STATE OF ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION **Policy and Procedures**	DIVISION: **Commissioner's Office**	**Page 1 of 6**
SUBJECT: **Communications and Media Protocol**	APPROVED BY: **Becky Hultberg, Commissioner**	DATED: **January 1, 2013**

Purpose:

This document has three purposes:

1) to outline procedures and clarify protocol for DOA media relations;
2) to clarify the procedures for notification of DOA Commissioner's Office personnel on situations that have generated or may generate public interest; and,
3) to manage internal communication, maximize the dissemination of accurate information, streamline decision-making, reinforce appropriate internal protocols and promote consistency in department messaging.

Background:

The Department of Administration's (DOA) mission is to provide centralized administrative services to support the State of Alaska. In fulfilling this mission, communication plays a significant role, whether it is through the media, speaking to community groups, to legislators or through other venues.

Management of media and public relations is critical to provide an efficient, broad and effective avenue for communicating with DOA stakeholders. It is advantageous to maintain open communication with stakeholders through the media about our work/mission. Through effective media relations, the department can educate and inform stakeholders about issues and the provision of DOA services. The media cannot carry out these functions without our consistent and efficient cooperation.

Recognizing that circumstances not covered in this document may arise, department staff should adhere to the philosophy and guidelines outlined here as closely as possible.

**Note when the following are used in this policy/procedure, contact is:

Deputy Commissioner/Legislative Liaison – Curtis Thayer, curtis.thayer@alaska.gov, 269-5795 or 465-5671

Special Assistant/Communications Coordinator – Andy Mills, andy.mills@alaska.gov, 465-1176

PROCEDURES FOR DOA COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA RELATIONS

OVERVIEW

It is DOA policy that the Office of the Commissioner coordinates communication and media relations, with input from division personnel, on:

- responses to the media, the offices of the Governor and Lieutenant Governor, the Legislature, and other departments and agencies;
- designation of spokespersons;
- preparation of news releases and other materials;
- strategies for proactive media relations; and,
- management of ongoing media relations.

This includes:

- crisis or unplanned external events;
- arranging interviews with DOA spokesperson(s);
- proactive media relations in pitching news stories or opinion pieces;
- providing background information and situation status updates to media;
- working with DOA staff to prepare key messages and develop news releases and other public information materials; and,
- coordinating information release with other involved departments.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION PROTOCOL

Transmission of timely and accurate information to and among key DOA staff is crucial. We need to keep each other informed of situations and issues. Although elements in the chain of command (see attached flow chart) should generally not be skipped, timeliness of the situation may warrant certain actions. When necessary, the Division Director or designee should promptly notify the Commissioner's Office with recommended actions or steps to be taken so that it can be evaluated and reassigned.

When media contact is made or when a situation occurs that might draw media attention, the following steps should be taken:

1. **Initial Notification**: This may occur from a wide variety of sources within or from outside of DOA. Notify your supervisor if you are aware an issue is developing or has become critical.
2. **Verification/Evaluation**: The Division Director should verify the report or subject including those coming as a result of a media inquiry, so as not to propagate a rumor that may later prove to be false.
3. **Commissioner Notification**: When necessary, the information should be provided to the Commissioner's Office with a recommendation, especially if there has been media interest or there is likely to be media interest. Media inquiries should be passed on via a

Report of Contact form, available on the DOA intranet. In notifying the Commissioner's Office, you may inform the Commissioner's Office via email or phone about the event, media inquiry or pending media inquiry. However be sure to confirm that the message has been received by the appropriate person so quick action can be taken to respond to the inquiry.

4. **Strategize**: The Division Director and, when necessary, the Commissioner's Office will determine the appropriate media spokesperson, anticipate questions, coach the spokesperson on key messages, and involve other staff, such as subject matter experts, as necessary.
5. **Dissemination**: The Division Director or designee will initiate the communication process, following the flow chart below.

Division Directors will:

- coordinate public communications with the DOA Special Assistant/Communications Coordinator;
- approve all division-related media releases before the Commissioner reviews them;
- if designated, act as spokesperson for broad policy issues, or designate a spokesperson for the subject at hand;
- inform the Commissioner's Office on all issues and situations – including those that may or may not be initiated by, or communicated to/through, the media – immediately upon learning of a problem, opportunity or issue about which the Commissioner should be aware;
- exercise their own discretion about the significance of a request. Routine, procedural inquiries may not require Commissioner's Office notification;
- ensure that media inquiries emailed to staff be forwarded immediately, without response, to supervisors;
- educate staff who may be contacted by media on how to be helpful with incoming media calls, but not engage reporters on specific questions or inquiries. In accordance with the media contact flow chart below, staff should be trained to note the following:
    - ✓ reporter's name, media outlet, phone number;
    - ✓ information needed; and,
    - ✓ the deadline to provide the information or conduct the interview.

  The reporter should be informed that someone from the department will get back to him/her within a short period of time (60 minutes is reasonable, unless the reporter is on deadline).

Commissioner's Office/Division Director will:

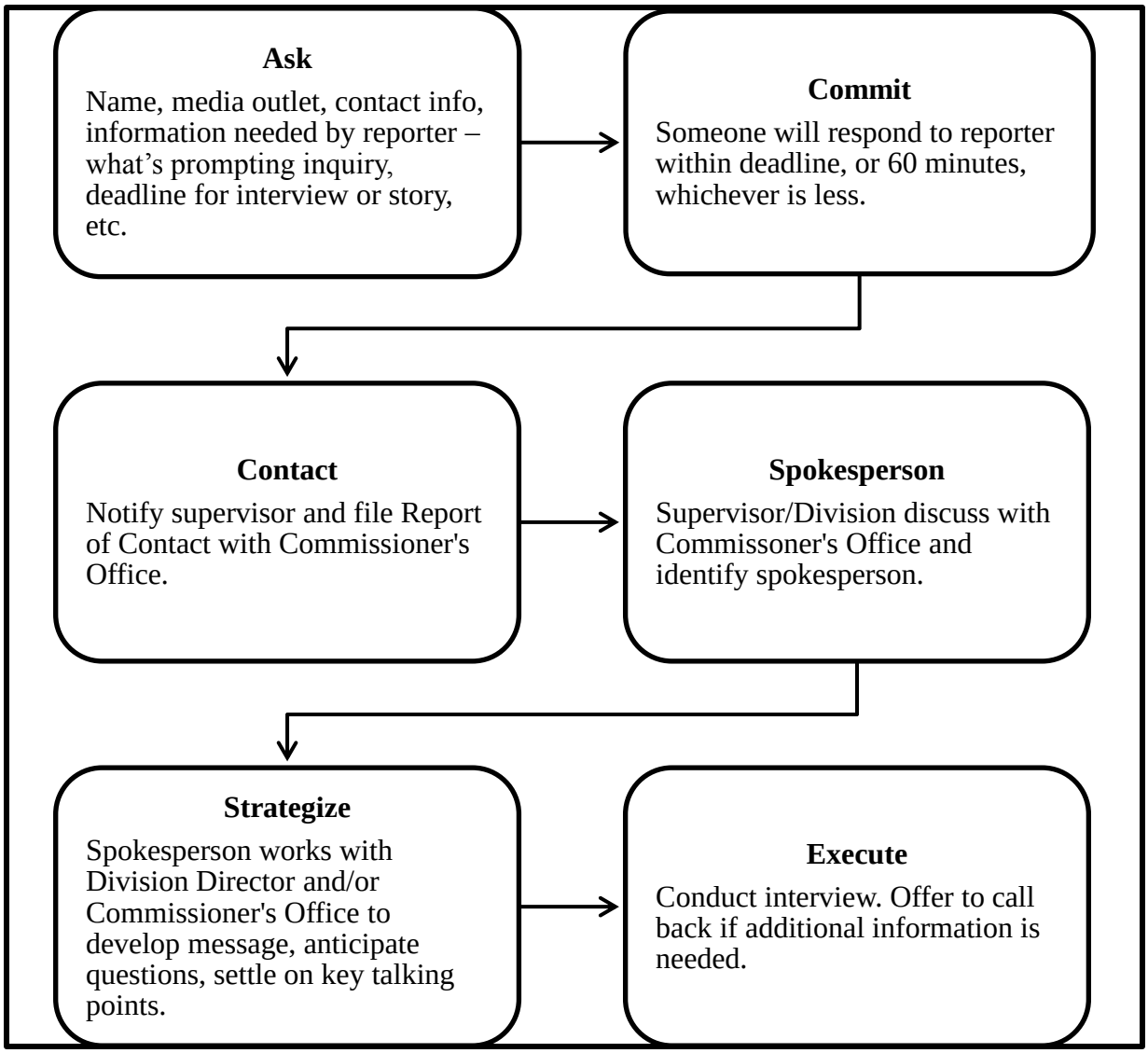
- evaluate the situation to determine the extent of involvement needed from other department staff and/or Governor's Office;
- determine spokesperson(s); and,
- discuss response and interview strategy.

Spokesperson will:

- participate in media interviews and press conferences as a DOA representative;
- be available within the reporter's deadline;
- note that reporters appreciate our commitment to accuracy and honesty. Everything is on the record. "Off the record" does not exist;
- keep comments informational and only about matters of which the spokesperson has personal knowledge. Matters of department policy, philosophy, intent for the future of the department, budget plans, etc., must be answered by someone designated by the Commissioner's Office staff and/or the Division Director;
- give only the facts and offer to follow up with the other information after the interview. never make something up, hedge on information or tell a half-truth;
- never say "no comment";
- not interject opinions when representing the department;
- offer to follow-up on any questions that require additional information.

FLOW CHART FOR ENCOUNTERING THE MEDIA

Reporter Calls



Commissioner's Office order of contact:

1. Andy Mills: 465-1176, andy.mills@alaska.gov
2. Curtis Thayer: 269-5795 or 465-5671, curtis.thayer@alaska.gov
3. Mike Barnhill: 465-5668, mike.barnhilll@alaska.gov
4. Becky Hultberg: 465-5670, becky.hultberg@alaska.gov

EXTERNAL/ PROACTIVE MEDIA RELATIONS PROTOCOL

Proactive media contacts occur in the following ways:

- division staff have news to share and will draft a news release, or suggest a story idea or interview opportunity;
- the division may want to author an opinion piece for local or statewide media;
- a national story has a local angle, and a reporter will contact staff with an inquiry; and,
- another external force (report, survey, research, etc.) will require a division response, and a reporter will contact department employees with an inquiry.

News Releases, Pitching Stories, Initiating Interviews

In all cases, department communications staff will initiate contacts with the media. Employees with story ideas or those serving as spokespersons will work with and through the Commissioner's Office.

If an employee, as a representative of the department, wishes to submit a letter to the editor or an opinion piece to a publication, the letter must be reviewed and approved by the department Special Assistant before the letter is submitted for publication.

While all news releases are issued by the Special Assistant, other department staff may suggest or draft news releases or prepare other information. Final releases must be approved by, and issued from, the Commissioner's Office.

Presentations to Community Groups

In all cases, staff presentations to business or community groups must be approved by the Division Director, in consultation with the Commissioner's Office when appropriate.

OTHER TYPES OF CONTACT

Governor's Office and Lieutenant Governor's Office

Staff from the Governor's and Lieutenant Governor's offices may directly contact Division Directors. Directors should use discretion when a situation warrants input from the Commissioner or Deputy Commissioners. If contacted directly, department staff should bring the inquiry to the attention of the Director immediately.

Legislature and Ombudsman

The Report of Contact form should be filled out immediately and sent to the Division Director and Deputy Commissioners.