2012) and S. Rep. No. 95-1118 (1978).

4. Roles and Responsibilities. These roles are assigned to the organizations and positions identified to ensure effective implementation and timely management of GSA's relationship with the news media.

a. OSC. OSC is responsible for developing, coordinating, planning, and directing an

integrated agency-wide communications program, ensuring that GSA's communications are consistent with the goals and objectives of the agency and the Administrator. In OSC:

(1) The OSC Associate Administrator or designee will determine which public information will be issued by GSA.

(2) The Press Secretary, as designated by the OSC Associate Administrator, serves as the agency's primary spokesperson and news media relations manager, taking the lead in reviewing and expediting potential public information through the GSA clearance process, liaising between GSA subject matter experts or the GSA Administrator and news media representatives, and planning and coordinating public affairs events, pitches, and projects to share with the public information about the agency, its programs, and policies.

(3) In the Regions, the OSC public affairs officers serve as their respective regions' primary spokespersons and media relations managers, submitting for clearance to the Press Secretary in Central Office in a timely manner any news media requests or public information submissions that pertain to administration-wide policies, are from a national outlet, or are determined to have the potential to generate significant media or public interest or inquiry.

b. GSA Employees. All GSA employees (and contractors, as applicable) are required to coordinate in a timely and reasonable manner with the designated OSC point of contact (who will be identified to them after the employee forwards the media contact information to [press@gsa.gov](mailto:press@gsa.gov)). GSA employees (and contractors, as applicable) coordinate with the designated OSC point of contact on any media request or public information submission prior to the release of information to ensure that information to be released is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Administrator, Agency, and the Administration and appropriate for the intended audience. Only after approval from the appropriate OSC point of contact -- or the Administrator or someone acting on the Administrator's behalf -- can information be released to the news media. Employees authorized to speak with the media will limit discussions to pre-approved topics and talking points, avoid personal opinions, and will not speculate or respond to hypothetical questions or questions about the actions of other agencies, customers, partners, or stakeholders. Spokespersons will not divulge classified information, restricted contracting and financial information, personal information protected by the Privacy Act of 1974, or information restricted due to ongoing litigation.

c. Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs (OCIA). OCIA will coordinate with OSC regarding the disclosure of information regarding public policy and legislative interests.

d. Whistleblower Protection. These provisions are consistent with and do not supersede, conflict with, or otherwise alter the employee obligations, rights, or liabilities created by existing statute or Executive order relating to: (1) classified information, (2) communications to Congress, (3) the reporting to an Inspector General of a violation of any law, rule, or regulation, or mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, an abuse of authority, or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety, or (4) any other whistleblower protection. The definitions, requirements, obligations, rights, sanctions, and liabilities created by controlling Executive orders and statutory provisions are incorporated into this agreement and are controlling.

e. Labor Management Relations Responsibilities. Implementation of this Order with respect to employees represented by a labor organization is contingent upon completion of appropriate labor relations obligations.

5. Signature.

/S/ \_\_\_\_\_  
MARK M. MCHALE  
Associate Administrator  
Office of Strategic Communication