



POLICY DIRECTIVE

Policy:	DOC 1.1.16 PUBLIC COMMUNICATION
Effective Date:	05/18/2012 Page 1 of 3
Revision Date(s):	08/27/2021; 04/24/2026
Signature/Title:	/s/ Eric Strauss, Director

I. POLICY

It is the policy of the Department to promote public trust and enhance accountability and openness through providing the public with access to the Department's records and responding to public requests for services in an expeditious and professional manner.

II. APPLICABILITY

All divisions, facilities, and programs Department-owned and contracted, as specified in contract.

III. DEFINITIONS (see Glossary)

IV. REQUIREMENTS

A. General Requirements

1. The Department strives to provide resolution to public communication requests or comments within a 30-day period; however, additional time may be required to complete the following:
 - a. clarify public statements or requests;
 - b. locate and assemble requested information;
 - c. notify persons affected; or
 - d. determine possible exemptions from disclosure.
2. A division administrator is expected to collaborate with subject matter experts or consult within the chain of command when responding to public communication requests or comments that may result in an escalating situation.
3. A division administrator is required to adhere to the following requirements:
 - a. maintain receipt and response records pertaining to public communication; and
 - b. ensure consistency and accuracy of statistical information released, the Department Communications Director must be contacted prior to the release of applicable information.
4. The Department will maintain informative relationships with the news media and will release information to representatives in accordance with *DOC 1.1.8 Media Relations*.
5. If communication subject to the requirements set forth in *DOC 3.3.3 Offender Grievance Program* conflicts with requirements set forth in this policy, the Offender Grievance Program will take precedence.
6. The Department will support and assist in corrections research efforts of other government entities, academic institutions, and foundations by providing data and information to the extent possible. Research efforts must not compromise the security of Department facilities, programs, staff, and offenders.

B. Public Comments

1. Comments submitted by requestors electronically, by mail, or by telephone will be addressed by the Department using standard methods that encourage positive communication, enhance Department responsiveness to public concerns, and increase transparency.
2. Division administrators are responsible for investigating circumstances alleged in submitted comments and responding to comments in ways that do not require inclusion of information related to the following:
 - a. confidential personnel matters;
 - b. the security of an institution; or
 - c. violation of any citizen's right to privacy.

C. Requests for Public Information

1. The Department will adhere to applicable state statutes and administrative rules governing the release of Department records.
2. When release of public information will result in reproduction costs, the responding division administrator will determine the appropriate costs for reproduction and will notify the requestor of costs in advance.
3. Department Legal Services will analyze requests for information and identify exempt and nonexempt material prior to release.
4. If any requested record that is determined to be exempt contains any material that is not exempt, nonexempt material will be separated, copied, and forwarded to the requestor.
5. Requests to receive records may be granted, denied, or granted in part.
 - a. If a request is denied, the Department will issue a written response that includes an explanation for appeal and specific reasons for denial including citations to applicable legal authority.
6. The Department may deny a request for records when it would be unduly burdensome to comply. However, prior to denial, a Department representative will confer with the requestor in an attempt to narrow the request to more manageable proportions.
7. Non-production of records due to the fact that a good faith search by the Department does not produce the requested documents is not a denial of access.

D. Research Activities

1. The Department Communications Director will establish specific criteria for the review of research proposals submitted by outside entities. Those criteria are:
 - a. the Department will consider the results of all Department-related research projects to be within the public domain;
 - b. when proposals are likely to interfere with Department programs, the Department Communications Director may advise the requesting entity to alter elements that may negatively impact programs. in which case approval may be contingent upon minimizing any negative program effects;
 - c. research requests will not be approved if the research data is unavailable to the Department, unless the requesting entity gathers and processes all such data;
 - d. research requests that directly involve increased Department expenditures without benefit to the Department will not be approved;
 - e. Department employees may not receive compensation, remuneration, or payment of any kind beyond their normal salaries for participating or assisting in any research project;
 - f. the Department Director will serve as the final decision-maker regarding Department participation in any research effort; and

- g. if Department participation in a research effort is denied, a letter describing the reasons for denial will be provided to the requestor within 30 days of the decision.

V. CLOSING

Questions about this policy should be directed to the Department Communications Director.

VI. REFERENCES

- A. *Montana Constitution, Article II, Section 9*
- B. *Chapter 2, Title 6, Public Records, MCA*
- C. *DOC 1.1.8 Media Relations; DOC 3.3.3 Offender Grievance Program*