

EPA'S OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

OFFICE SUMMARY:

The Office of Public Affairs (OPA) is the primary office for all U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) internal and external communications. The Associate Administrator for Public Affairs (AA OPA) serves as the principal advisor to the Administrator on all issues concerning short-term and long-term strategic communications. **The Associate Administrator is assisted by the Principal Deputy Associate Administrator (PDAA) for OPA, the agency's senior career communications official.**

OPA is charged with facilitating the exchange of information and broadly communicating EPA's mission with the media, public, Tribes, and other stakeholders. OPA works hand-in-hand with the Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs and the Office of Public Engagement and Environmental Education to communicate with the public about agency actions and programs. **OPA also coordinates closely with the Communications Directors in the HQ program offices and the regional Public Affairs Directors to facilitate coordination and collaboration.**

OPA:

- Serves as the agency's lead for official agency announcements, press releases, media advisories, statements, speeches, and other documents of public interest.
- In coordination with the Administrator's Office, national program offices, and the regions, plans, develops, and executes communications strategies for major agency actions and programs.
- Serves as the national lead for media inquiries and overall coordination with the national media.
- Serves as the agencywide point of contact for the planning and management of the EPA's public web and internal web content along with the agency's social media presence.
- Lead content developer for EPA's national social media accounts including @EPAgov, EPA's Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram along with accounts associated with the current EPA Administrator.
- Manages requests for new social media accounts to ensure they are properly created and managed with records schedules and terms of service agreements.
- Serves as the lead for risk communications across the agency ensuring the public makes informed, independent judgements about risks to their health, safety, and the environment using science-based information.
- Works closely with the Office of Mission Support and the Administrator and Deputy Administrator to craft and distribute internal communications.
- Serves as the agencywide point of contact for the planning, developing, and reviewing of all agency print, promotional, display, audiovisual and broadcast products intended for the public.

- Coordinates with the Office of Emergency Management—the agency's lead for external messaging for emergency response activities, including implementation of the agency's Crisis Communications Plan.
- Directs agency multilingual, Limited English Proficiency (LEP), outreach and communications efforts as it relates to posting content on the public website, social media, and press releases in LEP languages.
- Serves as the agencywide point of contact for the public query management tool being implemented to manage responses to inquiries received by EPA.
- Prepares speeches for the Administrator and Deputy Administrator.
- Coordinates press and digital coverage for rollout events, travel, and local engagements for the Administrator and Deputy Administrator.

OPA includes:

- OPA's Immediate Office (including the AA's Office): Various appointees (non-career), including the Associate Administrator, Deputy Associate Administrator, Press Secretary, Speechwriter, Digital Strategists, and other staff; and 4 career staff including the Principal Deputy Associate Administrator. Political appointees and career staff in the IO work closely with the following OPA Offices:
 - Office of Media Relations and Risk Communications (OMRRC): 9 career staff that includes 2 senior advisors for risk communications, a team of experienced career press professionals, and administrative support. OMRRC is led by the Acting Director of OMRRC who collaborates closely with political leadership (including the AA, the Deputy AA, and the Press Secretary) and the PDAA. This office coordinates most frequently with the Press Secretary and senior political leadership (AA/DAA) on rollout planning, incoming press inquiries, media training, and event coverage.
 - Office of Multimedia (OM): 9 career staff that includes videographers, A/V techs, a graphics artist and the official EPA photographer. This office coordinates most frequently with the Administrator's engagement/scheduling team, digital strategists, and senior political leadership (AA/DAA).
 - Office of Digital Communications (ODC): 14 career staff that includes a Director and Deputy Director who oversee social media management across the agency, public website management across the agency, multilingual web oversight, internal website management across the agency, senior leader mass mailers and agency newsletter activities. This office coordinates most frequently with digital strategies, speechwriter, and senior political leadership (AA/DAA).

BACKGROUND:

- Annually, OMRRC issues over 400 press releases and media advisories out of headquarters, supports over 1,300 regional press releases and media advisories, responds to over 3,200 media inquiries; and provides essential coordination to EPA's national program offices and regional offices in their efforts to respond to members of the media.
- Through broadcasting, webcasting, photography, and graphics, OM helps keep EPA staff and the general public informed on the latest agency activities and messages. Annually, OM oversees more than 200 audio-visual productions (including livestreams, audiovisual event support and produced multimedia content), 500 graphics and print productions, 2,800 event photographs, and 60 portraits. As part of the product review process administered through PROTRAC, OM reviews and approves more than 170 projects (audiovisual, print and novelty items) every year from programs and regions. OM also manages its cybersecurity protocols as a Macintosh-based system, responding to between 50 and 120 POA&Ms (Plan of Action and Milestones) for cybersecurity remediation each year.
- In terms of digital media, OPA receives over 310 million views annually on www.epa.gov pages and posts over 100 unique EPA homepage banners. EPA's social media accounts published nearly 30,000 posts across all platforms, for a total of over 50 million impressions and 650,000 engagements. Internally, OPA posts annually over 200 intranet banners; issues 48 issues of a weekly e-newsletter - *This Week @ EPA* - with over 300 articles and 55 employee profiles; and sends more than 160 agencywide employee messages from senior leaders such as the EPA Administrator, Deputy Administrator, and Principal Deputy Associate Administrators.
- Risk communication is focused explicitly on providing EPA's audiences with the information they need to make informed, independent judgements about risks to their health, safety, and the environment. Risk communications work is divided between **programmatic activities** (training, supporting research and Agency infrastructure) and more traditional **senior advising activities**. *(Please also reference the AO OPA Risk Communications Transition Paper for more details about risk communication activities at EPA.)*

KEY EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS:

- | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Congress | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> States | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tribes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Media | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other |
| Federal Agencies | | | | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NGOS | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local Governments | | | | |

MOVING FORWARD:

EPA Public Website Management

- EPA's Office of Mission Support (OMS) and ODC will continue working together to update the agency's public website policies and procedures to ensure all content on the website complies with the [U.S. Web Design System](#) standards and [21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act](#).

The ODC and OMS offices also co-lead the Public Web Council, which is charged with proposing and voting on EPA specific guidance and directives governing the external web environment.

- The ODC team will continue partnering with OEX to adopt a tool tailored to assist offices with receiving, managing, and responding to public queries. The tool tracks queries throughout the response process and allows for analytics on agency response completion and greater accountability for staff charged with responding to the public. The system also has the potential to provide insight to possible areas of public concern, allowing the agency to be more proactive with identifying and responding to potential communication concerns.

EPA Intranet Modernization

- OPA will continue overseeing the adoption and development of the EPA's intranet environment, which transitioned to Drupal as the enterprise intranet content management system in 2021. As part of EPA's Intranet Modernization Project, OPA and OMS work together to ensure federal and agency web policies and procedures are met and all standards aim to improve the digital experience for employees and bring the environment into compliance with [U.S. Web Design System](#) standards and the [21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act](#) requirements.

EPA Social Media

- ODC will continue providing guidance and strategic direction for the agency's social media presence. This includes overseeing and managing policies related to social media platforms, the agency's social media presence and all nationally applicable processes and procedures. It will also continue managing national social media accounts and multiple agency-specific guidance documents that provide direction to regional and program offices so that they can independently manage their social media accounts.

EPA HQ Engagement with the media

- OMRRRC will continue to work across the agency to build and foster relationships with reporters, respond to media inquiries coming into HQ, and coordinate closely with EPA's national program offices and 10 regional offices.
- OMRRRC will continue to develop strategies for improving media trainings for subject matter experts, including trainings on how to effectively communicate risk. The goal of training current and new subject matter experts and communications professionals is to not only improve the quality of interviews conducted but also to increase the number of interviews that the agency can accommodate.
- OMRRRC will continue to ensure that responses to the media take into account principals of effective risk communications and are structured in a way that is most responsive to the questions at hand.
- OMRRRC will continue to leverage resources such as GovDelivery and other resources to ensure that press releases and media advisories that come out of HQs are streamlined and that there are easy ways to track who receives our outputs.
- OMRRRC will continue tracking clips and press trends to help inform communications plans and strategies.

EPA Risk Communication

- In the past year, OMRRRC developed a scientifically grounded risk communication training platform. In this ongoing work:
 - OMRRRC will continue focusing on risk communication training, expanding access to a broader circle of the EPA staff and the agency's state, tribal, local, and federal partners.
 - OMRRRC will increase the agency's reliance on best practices through the implementation of many of the products currently under development.
 - OMRRRC will increase its academic partnerships to better understand the EPA's audiences and bring more proven practices into practice faster.
 - OMRRRC will continue expanding the size of its dedicated risk communication staff to manage what amounts to a fundamental culture change at the agency.

(Please also reference the AO OPA Risk Communications Transition Paper for more details about risk communication activities at EPA.)

EPA Multimedia

- In support of the Administrator and the senior leadership team, OM will pursue:
 - Infrastructure upgrades for the lighting grid in the OM studios.
 - Audio sound system upgrades in the Rachel Carson Room located at the EPA headquarters facilities. OM will conduct the research and testing, facilitate the procurement, installation, management and maintenance of the new equipment.
 - HVAC modifications in the OM control room and master control spaces.
 - OM incurs recurring expenses for cybersecurity requirements, to include annual cybersecurity assessments, and monitoring and auditing software. OM is seeking potential contractor assistance through OMS to support remediation of cybersecurity POA&Ms (Plan of Action and Milestones) that are incurred annually following automated and manual cybersecurity evaluations.
 - Increased support for agencywide events, including affinity month events.
 - OM supports national program offices and regions on video/photo shoots and multimedia production (example: graphics for social media or print products) through both in-house resources and contract production teams.

LEAD OFFICE/REGION: OPA/R1

OTHER KEY OFFICES/REGIONS: ALL NPMS & REGIONS

There are Communications Directors in all NPMs and Public Affairs Directors in all 10 regional offices. OPA coordinates closely with the Lead Region for the AO on all appropriate matters.