



Navy Public Affairs Guide for Ombudsmen



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Dear Ombudsmen,

If you picked up this guide, a loved one is affiliated with the Navy in some form or fashion. We are grateful for them and for your dedicated support of their chosen career.

One way to support your Sailor is to recognize the importance of sharing the Navy story. You have likely heard that family readiness equals warfighting readiness, and we hope you believe that as strongly as we do. Without strong, capable families, our men and women cannot be prepared to do what they must to defend our nation and further our objectives abroad.

Because families are such a big part of the Navy's story, it makes sense to get to know each other a bit better than perhaps we do; to work more closely than we may already in order to better tell that story.

This guide is an introduction to Navy Public Affairs that we hope begins an in-depth discussion of how we can work together, and deepens an already robust partnership. Some of it will discuss the Public Affairs-Ombudsman relationship, while other parts are geared to help you as a liaison to family members. We will present best practices and a few rules of the road, and let both the ombudsman and the command know what they should expect of the Public Affairs Team when we work together to share the Navy story.

This product is the first of its kind, so we hope this is a useful tool and appreciate you sharing your feedback with the PAO who shared this guide with you. Welcome to the Navy Communication team. Thank you for your service.

With the utmost respect,

Navy Public Affairs

The Ombudsman's Role in Communication

When we talk about sharing the Navy story, we talk about families in general. But where does the ombudsman fit into Navy communication, exactly?

The Ombudsman Handbook states ombudsmen are volunteers appointed by the commanding officer to serve as an information link (http://www.cnmc.navy.mil/content/dam/cnmc/hq/pdfs/n91_fleet_and_family_support_program/ombudsman_program/OmbudsmanTrainingMaterialsProgramManual.pdf) between the command leadership and command families. Ombudsmen are trained to disseminate information — official Department of the Navy and command information, command climate issues, local quality of life improvement opportunities, and “good deals” around the community. They also provide resource referrals when needed and are instrumental in resolving family issues before they require extensive command attention. The command Ombudsman Program is shaped by the commanding officer’s needs. The ombudsman works for the commanding officer, who determines the priorities of the program, the roles and relationships of its participants, and the types and levels of support it receives.

Your job description is a lot like ours – support the objectives of the commanding officer through effective, appropriate communication. The best way you can help us is by serving as a liaison and:

Providing feedback on how PA products are received by families.

Keeping your ear to the ground, and bringing it to the PA team’s attention if you hear of family members participating in media events, such as reality shows. While family members have no legal obligation to inform the Navy of their participation in a reality show or similar productions, it is a professional courtesy. We need to be prepared to answer questions from the media if they arise.

Assisting the PA team in identifying appropriate individuals who might be willing to do an interview, when media request a family interview or a family voice is needed for command-produced blogs or social media sites.

Sharing information about family events (command-sponsored and non-command-sponsored) with the PA team prior to the events. We may be able to assist you. Your command-appointed liaison may also forward this information to us when appropriate, depending on your command structure.

In addition to your role as a liaison, you may be asked to serve as a subject matter expert for a news media interview, or to provide a quote for use in a press release or blog produced by the PA team. We will talk more about the news media later in this guide, but rest assured you will be well prepared and protected if you do interact with them.

Meet the Navy Public Affairs Team

Public Affairs (PA) professionals work with both the command and communication leaders in the Pentagon to clearly describe the Navy's roles and actions to the public.

Governed by Secretary of the Navy Instruction 5720.44C, PA professionals facilitate open, timely and uninhibited access to public information, except where restricted by law, security classification, or privacy statutes; and communicate information about Navy and Marine Corps programs, activities, missions, and responsibilities to both external and internal U.S audiences as well as international and host-nation populations. PA professionals also protect the privacy of those who use or request information, act as liaisons to the news media without interfering with the reporting process, advise the commander, and promote positive relations between the command and the local community.

Through any and all avenues, the Navy's communication philosophy is based on the following fundamentals:

It is our responsibility to continually and accurately communicate with the public, providing context to enhance their understanding of issues of the day. We accept this responsibility to explain ourselves to the people we defend.

We value and prioritize our relationships with reporters, editors, producers, and other media members who enable us to share the Navy story.

Credibility is our cornerstone – we tell the truth.

Time is of the essence, but we always communicate deliberately.

Words matter – we choose them carefully.

Operational security is maintained at all times.

The Navy is always on duty, and so are its PA professionals.

If you are thinking “wait a minute, ombudsmen are expected to be familiar with Navy and Marine Corps programs in order to use them as referral resources,” then you already see why we are so excited to work more closely with you! We share many communication goals, and we can reach them more effectively by working together.

The PA professional you work most with at your command may, or may not, be a uniformed service member. Like ombudsmen, our team members have varied backgrounds. Whether they wear uniforms or civilian clothes, junior or senior, all members of the Public Affairs team are eager to share the Navy story with our families.

How Public Affairs Supports Ombudsmen

Wondering what exactly the PA team can do, or nervous about approaching us with your request?

First and foremost, remember that we are here to share the Navy story, and you are part of that story – our doors are always open. We most commonly work with ombudsmen when we:

Facilitate or support speaking opportunities	Many Navy spouses are high-powered professionals, or influential community members active in local organizations. It is not unusual for Navy spouses to receive requests to speak about their lives, which often includes a discussion of how they balance the demands of supporting their Sailor's career and their own interests. We are happy to provide talking points, videos, photos, and other materials for any family member who may speak about the Navy experience as part of a PTA meeting, children's career day, or other non-political public events.
Field embark requests	All requests to embark a Navy ship, plane or other tactical vehicle, or to tour a command, should be forwarded to the PA team.
Support Ombudsman Assemblies	Because Ombudsman Assemblies are attended by the commander or a representative, as well as chaplains and other Navy leaders, they are considered official functions. We are happy to speak briefly or photograph when our operational commitments permit.
Provide training to ombudsmen and families	Family member briefings on how to interact with the news media and responsible social media use should be a standard element of pre-deployment family readiness group activities. If your families need or want training on other related topics, we may be able to assist.
Facilitate news media interaction when appropriate	PAOs have a working relationship with the news media, and can provide advice on how to share the Navy story without sharing information that could lead to the inappropriate release of privacy, classified or other sensitive information about Sailors or families. PAOs can help family member protect their privacy, while allowing the news media to report the story.
Gain clearance and escort news media	PA clearance and escort is required for news media visits to a Navy installation regardless of the purpose of their visit, with no exceptions. Several reporters covering military issues are or were military spouses. Do not make the mistake of ever believing a reporter is attending your event in a "spouse only" capacity – while that may be the initial intention, if they hear something interesting at the event, the reporter hat is quickly donned. Inform the PA office if you believe a reporter will attend an ombudsman event in any capacity, and we will reach out and determine how we can best support them.
Photograph command-sponsored events	Photographers may cover command-sponsored events in an official capacity as operational commitments allow. A command-sponsored event is one that includes both Sailors and their families, and is hosted or otherwise endorsed by the commander.

A portion of Navy Ombudsman training is dedicated to the discussion of allowable expenses and the reimbursement process of approved expenditures incurred in carrying out your duties. Like you, we must also operate within a few parameters. Please be mindful that:

We are not personal photographers, and cannot support ombudsmen- or family-only events that are not command sponsored. Some commands have cameras available for check out to take photographs of family events. There may be a photographer in the family crowd who would like to take photos and release them with photo credit. Don't be alarmed if the PA team consults the JAG (military lawyer) about supporting a photography request - with the allocation of military resources under ever-increasing scrutiny, we must always be able to justify why we support an event.

Please do not approach the PA team with requests for production support; the budget for production of business cards and similar materials comes from the commanding officer or their designated representative.

If we are occasionally slow to respond, your patience is appreciated - emergent operational matters quickly can take center stage and wreak havoc with scheduled meetings. Our relationship with you and the families you serve is extremely important, but operational needs of the command are of primary importance when allocating resources, including time.

News Media

One of the PA team's roles is effectively and appropriately interact with the news media, as well as train subject matter experts to engage with them.

Merriam-Webster describes "media" as "a medium of cultivation, conveyance, or expression." Dictionary.com defines "media" as "the means of communication that influence people widely;" the singular, "medium" is described as "an intervening substance through which a force acts or an effect is produced." These definitions are broad – "media" is no longer synonymous with "newspaper." In the modern communication environment, "media" can mean community publications, local vigilante blogs, social media websites, university-sponsored newsletters, student-run video channels, regional radio, trade magazines, national television affiliates, or international outlets. Stories are told in video, infographics, photographs, sound bytes, written stories, and in social media blasts of 140 characters or less.

News is an extremely competitive business, and reporters go to great lengths to "get the story" before their competitors do. Military families often become the center of news media attention as reporters produce local and national stories. Sailors and their families can be the best (sometimes the only) local ties to news stories about global and national events. Their individual stories are often the best way to tell the military's story, good or bad.

When it makes sense to share a family story through traditional news media, we will take every opportunity to do so. The PAO will likely ask you to participate in an interview, or for your assistance finding another suitable interviewee. As the ombudsman, you are already vetted and have the full faith and confidence of the commander, as well as basic training and the credibility to make statements about the families at the command.

If you feel nervous at the thought of speaking to a journalist, first, take a deep breath and relax. Reporters are not out to get you. They respect your position as an ombudsman, and are well aware you do not make policy or formulate procedures. Besides, being rude to the ombudsman would be among the quickest ways for a reporter to sour their relationship with a command!

We will talk about types of interviews and walk through the interview process shortly, but there are a few fundamentals that are applicable to every situation:

- Never engage the news media on your own, suggest a story to a reporter, or comment on the command or families without the authorization and guidance of the CO or PAO. You are not an official Navy spokesperson, nor do you have access to information that determines whether or not we choose to aggressively publicize any particular story. On a more personal note, as mentioned earlier, a PAO can facilitate an interview and help you protect your privacy. Finally, your job is to support the command; your commander will want the PAO involved to ensure the story is reported accurately and consistently.
- If you are ever approached by a reporter, no matter how casually, do not answer any questions – refer them to the PA office. Refrain from saying "no comment," which can be construed as an attributable quote. Next, inform the PA office you were approached and provide details such as the name of the reporter and outlet, time and location, and any questions the reporter asked. They can take it from there and reach out to the reporter.

- Please remember the news media does a job vital to democracy. It is not harassment if they initially call your home or stop you at the supermarket to ask for an interview. It is harassment if they infringe on your privacy or persist after being referred to the PA office. Your home is your property. No one, reporter or otherwise, has a "right" to enter your home or be on your property unless you grant them that privilege.
- What you choose to share is entirely up to you. You have the ability and opportunity to end an interview at any time, if for any reason you feel that your privacy is being infringed upon. Be conservative, because once you grant an interview, you have in a sense opened the door to others who also wish to speak with you.
- Before the interview begins the PAO will make it clear to the reporter that privacy is of the utmost concern. To protect your privacy, the PAO may ask you whether you want to use your full name, only a first name, or a pseudonym. While it is acceptable to mention that you do or do not have children do not discuss them with a reporter. In the same way that children are not included in official Navy biographies, for their and your protection, they should be kept away from the media, as well. Refrain from mentioning your address.
- You are a valuable subject matter expert because the media would like to share your experience and perspective as an ombudsman and family member. Do not offer your opinion on policy, or speculate. Some of what you have learned from your spouse could be incorrect, sensitive, or subject to change. If a technical viewpoint or comment on policy is desired, those experts will be approached separately.
- Explain concepts, programs, initiatives, and operational developments clearly and in simple language. This is a challenge for the military community, and in government in general. Michael McCurry, President Clinton's former press secretary and a veteran of more than 30 years in Washington, goes so far as to note that one of the biggest mistakes federal leaders make when communicating with the American public is using acronyms, abbreviations, or vocabulary that are not understood by the audience. We want people to understand what we are doing and how – that is the point of engaging the media.

You may be asked participate in an interview for a command-produced product, or with a reporter for a newspaper, blog, radio or TV show:

- **Interview for a command-produced product.**
This is the easiest type of interview because the command has full control over the final product. You may speak to the PA professional preparing the story in person, on the phone, or over email. Instead of a formal interview, you may be asked to provide a quote, or approve a quote that is drafted for you.
- **Interviews for an externally produced product.**
You may ask a PAO help you prepare for and to facilitate the interview. Like an interview for a command-produced product, you may speak to the reporter in, person, on the phone or over email. Or, you may never speak to the reporter at all, but work with the PAO to draft a quote. Your name is used, and information provided in the interview is attributable to you.
- **Off the Record.**
Remember when speaking with a reporter, nothing is truly ever off the record.

The interview process itself is relatively straight forward:

- You will meet with the PAO a few minutes before the scheduled interview time.
- The PAO will address any last minute questions or concerns you may have, and ensure you are comfortably settled in the interview location. If it is a phone interview, the PAO may review details such as when they will mute the phone.
- It is customary for the PAO to call the reporter at the designated time; if an in-person interview, the PAO will walk out to meet the reporter and escort them to the designated location.
- Once everyone is ready, the PAO will review ground rules such as how long the interview can last, the topics for discussion and the process for submitting follow-up questions.

During the interview, stay relaxed and talk to the reporter as you would with any other person. If you misspeak or say something in error, the PAO can clear it up with the reporter later – try not to be nervous or flustered, and simply move along with the discussion. Remember, the reporter is not out to get you.

News outlets now strive to be on as many platforms as possible, at the same time, which means print journalists also snap photos and produce blog entries, newspapers run in-house television stations, and many traditional outlets employ social media specialists, to cite a few examples. Your message must be as multi-dimensional and easy to translate as possible, because it will be shared and it may go viral. Be mindful of the fact that “viral” means you can never be entirely certain who you are talking to, or where a product will end up.

After the interview, the PAO will follow up to make sure the reporter got the needed information, answer any additional questions, and confirm the expected publication or run date.

The PAO will also be sure to get you a copy. What’s the best thing to do with the piece?

Share it on social media, of course! More about that in the next section...

Social Media

My command is currently deployed and the collateral duty PAO asked me to help with the command Facebook page. What do I do now?

When ships or units are deployed, they have less bandwidth, or no connection at all, which makes it difficult or impossible to update social media sites. Having someone shore side help by uploading photos, video, or even just status updates can be extremely helpful. We recommend that you talk to the public affairs office or senior enlisted advisor before the command deploys and discuss this possibility. Ask the public affairs officer for training before he or she departs in case they need your support. If the command is already deployed and you need immediate assistance with a social media platform that you are unfamiliar with, you can reach out to the Navy Media Content Services team at any time at 703-614-9154 or navymedia@navy.mil.

Eager to connect with other Ombudsmen?

Ombudsmen registered in the official Ombudsman Registry at www.ombudsmanregistry.org can request access to a Facebook group for Navy Ombudsmen that currently includes nearly 900 active participants in everything from discussions on OPSEC to webinars explaining resources and benefits. To join the group, log onto Facebook and search for “U.S. Navy Ombudsman Program Discussion Group.” You will need to submit a request to join the group and be approved by the administrator prior to gaining access.

“Social media” describes the different means by which people, enabled by digital communication technologies, connect with one another to share information and engage in conversations on topics of mutual interest. Social media is an umbrella term describing a variety of communication mediums and platforms, social networking being the most well-known of them. As a result, people now get information from more places than ever, fueling a desire to have real conversations with other people and organizations. While specific mediums, platforms and technologies may change over time, the overall trend of people connecting with each other will continue to increase, presenting a tremendous opportunity for commands to be able to better communicate with their Sailors, their families, and their country.

Ombudsmen report they interact with Navy families, sometimes on a daily basis or even multiple times a day through social media. Your social media presences are where you will share content that is publicly released.

You and the command can consider a number of options to support family readiness through social media. Based on our experience and observations, we recommend commands have a single presence on any given social media platform, with the ombudsman actively participating. Facebook and Twitter are the platforms we recommend because those are the communities the most families are active in, and the platforms incoming Ombudsmen are familiar with. If the command is unable to support an on-going presence on a social media platform, we recommend they do not create one. It’s better not to have one, than to have one and abandon it later.

Ultimately, it is up to you and your command to determine which social media platform is the best fit for how you need to communicate with your families. Keep in mind that by its very nature, social media is viral, so it is easy to post information in one place and for it to quickly spread to your command’s extended family. A well-coordinated command social media presence with active participation from you alongside command leadership, presents a cohesive and supportive environment that leads to stronger family readiness. Also, remember people want to communicate with one another. Your families can and

will create their own social media presences if the command does not have one in place. It is in your best interest and the command's to lead the way by providing an online presence for your families.

We have found that the following are vital to any environment you choose to engage families:

- **Command leadership participation**

Command leadership participation is essential to the success of a social media presence. Family members see command social media use as a direct and open line of communication to both the ombudsman and command leadership.

- **Audience connection**

It is tempting to create a social media presence for specific groups or audiences. However, it is more effective to have one central location for families and Sailors at the command. In some cases you and the command will determine it is beneficial to have both a command and a family readiness group presence, but you should cross promote each other's presences and keep the number to a minimum to avoid confusion.

- **Discussion sharing**

Social media is most valuable when members of a community engage in discussions, share resources, and network. As the ombudsman, you are in an excellent position to encourage discussion on the command and family readiness group presences. People will be honest, ask questions, and at times, may express frustration. This feedback enables the command leadership and you to effectively address family concerns. More often than not, we have seen overwhelmingly supportive Navy families on social media — especially when there is an active and responsive administrator.

Operational Security

OPSEC should be the #1 concern of anyone communicating through a social media site in an official capacity, or even in an unofficial one.

Remember!

Even if you are using a private or closed social media site, such as an invitation-only Facebook group, you should still refrain from disclosing any sensitive information. While the group may appear secure, there is no true way to verify the security of a third-party site or your Web connection. Save sensitive discussions for an appropriate forum, such as your next in-person meeting.

Not sure how to safely use social media? Pause before you post, and you will be just fine. For example:

Instead of saying that you are proud of your Sailor, a member of XYZ unit, at ABC camp, in TUV city in overseas, say that your Sailor is deployed in overseas.

Instead of saying that you can't wait for your daughter, aboard XYZ ship, to call you when she reaches ABC city/country in X number of days, simply state that she is stationed aboard the ship.

Instead of saying that your family is back in Union, Kansas, share simply that you are from the Midwest.

When posting to social media as an ombudsman or educating families about safe social media use, remember the following:

- NOTHING online (including e-mail) is fully secure. Closed groups may appear to be a safe place to communicate with designated families and Sailors, but they can be hacked, monitored or otherwise breached.
- Keep sensitive information safe. Do not discuss sensitive information, such as ship or unit scheduled movements; locations, including underway or return times; information about military capacity and weapons; personnel rosters; or anything else that may compromise the personal privacy of our Sailors and their families or bring harm to them.
- Limit the amount of detailed information you post on social media about yourself, your Sailors and their activities. You never know who is watching and collecting information that can be used to harm you or your family.
- Set and regularly check security settings. Social media platforms regularly change their security features and settings – sometimes even updating yours to more public settings with each new feature. Remember, just because you are not “friends” with someone or they don’t “follow” you, does not mean they can’t see your profile and posts.
- When using public wireless networks with your laptop, tablet or smartphone, always assume they are being monitored. Equipment to illegally monitor these devices can be readily obtained on the open market.
- If you have any questions about what constitutes a breach of operational security, contact the PAO before posting or sharing.
- The Naval OPSEC Support Team offers information and training materials at: <http://www.slideshare.net/navalOPSEC>, or send your questions and challenges to opsec@navy.mil.

We have observed Navy Ombudsmen are extremely mindful of OPSEC concerns and have been doing an outstanding job monitoring online discussions and reminding family members when posts are a potential security risk.

You may find yourself educating families about OPSEC and reminding them to be aware of what they post online. Some ombudsmen successfully employed education techniques such as:

- Including notes and reminders of OPSEC, as well as real-world examples, in monthly newsletters
- Proactively providing information about FRG meetings and other appropriate venues to discuss homecoming and port information, so family members do not feel like they have to violate OPSEC – they know where to get information
- Discreetly contacting those who violate OPSEC directly to have them remove the offending post, and creating a teachable moment by discussing why the post is a violation of OPSEC so the mistake is not repeated. If the offending individual refuses, you can block or report them. This option, however, does not fix the problem because the offending person will likely share inappropriate content elsewhere. In either case, notify your command so they are aware of the breach in OPSEC.

The Naval OPSEC Support Team offers information and OPSEC training materials at their website (<https://www.nioc-norfolk.navy.mil/opsec/index.html>) under the 'FRG/OMBUDSMAN Brief' tab. They also operate a Facebook page (www.facebook.com/NavalOPSEC) with OPSEC information and products.

Privacy

As an ombudsman, you are trained to keep sensitive personal information and information shared with you in confidence, private. Social media is no different and is not the place to share such information.

What you post online is often seen by a lot more people than you intend. Something you think is private, likely is not. Social media sites share most information by default. If you want to keep something private, you may not want to share it on social media. If you'd like to share something with just your friends (but not their friends) you'll need to update your privacy settings. When you hear of major (and even minor) changes to how social media sites are sort and share information, be sure to double-check your privacy settings, because the sites change often and don't always share how that affects your privacy settings.

Be especially mindful in situations where there is loss of life or injuries. It is the DoD's policy not to release the names of casualties until 24 hours AFTER their next of kin have been notified to respect their privacy. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) prohibits the release of medical information without the individual's consent. That means, if a Sailor or family member is injured and you don't have their permission to share information with others, you should not share those details in any manner, not even on a closed Facebook group.

This applies equally to photographs, videos and written posts.

Frequently Asked Questions about Social Media

Q Our Sailors have been extended on deployment and the families are not happy. There is a very negative feel to our social media presence right now. What should I do?

A Most importantly, do not get discouraged and DO NOT close the account. Closing the page will only result in your families creating alternative presence(s) to continue complaining, in which case you will have less opportunity to understand or influence this conversation. It is important to get command leadership involved to reach out to the families and reassure them. In the meantime, you may want to stress alternate methods of discussing information that if posted online could violate OPSEC. Continue to be proactive on the social media presence and ask the command to send photos and updates of Sailors for the families to keep connected.

Q Someone hacked into my ombudsman social media account. What do I do now?

A If you believe your account has been hacked, taken over, or otherwise compromised, the first thing you should do is notify any other administrators to your command's social media presences and ask them to remove you as an administrator. Next, change the password to every email address you use to access these sites. The most common method of taking over accounts is by someone figuring out your password through social engineering. Once you have changed the password(s) on your email address(es) and established control of them, attempt to reset your password to your social media accounts. If the person who has taken over your account hasn't changed the default email address then you should receive an email with a link where you can reset the password and regain control. If you do not receive an email to reset the password you will need to work with the site directly to regain control of the account. In this case contact the Navy Media Content Services team and we will work with you to reach out to the site. In the meantime inform people on your command's social media presence the account is no longer fully under your control and that communication coming from that account should be treated as suspect.

Q I did some searching and found my command already has a non-official family group on Facebook (or YouTube, Twitter, etc.). What should I do?

A Many commands have unofficial social media presences established by former crew members, veterans or fans excited about the command. We do not have the right to remove these presences, nor would we want to unless they portrayed themselves as an official presence. Work with the command leadership to determine if you want to approach the page and/or simply monitor it and chime in when you have information to add. You also may want to contact the administrator to see how you can work together. Regardless, this should not stop you or the command from creating an official presence for the command

and its families. These official presences are listed in the U.S. Navy Social Media Directory (lists only command presences, not family readiness groups) which can be found at: <http://www.navy.mil/>. If you find an online presence portraying itself as an official presence and the command is not sponsoring it, suggest your command contact the administrator. If your command is unable to engage with that presence, contact the Navy Content Media Services team for further assistance.

Q I am turning over Ombudsman duties. How should I transfer our social media presence?

A If you established your social media presences under a general command ombudsman account, simply turn over the login and passwords and teach the new ombudsman how the platform works. If you have been using your personal account to relay information as an ombudsman, you will need to introduce the new ombudsman on the social platform to the audience. If you have administrative rights to the command's social media presence or a family readiness group page, ensure the new ombudsman is added as an administrator and you are removed. You may also recommend the new ombudsman post a photo/note introducing themselves.