

# United States Department of the Interior

## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Montana State Office

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EMAIL TRANSMISSION – 10/16/14

Instruction Memorandum No. MT-2015-004

Expires: 9/30/2016

To: All Montana/Dakotas Employees

From: Chief, Office of Communications

Subject: Working Effectively with the Office of Communications

**Program Area:** All program areas

**Purpose:** This Instruction Memorandum (IM) brings awareness to communication tools that can help you be more effective as stewards of public land resources in the Montana/Dakotas. Because our multiple-use and sustained yield mission is complex, we must be proactive and deliver professional, accurate, and timely responses to address both internal and external needs and inquiries.

**Policy/Action:** The BLM Montana/Dakotas strives to provide an appropriate and consistent message to all our diverse publics. There are myriad ways to prepare for and conduct professional outreach. Please see the following guidance for a number of communication topics:

*Public Outreach:* Some form of outreach should be prepared and included when activities impact our interested publics. This is likely needed in all but the most routine internal activities. A communications plan – or talking points at a minimum – can help define issues and opportunities to help us speak in one voice. It also provides structure for needed outreach actions and delegates responsibility for achieving them.

*Media Relations:* Most people form their impressions of the BLM through the media. Managers should be proactive with the media whenever possible and constantly strive to build and maintain positive working relationships with members of the media. District Public Affairs Specialists (PAS) should coordinate with the Office of Communications (OC) before responding to state- or bureau-wide issues.

Interviews with reporters should be conducted by the person who is conversant on an issue but not bureaucratic; friendly, open, and candid; and can forthrightly deliver key messages, explain our work/actions, and correct or clarify misinformation without sounding defensive. A PAS or manager can act as a third party supporting the employee being interviewed. He/she can also attempt to guide the interview in a favorable direction, or supply additional information that may have been overlooked. Pre-interview advice and media liaison training is also available from your PAS and OC.

When social media, an opinion-editorial, or letter to the editor is considered, District/Field Offices should coordinate the proposed message with their PAS or OC to ensure consistency with state and national bureau policy, and to avoid conflict with other BLM actions occurring elsewhere in our three-state area. Op-eds must be approved by Washington Office (WO) Public Affairs through the OC chief.

Inquiries received from the news media should be coordinated as follows:

**District and Field Offices:** Realize that in today's real-time environment, media deadlines have never been shorter. To better prepare for an inquiry, District/Field Managers should include the District PAS in all communications as appropriate to ensure awareness of the issues. Unless the District/Field Manager directs otherwise, coordinate a response with the District PAS and program leads to ensure a timely and appropriate response.

**Montana State Office and BiFO:** Coordinate with the OC staff.

Report all media contacts to your District PAS and/or the OC chief using the following format:

**Reporter:**

**Representing:**

**Date:**

**Telephone:**

**E-mail:**

**Topic:**

**Questions:**

**Response:**

**Publish date:**

**Story angle:**

*Congressional Relations:* District/Field Managers are encouraged to establish good working relationships with local congressional staffers. This includes providing them with advance briefings on major issues, including current planning initiatives. OC will coordinate responses to congressional inquiries that are addressed to the State Director after consultation with District/Field Offices or program leads. The intent is to coordinate responses so that our message is consistent and reflects a state- or bureau-wide position. For further guidance on working with our Congressional delegations, as well as on State Legislature/Touhy requests, see [IM No. WO-2014-143](#).

*News Releases:* District/Field Office news releases (wildland fire incidents excepted) must be sent through OC for approval by the WO Public Affairs division chief. Prior to issuing, news releases will include the appropriate graphic header and BLM standard closing paragraph. If you are asking for public comment, the standard Privacy Act language must also be included. More information can be found at the following link: <http://web.blm.gov/internal/wo-500/directives/dir-13/im2013-048.html>. Please check with your PAS/OC regarding specific language must also be included when the topic is about coal lease modifications.

*Web Clips:* Each Field Office is responsible for monitoring the media in its area. Any item that may be of interest to the BLM but is not available online should be scanned and sent to OC as soon as possible. OC will compile, distribute by e-mail, and post online at <http://web.mt.blm.gov/staff/Websters/SD/ea/web.clips/index.htm>.

*Federal Register Notices:* District PASs are available to assist staff in the development of *Federal Register* notices and ensure notices are in the proper format prior to the surnaming process. Once surnamed, notices must be sent through OC to either the WO through the Bureau's Data Tracking System (DTS) or the *Federal Register*, which is determined by their status as non-exempt or exempt. Your non-

exempt notice may be tracked in DTS or contact OC for details. Those who develop and process *Federal Register* notices are encouraged to take training available on DOI Learn. For more information about processing *Federal Register* notices, go to <http://web.blm.gov/wo600/regulations/federal.php>. The Montana/Dakotas Standard Operating Procedures may be found at [http://web.mt.blm.gov/staff/Websters/SD/CommInternalWeb/Internal\\_Website/Documents/FRN\\_SOP\\_1.3.12.pdf](http://web.mt.blm.gov/staff/Websters/SD/CommInternalWeb/Internal_Website/Documents/FRN_SOP_1.3.12.pdf).

*Monthly Public Affairs Teleconference Call:* At 9 a.m., the first Thursday of every month, OC conducts conference calls with the District PASs to discuss current events and exchange information relevant to public affairs. PASs should make every effort to attend each call, and others are always welcome to participate. Contact the OC chief at (406) 896-5260 for details.

*Weekly Report:* The Weekly Report outlines key activities, schedules, and media events for the coming weeks. You are encouraged to work with your District PAS to submit your weekly highlights to OC, which will in turn forward a compiled report to the WO by close of business on Thursdays. Please note whether meetings are open to the media. As with all communication materials sent to OC, the appropriate program lead and manager review should have been obtained prior to submission.

*The Steward and Feature Stories:* The OC printing specialist coordinates the production and distribution of a biannual newsletter, which is posted online and also printed for external distribution. Feature stories showcasing the people and places of the Montana/Dakotas organization can be viewed on the internal website and may be submitted to the WO for use on The BLM Daily and DOI OneInterior. All BLM employees are invited to share your stories and are encouraged to coordinate with your District PAS or printing specialist to do so.

*Briefing Papers:* Internal briefing papers, or informational memorandums, are reviewed by the appropriate manager, then distributed and posted at [http://web.mt.blm.gov/staff/Websters/SD/CommInternalWeb/Internal\\_Website/Documents/CommLibrary.html](http://web.mt.blm.gov/staff/Websters/SD/CommInternalWeb/Internal_Website/Documents/CommLibrary.html). These documents are generally written for internal distribution only. Authors should ensure these documents are kept current as the issues evolve and work with their District PAS or OC to make revisions and re-post.

*Annual Report:* At the end of each calendar year, OC calls for statistics from the previous fiscal year. The most frequently requested data is compiled, printed, and distributed as our Annual Report and may be viewed online at <http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/info/newsroom.html>.

*Templates:* Templates for briefing papers, fact sheet and blank graphic headers, early alerts, VIP scheduling requests, Powerpoint presentations, etc. can be found on OC's internal website at <http://web.mt.blm.gov/staff/Websters/SD/CommInternalWeb/index2.html>. National BLM design standards and downloads, such as business card templates, are also available for your use and can be found at <http://web.blm.gov/wo600/pubresources/overview.php>.

*External Web and Social Media:* Working through your Web staff and PAS is the best way to maintain an effective Website and social media presence. If you have an idea for a video, please engage your PAS, who will then work with OC to develop a professional end product. For the external web, please see [IM No. MT-2013-011, change 1](#).

*Photographs:* Please share your high-resolution photos, including basic metadata, with your PAS and/or OC for featuring in new media and print applications. When taking photos of minors, please protect yourself and the Bureau by using the photo release form found on the OC internal web site (under Important Links) at <http://web.mt.blm.gov/staff/Websters/SD/CommInternalWeb/index2.html>.

*Printing Needs:* If you have printing needs, please review [IM No. MT-2015-003, BLM Montana/Dakotas Publication Procedures](#) and contact the State Printing Specialist with questions. Remember that Form 1550-8, found at <http://web.mt.blm.gov/staff/Websters/SD/CommInternalWeb/index2.html> under Publications & Brochures, is required before initiating a project.

*Copyrights:* When using music in your video, remember that giving credit at the end of a video only protects a person or organization from being a plagiarist, it doesn't protect from copyright infringement. Please keep the following information on copyrights in mind when developing any publication, video, or other creative work. Remember that government works, which include original works created by a government agency, are not eligible for copyright protection.

Asserting copyright privileges over photographs taken using official time or using government equipment constitutes an abuse of one's office. The same holds true if personal equipment is used on official time. Any photographs, reports, databases, inventions, or intellectual reports developed or created using official time as a result of the expenditure of appropriated funds, e.g., one's salary, are the property of the Government.

**Timeframe:** Immediately

**Budget Impact:** Minimal

**Background:** Your PAS and OC staffs are here to help create effective outreach programs and products that will reflect positively on BLM Montana/Dakotas. OC welcomes and encourages Division and BiFO requests for support, as well as those from District/Field Offices should your PAS or their back-up be unavailable. The following are additional resources that may be helpful:

- [http://web.mt.blm.gov/staff/Websters/SD/oc\\_handout\\_092012.pdf](http://web.mt.blm.gov/staff/Websters/SD/oc_handout_092012.pdf)
- [http://web.mt.blm.gov/staff/Websters/SD/CommInternalWeb/Internal\\_Website/Documents/HowToUsePublicAffairs.pdf](http://web.mt.blm.gov/staff/Websters/SD/CommInternalWeb/Internal_Website/Documents/HowToUsePublicAffairs.pdf)

**Manual/Handbook Sections Affected:** None

**Coordination:** This IM was coordinated with District Public Affairs Specialists.

**Contact:** Chief, Office of Communications (406) 896-5260

Signed by:  
Melodie A. Lloyd  
Chief

Authenticated by:  
Ann Boucher (MT912)