

**DRAFT-MARCH 13, 2006**

**Ohio Commission on Hispanic / Latino Affairs**

**Media Policies**

**and**

**Guidelines**

**CONFIDENTIAL DRAFT  
March 1, 2006**

## **OCHLA Media Policies**

### **Introduction**

The Ohio Commission on Hispanic / Latino Affairs (OCHLA) recognizes the need to be prepared for media interest regarding a number of issues. Sometimes the media may call or arrive unannounced at OCHLA's offices or approach Commission members at public meetings or other events. The media may also call or visit any of the nine commissioners at their homes, workplaces or at local community meetings. The following information should help Commissioners handle such calls and visits successfully.

### **What OCHLA wants to achieve when working with the media**

OCHLA believes that maintaining an open, responsive, productive and long-term relationship with the media will benefit its reputation, help the organization achieve its goals and play a role in providing information to serve the state's Hispanics over the long term. OCHLA understands the role reporters play in communicating accurate information to the public and expects its Director, staff and all Commissioners to treat media representatives with respect and courtesy – regardless of whether the story they seek is positive or negative.

To ensure prompt responsiveness, accuracy of information and a good working relationship with the media, OCHLA developed the following policies and guidelines, which all Commissioners and staff members should observe when dealing with the media.

In every instance where OCHLA engages with the media, we want to:

- Enhance and protect the reputation, credibility and positive image of OCHLA and its Commissioners
- Speak with a single, consistent voice that is focused on OCHLA's mandate and charter
- Ensure that our point of view is represented accurately, candidly and in a timely manner
- Demonstrate the highest standards of honesty and ethics in every thing we do

### **OCHLA spokesperson protocols**

Only the Commission Chairperson and Executive Director are authorized to speak with the news media as official representatives of the Commission. From time-to-time, based on the topic and individual expertise, other Commissioners may be authorized to address the media in lieu of the Executive Director or Chair. This will be done only after consultation with and counseling from the Executive Director and Chairperson.

Individual Commissioners may be approached by the media for comment on an issue. If the Commissioner chooses, he or she may address the issue as an individual Commissioner, but not as the official spokesperson for the Commission itself. Official statements about the Commission or its policies can only come from the Executive Director or Chair of the Commission. If a Commissioner is planning to attend a meeting or other event where the media is expected to be present, it is suggested he or she contact the Executive Director and/or Chairperson for counseling and guidance regarding possible media interactions.

Any media contact by an individual Commissioner should be immediately reported, with a brief description of what the topic and what was said, to the Executive Director. The Executive Director will in turn provide notification and content of the interview to all other Commissioners.

When contacted directly by the news media, the Executive Director should consult the Chair of the Commission prior to making any public statement. For routine inquiries, where public facts or pre-determined statements have been previously authorized by the Chairperson, the Executive Director may respond directly to the media using those materials. If the Executive Director has any reason to believe the scope of the interview may expand beyond such pre-approved materials, he or she should consult with the Chairperson before engaging in the interview.

If a "routine" media interview expands into a new topic or issue that does not have pre-approved talking points, the Executive Director should not provide answers or provide speculative responses. He or she should politely decline to respond and promise to get back to the reporter with the most current and appropriate response. The Executive Director should then contact the Chair of the Commission for consultation and help to formulate the official response of the Commission.

All Commissioners should immediately be informed of any media interview with appropriate background information conducted by the Executive Director.

### **OCHLA Communications Committee**

A committee consisting of the Executive Director, Chairperson and other commissioners who possess specifically helpful training or skill sets (e.g., law degrees, accounting training, etc.), or who have a special interest in the issue (e.g., geographic, associations, etc.) may be formed to help address certain issues or topics. Such Communications Committees will be chaired by the Chairperson of the Commission. If and when established, such committees will formulate strategies, messaging, third-party alliances and other tactics to help ensure the most effective OCHLA responses are effected. The Governor's Liaison, Attorney General's contact and others as appropriate may be asked to join or contribute to such committees.

### **Maintaining media lists**

The Executive Director, with the assistance of all Commissioners, will maintain a complete, accurate and up-to-date data-base of media contacts including phone numbers, fax numbers, e-mail addresses and mailing addresses. This list should cover all major media across the state. This data base will facilitate quick action in the event that OCHLA has to disseminate information or follow up with a specific reporter.

Additionally, a contact list recording news media interactions should be maintained by the Executive Director. This list should include the date(s) of such contact, telephone call-back data (for correction purposes), the topic of conversation and any other relevant information to help guide future relationships with that individual and his or her organization.

### **Press Releases**

The Executive Director will oversee the preparation and distribution of press releases to the news media. The purpose of such releases will be to ensure a broad general awareness and understanding of events and information of interest to OCHLA constituencies. All such press

communications, including personal background calls and visits to the media, will be pre-approved by the Chairperson of the Commission and in conjunction with other Commissioners as appropriate.

### **Media monitoring**

Following an interview, the participant should monitor the news outlet involved to ensure the accuracy of the report. If obtainable, a copy of the report or article should be sent to the Executive Director for distribution to all Commissioners and evaluation.

If there are inaccuracies or errors in the report, the Executive Director, Chairperson and others involved should confer on whether a strategic response, if any, is necessary or appropriate.

### **Employee / Commissioner reviews**

These policies and protocols should be reviewed with all new employees and news Commissioners as they accept appointments to OCHLA. These materials should be reviewed periodically to remind all employees and Commissioners of the expectations placed on them when dealing with the news media.

## **OCHLA Media Guidelines**

### **Instructions for “entry points”**

Typically, secretaries, receptionists, switchboard operators or security personnel are the first to field inquiries from reporters, concerned citizens, regulators, or other visitors. It is important that the OCHLA office’s “entry point” handle such inquiries as efficiently and professionally as possible.

All OCHLA personnel who could be in a position to answer calls or inquiries should be trained on how to log calls and directed to contact the Executive Director or Chairperson if such a call is received.

Unless otherwise directed, these entry-point individuals should be instructed not to make statements on behalf of OCHLA. If pressed by the caller or visitor to make a statement, they should be instructed to say politely:

“I am not the appropriate person to comment on this situation. I would be happy to take your name and number and have the appropriate person call you back as soon as possible.”

In addition, entry-point individuals should remember to be:

- Be friendly and courteous
- Remember the camera or tape recorder may be rolling...so, don’t do or say anything he or she wouldn’t want broadcast or published.
- Find out why the reporter is calling.
- Get all appropriate contact data

- Establish the deadline the reporter is working under
- Set no expectations for a response if that is impossible, i.e., the Director is traveling, or unavailable until after the deadline passes
- Notify the Executive Director
- Absent the Executive Director, contact the Chairperson as quickly as possible

**Working with an uninvited / unexpected reporter**

The first several minutes of interaction between a reporter and an OCHLA Commissioner or employee can set the tone for coverage of the story. This is especially true in a negative situation. The media have a job to do, and OCHLA Commissioners should make a reasonable effort to be helpful. This will help ensure accuracy in the reporting and minimize the potential for damage OCHLA.

Although we do not want to place obstacles in the way of a reporter covering a story, we have a duty to ensure that any information we provide is accurate, non-inflammatory and free of speculation. If it is not an approved statement, or if it is not known to be a fact, don't say it. Care should be taken with "small talk" as that may ultimately appear as part of the story.

Remember: there is no such thing as "off the record." If you can't tolerate seeing it in print, or testifying to it in court...don't say it. Additionally, don't put it in an e-mail.

Being helpful does not mean it is appropriate to volunteer confidential, proprietary or speculative information. Statements made in an attempt to "comfort" a reporter should be avoided, as reporters may view them to be facts for inclusion in a story.

Help is available if the procedures outlined here are followed.

A Commissioner at home in his or her community, or attending a public meeting should be prepared for a media inquiry. The Commissioner is under no obligation to respond, or respond immediately to such an inquiry. The following guidelines should help manage such a situation:

- Don't say "no comment."
- Ask questions about the kind of story the reporter is working on and how the OCHLA fits into it.
- Let the reporter know that you understand his or her concern.
- Determine the reporter's deadline.
- You can tell them:
  - "I don't have the most recent information and don't want to speculate, let me take your contact data and have someone get back to you with the most recent data."
  - Or, "I'm not authorized to speak on the issue, let me get to our Executive Director or Chairperson who is in a better position to provide you current information"
  - Or, "I don't have expertise in the matter, but want to help you get help to complete an accurate story, but I will help you get in contact with the AG's office or with the Dept of Immigration to see if someone there can help."
- Agree on a time to get back to the reporter.
- Let him or her know that you will locate the appropriate person to respond...and ensure that a response follows as promised.
- Get contact information for a timely follow up.
- Contact the Executive Director and/or Chairperson for a discussion of strategy for handling the situation

Any Commissioner who has been designated to talk to the media must be clear and concise with the information to be delivered. Although the Commissioner will be briefed before an interview, the following should always be avoided during an interview:

- Don't feel forced to answer questions you don't know the answer to
- Don't be drawn into speculation.
- Don't hide information or attempt to mislead the media.
- Don't try to make jokes or display humor.
- Don't place blame on other organizations, political parties, etc.
- Don't lose your temper or composure.
- Don't be afraid to repeat your key messages.

Finally, remember that you are not expected to, and do not have to, answer every question. Some questions will be repeats, or attempts to get the desired response through another approach. It's perfectly OK to say you don't know the answer, and that you will find out and get back to the reporter (which you must do, even if only to say that an answer cannot be provided).

**When a photographer accompanies a reporter**

If the reporter is accompanied by a photographer, you do not have to allow pictures to be taken of you or of private or confidential property. If the photographer or videographer is on public property, such as a sidewalk, the street or a median strip, you cannot and should not interfere with his/her right to take pictures.

When informing a reporter that they are not welcome to take pictures be courteous at all times. Remember, the camera or tape recorder may be running. Do not say or do anything you cannot tolerate seeing in the headlines or broadcast through the media.

Additionally, citizens have a right to free speech. Do not attempt to interfere with a reporter talking to a meeting attendee, even if you disagree with what is being said. Note the inaccuracies and errors and work with the Executive Director and/or Chair to formulate a strategy for follow up if any is appropriate.