



Communication Directorate Media Training Guide

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INTRODUCTION

More than any other country in the history of the world, the United States is a nation based on the power of ideas. The rights of a free people to express themselves and obtain information from their government are guaranteed in the Constitution and in our laws. This is the essence of our freedoms as Americans because without these rights democracy cannot exist.

In simple terms, the Marine Corps' very existence as part of our government depends on the "consent of the governed." In the words of Abraham Lincoln, we are a government "of the people, by the people and for the people." We exist today because the public has insisted that we exist. To survive in the future, we must continue to earn the public's trust and support.

As stated in the following pages, "What the public thinks depends on what the public hears..." There is no other way to put it. In our society, the public depends on a free press (and a free social media) to keep it informed. If we want public support, we must learn to work with the news media.

This guide is intended to help you do just that. Read it. Study it. And when the opportunity presents itself, put its principles into action.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE PRINCIPLES OF INFORMATION

It is the policy of the Department of Defense to make available timely and accurate information so that the public, Congress and the news media may assess and understand the facts about national security and defense strategy.

Requests for information from organizations and private citizens will be answered in a timely manner. In carrying out this policy, the following principles of information will apply:

- Information will be made fully and readily available, consistent with statutory requirements, unless its release is precluded by current and valid security classification. The provisions of the Freedom of Information Act will be supported in both letter and spirit.
- A free flow of general and military information will be made available, without censorship or propaganda, to the men and women of the Armed Forces and their dependents.
- Information will not be classified or otherwise withheld to protect the government from criticism or embarrassment.
- Information will be withheld only when disclosure would adversely affect the national security or threaten the safety or privacy of the men and women of the Armed Forces.

The Department's obligation to provide the public with information on its major programs may require detailed public affairs planning and coordination within the Department and with other government agencies. The sole purpose of such activity is to expedite the flow of information to the public: **Propaganda has no place in Department of Defense public affairs programs.**

WHY MILITARY MEDIA RELATIONS ARE IMPORTANT

As an institution of the United States government, the Marine Corps, like the other Armed Services, must have the public's support to survive.

WHY MILITARY MEDIA RELATIONS ARE IMPORTANT

As different views of our military priorities are debated, we must learn to explain - possibly even defend - our new emerging roles to our fellow Americans; key audiences include, but are not limited to: Congress, news media, retirees and current Marines. Maintaining an adequate national security posture and a combat-ready Marine Corps will require public support and an understanding of our military mission and people. Ultimately, the American public, through its elected representatives, will make the final decisions on any new policies.

National security and public accountability are not incompatible. As a public institution, we have an obligation to provide timely and accurate information to American taxpayers. **The Department of Defense's policy in this area is very explicit: "MAXIMUM DISCLOSURE WITH MINIMUM DELAY. Information will be withheld only when disclosure would adversely affect national security or threaten the safety or privacy of the men and women of the Armed Forces."**



PERCEPTION

In this technologically advanced era the familiar adage, "Reality is not what is, but what it is perceived to be" rings louder than ever before. Most people are aware of, or are concerned about, the Marine Corps. They gain whatever knowledge and appreciation they have, not from direct contact or experience, but from remote observation. Usually, this information is derived through the media.

In fact, much of the public's high opinion of the Marine Corps' effectiveness derives from press accounts. News media have accompanied Marines and reported our accomplishments in nearly every major engagement in which we have participated. From the first recruits at Tun Tavern, through the Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, Desert Storm and including the Global War on Terrorism, the public has depended on a free and independent press to keep it informed.

Multi-media channels share the Marine Corps story. Consider the legendary AP photographer, Joe Rosenthal, who accompanied Marines during the landings on Iwo Jima in 1945. His photo of the heroic flag-raising on Mt. Suribachi was distributed throughout the world and remains not only one of the most famous combat photos ever taken, but also an enduring symbol of Marine Corps courage and commitment to duty.

UNDERSTANDING THE MEDIA

We must actively seek to keep the media informed of who we are, what we do, and what value we provide so that our story will be told. At the same time, we also need to respond to legitimate news media requests for information and be prepared to understand that the resulting story may not always be to our liking.

Whether the coverage is good or bad, if we are going to effectively represent the Marine Corps position on an issue, we must understand the communication process. Our positive image represents the result of years of dedication to duty and the personal sacrifice of thousands, many of whom gave their lives. We have a duty to tell their story and the story of our Corps. For, if we don't, who will?

Cooperation with the press is essential to projecting a strong, positive image. In general, the majority of news reporters are not hostile toward the military.

Do not fall prey to the skepticism or cynicism of hostile reporters. Always keep control of your message. Remember, no matter how familiar the media may be with a particular topic or event they are covering. YOU are the "expert" for the Marine Corps. Sometimes, we must react to unanticipated events, such as accidents. **Usually, the best approach is always to be PROACTIVE and plan your approach to the public communication actions as carefully as you would plan any military operation.**

In order to do this, we need to understand certain features of media coverage which may lead to distortion of our messages.

- **Short Deadlines:** Reporters operate under tight deadlines which can vary, depending on the outlet.
- **Time/Space Limitations:** Print, radio and television have small spaces (such as a sentence or paragraph) or short time periods (such as 10-30 seconds). You must organize your thoughts and be prepared to condense them into a few sentences or thoughts. Be brief and to the point.
- **"Prize" Journalism:** Some reporters may be looking for the big story of waste, fraud or abuse to win professional acclaim and praise. Be careful.
- **"Pack" or "Trend" Journalism:** Important or breaking stories are usually followed by a spate of follow-on stories on the same or similar subjects. For example, if a series of aircraft accidents occur over a short period, the collective media pack may start to generate stories focusing on aviation issues related to the aircraft or the type of incidents involved.
- **Inexperienced Reporters:** Some reporters without firsthand experience will not know the difference between a colonel and a corporal. At the same time, many military nicknames and acronyms can be indecipherable, even to an experienced reporter. Don't insult your guest. If possible, try to translate military terminology into civilian terms. Simple, "plain English" descriptions and a positive attitude will score points and most reporters will appreciate the assistance. More importantly, a helpful attitude will usually generate credibility and help you get your point of view across. Make every possible effort to educate the reporter to your terminology before the interview.

Proactive communication with the media neutralizes critics and eliminates embarrassing distortions. Prior planning is critical; don't "wing it." Before granting any interview contact your local Communication Strategy and Operations (COMMSTRAT) officer.

ROLE OF THE COMMSTRAT OFFICE

Your COMMSTRAT office is a valuable resource in dealing with the media. They have considerable practical experience with various forms of media and you can rely on them to:

- **Advise** if the proposed interview is authorized, appropriate and, on balance, a good idea.
- **Research** potential interview issues, include questions likely to be asked.
- Assist in helping you **prepare** for the interview, including review of possible questions and answers and conducting one-on-one rehearsals.
- **Make all arrangements** for the interview, including ground rules, time and location.
- **Monitor** the interview, if necessary, to provide an in-house record of the interview, as well as follow-up on items to be provided later.
- **Act as a liaison** with the news organization and provide follow-up video copies, news clippings, etc., of the resulting coverage.
- Provide **after-action review** and feedback: “did we get our message out and, if so, how effectively?”

COMMSTRAT personnel have been trained to tell you the bad news as well as the good news. Make it easy for them to be absolutely honest, even critical, with you.



THE MEDIA INTERVIEW

The first step in the interview process is to **agree to do the interview**. While many in the military are reluctant to talk to the media, it usually is in the best interest of the Marine Corps to do so. Interviews can be used to correct the record, answer the critic, or praise outstanding performance by personnel.

Having agreed to the interview, it is now time to **establish the ground rules**. Each time an official and a reporter meet, the ground rules must be stated clearly, understood and mutually agreed to by both parties before the interview begins.

Establish the parameters of the interview. Be very clear about what you will or will not talk about. It is perfectly legitimate to request a list of potential topic areas in advance. Remember that once you have given permission for a civilian interview, you have given up the right to censor what is written or broadcast. The best practice to avoid embarrassment is to grant only "on-the-record" interviews. **There is no such thing as an "off-the-record" interview.**

There are several types of news media interviews. Circumstances can range from an impromptu or pre-scheduled encounter on a routine subject to an accident/incident or crisis/contingency situation. Often, no two situations will be alike. By mastering certain basic techniques, however, you will be well prepared for most interview situations.

Some types of interviews to which you may be exposed to include:

GENERAL INTERVIEW

Normally a one-on-one encounter. A reporter will request an interview with an officer either in connection with a specific event (unit homecoming) or issue (allegations of sexual harassment in the command). A decision on whether to grant the interview is made on a case-by-case basis. How sensitive is the issue? Is the area beyond the responsibility of the person to be interviewed? If so, refer news media to the appropriate official. Never talk about an issue that is outside of your jurisdiction or above your rank. It has become routine for the command's COMMSTRAT Officer to monitor and record the interview. The recording is useful if questions arise later on the context of answers, etc.

ACCIDENTS, INCIDENTS, CRISES AND CONTINGENCIES

Accidents, incidents or crises can present some of the most difficult media encounters you may experience during your career. Extensive property damage, injury or even loss of life may have occurred. A contingency operation involving Marine forces may be underway or imminent. These situations are usually dramatic: the confusion of an accident scene, a fire raging with a rescue in progress, Marines hitting the beach. It is important to realize that the excitement surrounding such events will attract bystanders, as well as the media. The excitement may also be visual, in which case still and motion camera photographers may represent a majority of the media present. Their presence alone will attract attention and the situation can begin to quickly feed on itself. The already emotionally charged atmosphere will intensify, especially if the media begins to believe that they are being denied information, including access to the site, interviews with the participants, etc., for reasons other than safety or the needs of an operation or investigation.

There are several steps that can be taken to gain and keep control of the situation:

- **Make a brief statement.** Normal procedure calls for the senior officer present to make a brief statement or take a few questions at the earliest opportunity. This can vary depending on the type of story and proximity of news deadlines. A small amount of consideration can establish trust and defuse concerns or rumors as to what is actually happening. **Remember: the media feels an obligation to keep the public informed and your respect for their position will go a long way.**

- **Keep the press informed.** Media are present because they, just like you, have a job to do. At a minimum, let the media know your plans in as much detail as practical. It's usually best to keep it informal and let them know as much as you can about what is happening. If you do, don't be surprised if they try to keep you informed.
- **Be aware of what the press can do.** As a commander don't overlook the press' ability to assist you in reaching out to Marine Corps families and to the public. The press can help you acknowledge those involved; single out those who made special contributions; inform the public as to actions they need to take; or assure them appropriate action is being taken.



DEVELOPING YOUR INTERVIEW ANSWERS

The most important control factors of most news medium are “time” and “content.” Simply put, most news organizations don't have enough time to get into the details. A video tape of your interview will be rushed to the studio, edited, and shown all in less than 12 hours. A lengthy newspaper interview will probably be condensed into 10-20 column inches of news print.

The condensation is most dramatic with television and social media. Editors of a half-hour news show must usually condense several hours of news stories and video footage into a 22-minute show. To accomplish this, the high points of a story and the best photos will be condensed into succinct segments, generally less than 30 seconds in length. As a rule, more than an hour of film will generate about 60 seconds of usable footage.

You must be prepared to **express any one of your major points in short 10-20 second statements**. By organizing your thoughts, you make it more likely that your position will be understood by the reporter and less likely that you will be misunderstood. Put your **message up front!** If you want to elaborate or explain your answer in detail, go ahead, but do so only after the main points have been established.

These limitations must be addressed when planning for an interview. Commanders, in particular, must be sensitive to certain topical issues which will be routinely brought up in media interviews. In addition, specific areas of command concern or subjects noted by the interviewer prior to the interview must be anticipated and evaluated.

Don't try to memorize a response. Develop an understanding of the one or two main points which will be the focus of your answer. Then work to condense those main points into a 20-30 second statement. Preplanned answers that are triggered by an interviewer's question will result in the delivery of accurate, concise information. Experience has shown that information received through video format, in particular, must be singular and short. Plan all your messages in 30 second “bites.” **If you can't be short and to the point, you don't know your subject well enough to communicate it.**

CONTROLLING THE INTERVIEW

To control the course and content of an interview, prepare for it by identifying and organizing predetermined, positive messages. No matter what the interviewer asks, you should feel free to steer your response to the related message. The key is to develop your messages and learn the techniques you will need to deliver them.

DEVELOPING YOUR MESSAGES

No matter the event, you need to develop positive messages. This is not always easy, but it must be done. Consider a “worst case” scenario: an aircraft accident involving loss of life. Although it is difficult to expand on the positive aspects of negative events, it can be done. This always the best method for dealing with a difficult issue. Being “positive” does not mean that you try to downplay an event; only that you accentuate how you feel – that you are concerned, for instance – or what you are doing about it – such as taking immediate action. For example, if an aviation mishap occurs:

- **Express** the Marine Corps’ **concern** for the personnel involved.
- **Emphasize that we take any accident seriously** and that a thorough investigation will be started immediately.
- **Discuss the importance of ongoing aviation safety programs** and provide factual information on the safety record of the type of aircraft involved to reassure the families of those still flying in similar aircraft.

In short, by assuming an assertive and positive attitude, you will not be victimized by events no matter how disastrous. Always answer questions with your primary “messages” in mind and look for opportunities to deliver them.

In most cases, you will not be confronting a disaster but it is just as important to develop positive messages and the means to deliver them. You must determine what is important to the public or to your audience about the planned news story. Different stories and situations will always call for different messages. For instance:

- **Training stories.** Why is the training being conducted? Who benefits? How? When? Are there pictures or visual images that help tell the story? If so, tell the reporter.

7 C’S OF COMMUNICATION

1. **Credibility**... of the sender - Communication starts with a climate of belief. Receivers must have confidence in the sender and high regard for the source’s competence on the subject.
2. **Context** - effective communication must square with the realities of the environment.
3. **Content** - the message must have meaning/relevance for the receivers. In general, people select those items of information that promise them the greatest rewards. Clarity...message must be put in simple terms.
4. **Clarity** - the message must be conveyed in a logical order so that it is understood easily. Avoid indistinctness or ambiguity.
5. **Consistency** - communication is an unending process, requires repetition to achieve penetration. Repetition with variation contributes to learning and persuasion
6. **Channels** - established channels should be used, channels that users receive and respect.
7. **Capability**... of the intended recipients - communication is most effective when it requires the least amount of effort on the part of receivers...reading ability, habits, prior knowledge, etc. ...

INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

Packaging/Bundling. Quantify your information and tie it together giving the reporter verbal clues to follow.

Example: There are three new programs we've started this year to enhance aviation safety.

Bridging. Verbal maneuvering to what you want to talk about (your communication objective). The reporter may not understand or know the entire issue, whereas you have years of experience. A bridge must be valid but does not have to be fancy.

Examples:

- What concerns me even more...
- In my experience...
- The critical issue is ...
- That's one perspective ...
- I've heard that, but the real focus should be ...

INTERVIEW DOs AND DON'Ts

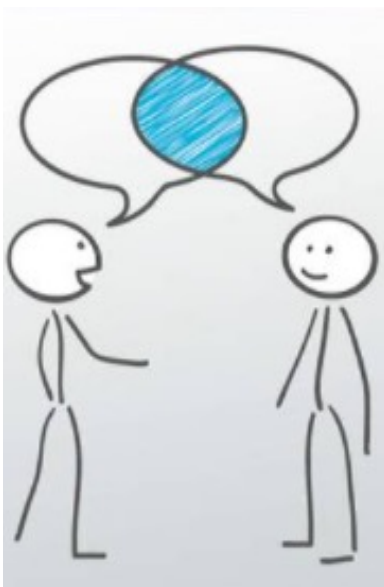
- Deal with press and media like you would want others to treat you.
- If you are distant and hostile with the media, you'll get what you give. Media need and want information. **Whether you cooperate or not, they will do a story!** Commands that are accessible and sensitive to a reporter's need for information will generate credibility and create a good working relationship.
- Give the main point or points and then support it. Don't feel you have to keep talking; make the interviewer keep the conversation going.
- Do not answer with just a simple "yes" or "no," or "no comment." Don't be curt. There is no such thing as a dumb question.
- The best defense is a good offense. Be proactive. Let your deeds speak. **Accentuate the positive.**
- Discuss only matters you have direct knowledge of. Avoid hypothetical situations. **Remember, there is no such thing as a personal opinion when you are speaking for the Marine Corps.**
- You aren't obligated to tell everything you know. Some things are better left unsaid.
- If you can't answer the question, give a reason why. There's nothing wrong with "I don't know" or "I can't answer that for security reasons." **Avoid "no comment." To many reporters and the public, it may falsely suggest that there is more truth to the issue than you may wish to discuss.**
- Don't pretend to be perfect. Admitting mistakes from time to time demonstrates candor and the integrity of our organization.
- Complete your **answer within 30 seconds** if possible, then elaborate or expand if you feel it's required.
- Do not use acronyms, technical terms or Marine jargon.
- If you wish to change or drop a topic, build in a cutoff in your answer. This is an opportune time to take the offensive and bring up the topic you want to talk about. Remember you have control.
- Take time to analyze the question and form the answer in your mind. Do not feel you have to answer instantaneously. Do not just start talking while you formalize the answer or you may talk yourself into a corner.
- Answer only one question at a time. If the question has more than one part, answer in the order you feel comfortable. If you forget part of the question, or are not clear on the meaning, ask to have it repeated.
- Do not repeat a question, or waste time with stock phrases. Comments such as "That's a good question" or "I'm glad you asked me that" are unnecessary.
- Be careful what you say and how you say it. Do not be overly defensive. Remember, this can be a positive, enjoyable experience. It's up to you.
- Pick out two or three points you want to emphasize and watch for places with the interview to transition to your subject.

- **Truth is mandatory.** The smallest lie will be discovered and will be immediately harmful. It will produce distrust and destroy your credibility. Remember the public has a right to know the truth.
- Avoid repeating or using words that may have a negative connotation. Words such as: massacre, scandal, deaths, corruption, etc. induce overly strong, emotional reactions and may be counterproductive to your objectives.
- If the interviewer is hostile, don't assume his or her attitude. Don't get angry or lose your temper. Control the interview: **the audience will only see your answer, not the question.**
- Do not use or repeat unverified terminology or "facts" given by the reporter, unless you are positive of their accuracy. Politely correct a reporter if you know the real facts. State that you are not aware of the validity of questionable figures or if you have not personally verified the accuracy of the referenced information. By using incorrect information or failing to challenge erroneous facts, the public will associate them with you and assume they are true.

The Cardinal Rule: THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS "OFF THE RECORD."

FOLLOW UP

Don't forget to tie up loose ends after the interview. Ensure your staff follows through on securing information that you said you would find out. Inform your interviewer that you are available for additional information or clarification if needed.



*Don't make people
work so hard to
know what you want
them to know.*

PUBLIC SPEAKING

Speaking before a group of concerned citizens is the most effective way to tell the Marine Corps story. You can more effectively interact with each of the audience members because they can physically see and hear you. You are able to observe the audience and can react to their feedback and modify your comments accordingly.

Before accepting any speaking engagement, do your homework:

- Is the audience right? (For example, you should not, as an active duty Marine, address a partisan political group, or any organization which would be considered extremist, and potentially embarrass yourself and the Marine Corps.) Do not accept an invitation unless you are going to be proud of your association – in uniform – with the group. Your COMMSTRAT officer can help you with good advice and contacts.
- Active duty members should not engage in partisan political activities and should avoid the inference that their political activities imply or appear to imply DoD/Marine Corps sponsorship, approval, or endorsement. Political activity by members of the Armed Forces continues to be governed by DoDD 1344.10 and The Hatch Act of 1939. Political activity by federal civilian personnel continues to be governed by The Hatch Act of 1939 and 5 C.F.R. Parts 733-734. When in doubt, seek advice from your COMMSTRAT office and Legal Counsel, especially in an election year.
- While researching your audience, tailor your message to their needs:
 - Is any Marine Corps issue a topic of interest? Or, do they want something specific?
 - Is there anything that could offend them? Will they be a friendly audience?

Dealing effectively with speech delivery requires many of the same components as the media interview. Your speeches, audience or subject matter, may require the use of a verbatim manuscript (when dealing with sensitive or classified material) or may just require casual notes to jog your memory on main points. In any case, the goal to communicate your story remains the same: Remember to talk to the group as though it is a living room conversation. Pick out several people around the room; and concentrate on those people as you speak. Speeches tend to make the speaker distant, formal, authoritarian and not real or likable. Consciously avoid this tendency. Be friendly, warm and human. Key points:

- Have something important to say! Pick a definite topic and research it. Organize your main points.
- Know your audience. Know their interests. Check on previous programs. Determine the occasion.
- If possible, check out the speaking location ahead of time, or have someone do it for you (the podium, the microphone, the water glass, etc).
- Arrive early enough to mingle with hosts and audience.
- Although the event you may be attending includes a cocktail or social hour, don't drink before your speech.
- Recognize notable civic or other leaders in the audience during introductory remarks. This may require advance coordination.
- Keep your talk around 20 minutes, but no longer than half an hour.
- Prepare all speeches triple-spaced using large type and all CAPS. Underline your key points.
- Don't carry sentences from one page to another. Don't staple pages together.
- Avoid Marine jargon and acronyms.
- Don't make public promises or extend invitations to the audience to visit your unit unless you mean it.

Public speaking today is for attribution and may be shared on social media. Media members are the link between the Marine Corps and the public. They form the conduit of communication that is vital in keeping a flow of accurate and timely information to the American public. This information is the bedrock of the public's perception of the Marine Corps.

It is the responsibility of each Marine, and particularly those who deal directly with the media, to become familiar with the process and feel comfortable in this environment. As a spokesperson for the Corps, you must keep the conduit free of obstruction by providing honest and accurate information to the public.

Remember that your COMMSTRAT officer is your local expert and can provide the best advice before, during and after your interview. Seek his or her counsel and utilize their experience with the media.

PANEL GUIDANCE

Panelist Guidance

A panel allows an audience to be a part of a conversation with experts that they would not have the opportunity to have.

Best Practices

- A panel is not a series of small speeches.
- A panel provides different experts' perspectives on an issue.
- Limited value in repeating another's statements.
- Conversationally agree, then add how you see a different part of the issue/concept.
- Answers in 30 seconds (2-3 sentences) up to three minutes (detailed explanation or telling a story).
- Educate, share experience, and inspire the audience.

Role of the Moderator

- Keeps everyone on time
- Ensure balanced panelist participation
- Keeps the conversation moving forward
- Facilitating Q&A sessions

Answering Questions

- Pause – Think – Respond w/confidence
- Weave messages into responses
- Stay in lane
- Avoid speculation (what if's)
- Avoid acronyms & jargon
- Don't over answer. When you're satisfied with your reply, stop.
- Don't assume the microphone, camera or tape recorder is off immediately before or after an interview.

Blocking: Explain if/why you cannot answer

- "I'm not going to answer that question. That is better suited for OSD to answer."

Bridging: Reframe the question to make it easier to answer.

- "We find the more important issue is..."
- "I think it would be more accurate to say..."
- "Here's the real problem..."
- "What I've said comes down to this..."
- "Let me emphasize again..."
- "While _____ is important, it's also important to remember that..."
- "It all boils down to this..."
- "Before we leave this subject, I need to add..."



Moderator Guidance

Preparation

Get to know the panelists

- Builds ease of communicating.
- Send questions and topics in advance to panelists.
- Request preferred titles, bios, and preferred billet description.
- Have at least one interesting related fact about them to use into prompts or question redirects.
- “When you were at... you saw the challenges with ... how has that influenced your approach to modernizing...?”
- Do not over rehearse or it will risk making the panel dull, scripted, and not genuine.

Set Up

Sit where your panelists can see you

- Arc (broad semicircle) seating is recommended – Allows all participants to make eye contact.
- Avoid sitting in a row – panelist won’t be able to see you or each other.
- Allows moderator to nonverbally signal to transition and move on.

Do not use slides

- Takes too much time and dampens dialogue.
- Only exception is if the topic is highly visual.

Check all mics/technology before panel begins.

Do not start early, one third of the audience arrives during the 5 minutes before the start.

Shut doors after intros or 10 minutes after the start to allow stragglers. (Maximize audience reach.)

Introduction

State your objective at the outset

- Two sentences is enough
- Frame discussion with context of big events occurring. Then what the panel will be discussing in relation to that context.
- “The digital age, Web5, the Internet of things, the whole world is advancing new technology so quick. The question today is “What is the Marine Corps doing to modernize?”

Introduce the panelists quickly

- Name, rank, billet
- How long they have been in the billet
- How their billet description/experience relates to the subject (don’t steal their thunder)
- Do not read their whole bio or explain how you first met

Explain the agenda so the audience is prepared to participate

- State how long the panel is scheduled
- How long opening remarks will be
- Then a ‘few Moderator questions’
- Transition to audience questions
- Instruct on how to submit their questions, so they can be prepared
 - It is good practice to ask the audience members to state their name and affiliation before posing a question. This will result in fewer “trolls” when they and their organization are not anonymous.

Moderate the Conversation

Moderators are not panelists

- Don’t have long elaborations or leading questions
- Don’t add your opinion or statements to the discussion

Sequence questions from big (strategic) to small (tactical)

- High altitude or Broad - Orient the audience to how the panelists see the big picture.
- Specifics - Detailed questions or looking for specific examples of how that panelist has seen X.

If a panelist is providing too lengthy of an answer, redirect the conversation to another panelist.

- Use questions to other panelists, to keep the conversation going.
- "Those are all great points, I'd be interested to see how Col Soandso sees...?"
- "If I can step in, this discussion leads to another of our questions: What does...?"

Don't go down the line every time with the same question

- Two answers is plenty unless a third person is eager to jump in.
- The third or fourth answer to the same question will not contribute anything interesting.
- You can have questions specifically directed to only one panelist.
- This includes audience questions. If one panelist provides a good answer no need to have multiple panelists respond.

Prep the audience to be ready to ask questions.

- "I have one more moderator question, then we will transition to audience questions. If members of the audience have a question, stand up at any time and line up behind the microphones."

Conclusion

Prep the audience with "We have time for one more question from the audience."

To end the Panel:

- Don't ask panelists for "one final thought." Typically will recap, no value added to conversation.
- Use a forward-looking question "What is the most exciting thing you see in the next decade?"
- "What should I have asked you?"

End on time

- Better to end three to five minutes early.



RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

1. Reconfirm the interview topic.
2. Establish subjects not open for discussion. Most journalists understand and respect ground rules.
3. Determine both your's and reporter's deadline.
4. Expect some give and take.
5. Find out if reporter has other sources. Set length, location, and date (a half hour is normally sufficient).
6. Remember that the environment can help set interview tone.
7. Ask if there will be a photographer if you are being interviewed by print media.
8. It is alright to tape the interview. It is a matter of accurate record, not a matter of mistrust.
9. It's okay to ask when the story will appear.
10. It's okay to have preinterview discussion:
 - Puts both parties at ease.
 - Helps determine reporter's knowledge.
 - Can determine reporter's slant for the story.
11. Don't ask for a copy of the story/video footage.
12. Don't ask to proofread or edit story.
13. Don't ask for questions in advance (topic areas okay).
14. Don't question the reporter's motive.

REMEMBER: Even during a preinterview discussion, you should operate under the principle that the cameras are always "rolling" and that the microphone is always "hot."



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

This is a disclosure law which provides public access to records in the possession or control of the Executive Branch of the federal government. The primary federal guidance on release of information in the Executive Department is contained in the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). An understanding of the FOIA provides the basic knowledge on federal release of information policy.

The FOIA is a disclosure law which says all information in the possession of the government is releasable except for nine specific categories of information. Further, the act does not require that exempted information be withheld, but rather permits it to be withheld. COMMSTRAT officers do not decide whether exempted information will be released, but they should understand the spirit of this primary guidance is to release, not withhold.

The Act includes nine exemptions, or reasons, allowing the government to refuse to disclose information. These exemptions are guidelines COMMSTRAT officers use to help determine whether to release information immediately, or to seek additional guidance. These exemptions are:

- National Security
- Internal Agency Rules
- Exempt by Other Statute
- Trade Secrets
- Inter-Agency or Intra-Agency Memoranda or Letters
- Personnel and Medical Files
- Law Enforcement Information, if released would:
 - Interfere with law enforcement proceedings
 - Deprive a person of a fair trial
 - Constitute an unwarranted invasion of privacy
 - Disclose the identity of a confidential source
 - Disclose investigative techniques
 - Endanger the life or safety of a law enforcement official
- Bank Reports
- Oil and Gas Well Data



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT (FOIA)

Your right to know

GUIDANCE ON RELEASE OF INFORMATION UNDER THE PRIVACY ACT, HIPAA AND OPSEC

PERSONNEL RECORDS

Regular service records request:

For all active-duty Marines, the owning unit is the release authority for service records.

For all reserve Marines, MARFORRES is the release authority for service records.

For all former Marines, M&RA is the release authority.

Releasable.

- Name
- Rank
- Date commissioned or enlisted
- MOS
- Date of rank
- Home of record (state only)
- Official photograph (if available)
- Duty assignments (current and prior)
- Duty status
- Awards and decorations

Non-releasable.

Personal information beyond that specified under “releasable,” except when public interest overrides privacy considerations based on balancing test.

Information not releasable without permission from the service member or civilian:

- Age, DOB, SSN
- Race
- Marital status
- Number and gender of dependents
- Civil education degrees, dates
- Civilian awards

Death of Marine:

Death generally extinguishes an individual’s privacy rights; however, surviving family members may have a legitimate privacy interest. Particularly sensitive personal details about the circumstances surrounding an individual’s death may be withheld when necessary to protect the privacy interests of surviving family members.

A deceased service member’s information should be released to the public no earlier than 24 hours after primary and secondary next of kin notification.

The owning unit is the release authority in coordination with Casualty Affairs.

Medical Matters:

Without a HIPAA-compliant patient authorization (<https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/forms/dd/dd2870.pdf>) or a specific exception stated in HIPAA, it is still permissible to release a one-word condition description of a medical condition without reference to the patient by name or other identifier. A patient’s location or room number may not be given to the media without the patient’s authorization. This includes a general location such as intensive care unit, burn unit, etc.

Only medical professionals are authorized to determine the description as one of the following:

- Good.
- Fair.
- Serious.
- Critical.
- Undetermined.

Releasable.

- Number of injured.
- Place of departure, destination (training missions).
- Medical facility.
- Medical transportation used.
- General medical condition (e.g., good, fair, serious, critical).
- Release names and other releasable data after PNOK notification or after permission is given by the injured.

Non-releasable. Without permission from the injured:

- Gender, age.
- Unless permission is granted by PNOK, the names of PNOK, and other dependents, including children and any associated personal information, including marital status and gender is also not releasable.
- Specifics on survivor benefits.
- Prognosis Information.
- Information on psychiatric or mental health patients.
- Treatment involving sensitive information (e.g., victims of sexual assault, criminal activity, drug abuse).
- Details, descriptions or extent of specific injuries or illness.

OPSEC

Information must be reviewed and approved at the appropriate level before release. As sources of information, each DoD member should be aware of OPSEC issues, whether participating in an official public affairs event or an informal family event.

Releasable.

- Confirmation of aircraft plainly visible to the public. Unit departures and arrivals are generally of high visibility due to family involvement or other reasons. Guidelines for the release of departure and return dates are usually specified by the component commands or equivalent.
- Approximate size of friendly forces embarked aboard ships and aircraft (exact numbers of forces or complete lists of units will normally not be provided).
- Casualty figures aboard the embarked vessel or aircraft (names will not be released until confirmation of notification of primary and secondary next of kin plus 24 hours. Names may not be released even after notification if such release may endanger or hinder rescue or recovery operations).
- Results of completed missions.
- Types and general amounts of ordnance expended (e.g., more than 25,000 pounds of high-explosive ordnance dropped from air wing).
- Number of aerial combat missions flown in the area of operations.

Non-releasable. The following information is generally not releasable unless declared otherwise by applicable public affairs guidance (PAG) or higher operational authority, or declassified for public release:

- Future plans or operations.
- Detailed information about vulnerabilities or weaknesses.
- Rules of engagement.

- Security measures, force protection, or deceptive actions used as part of the operation.
- Intelligence collection activities (past and present), including intelligence methods, targets, and results.
- Information about downed aircraft or ships while search and rescue operations are being planned or in progress unless clearly in plain sight of media.
- Specific types of ordnance expended, and (in some cases) the methods.
- Location and activities of special operations forces.
- Details of active law enforcement investigations.

ACCIDENT/INCIDENT

Releasable.

- Type of accident.
- Location and time.
- Number of people involved.
- Base, station, post or organization of assignment.
- Departure, destination sites (if unclassified).
- Type of equipment, weapon system involved (if unclassified).

Non-releasable.

- Names of dead before NOK notified.
- Names of MIA or POW before NOK notified and SAR ops terminated.
- Classified info.
- Speculation on cause.
- Visual info that would adversely affect families, friends or unit morale such as recognizable photos of wounded, injured or dead.

INVESTIGATIONS

The substance, details, or preliminary findings of ongoing investigations will not be publicly disclosed unless the proper authority authorizes disclosure. Not all findings will always be determined releasable. Therefore, COMMSTRAT officers will ensure that any public statement made about an investigation before its conclusion does not imply that all findings will be eventually disclosed.

Release Authority. Commands requested to provide information from investigations must have chain of command clearance prior to releasing information.

a. The general court martial convening authority who provides the final review for a command investigation convened under Chapter 2 of the JAG Manual investigation.

Additional Resources

SECNAVINST 5720.44C
DOD 5400.7-R (1998) Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)
DOD 5400.11-R (2007) DOD Privacy Program
HHS Summary of the HIPAA Privacy Rule (2003)
DINFOS Consolidated Guidelines for Release

POINT OF CONTACT

Headquarters Marine Corps Communication Directorate: ontherecord@usmc.mil, 703-614-4309

10 RULES OF GOOD MEDIA RELATIONS

- 1. Talk from the public's viewpoint, not service perspective.** Avoid jargon, acronyms, and use language the public will understand.
- 2. Speak in terms of personal experiences whenever possible.** Use examples people can relate to.
- 3. If you don't want to see a statement quoted, don't make it.** Nothing is ever "off the record." Avoid the phrase "no comment" which leads to suspicion or that we are trying to hide something.
- 4. Lead with the most important message.**
- 5. Don't argue or get mad.** It makes you appear defensive, unprofessional. Outbursts create drama and becomes part of the story.
- 6. Restate objectionable comments in terms favorable to you.**
- 7. Don't ramble.**
- 8. "I don't know" is not a bad answer.** Shows you're not trying to be evasive. Never speculate. Try to find the answer and provide it in a timely manner.
- 9. Don't shade the truth, even a little.** A lie becomes the story. You will have no credibility.
- 10. Tell the media what they expect and need to know, and no more.**

BEST PRACTICES FOR BAD NEWS

HOW TO ASSESS THE DAMAGE; HOW TO MAKE IT WORSE

If you determine you have been wronged in a news story or that inaccurate or misleading reporting has taken place you must decide if you want to take action. Your decision should be based on the answers to the following questions.

Bad news correction checklist:

- Is it important enough to correct or would a correction amount to nit-picking?
- Just how damaging is the charge, criticism or error?
- Will a correction simply give greater visibility to an opposite point of view?
- Is a correction worth a restatement of the entire problem, including the error, to the audiences?
- Is it possible to reach the identical audience originally exposed to the error?
- Did you respond promptly and accurately to the media inquiries which led to the story?

The more of these elements that apply, the more likely it is that you should seek correction, clarification, or retraction. However, we recommend that you proceed only if your situation meets at least four of the six criteria above.

Making bad news worse:

- Lose your temper.
- Phone the offending medium and demand a meeting with the management at which you threaten everything from withholding advertising to bodily harm.
- Call the reporter and demand a retraction.
- File a lawsuit.

Any of the above is a sure fire way to make bad news worse.

SCENARIO: DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

Scenario (Interview):

You and your spouse are out shopping when a reporter whom you have met previously spots you and asks if you and your spouse would be willing to answer a few questions regarding the recently released CMC Policy Statement on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Scenario (Panel):

You have been asked – and accepted – to participate in a panel regarding diversity in the Marine Corps.

Background:

In July 2021, Commandant of the Marine Corps General David H. Berger released his 'Policy Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.' Prior to that, he spoke about diversity in public settings.

- "I am absolutely convinced: Too much similarity – too much that we look all the same, think the same, have the same background – we're going to get killed because we're going to end up with solutions that we're all familiar with and solutions that are easy to counter."
- Gen. Berger, Modern Day Marine Expo, quoted
in Task and Purpose, 23 Sept 2020
- "We're much more powerful when we have different people looking at the same issue from different perspectives. We're going to come up with better tactical solutions, but we have to be able to explain that. I also firmly believe that war is going to get only more complex, so we're going to need a diverse force to solve the problems that are in front of us."
- Gen. Berger, Military.com, 11 Sept 2020

Issues that detract from diversity and inclusivity hinder recruiting and retention. Lack of inclusivity undermines the productivity and proficiency gained from a diverse organization. All with the ability and propensity to join the Marine Corps should be encouraged to join and feel they are valued and an equal member of the Corps with a bright future in its ranks.

The policy statement expects leaders at every level to be vocal about the value the Marine Corps places on diversity, equity and inclusion. You agree to the interview.

PA POSTURE: Active

HOLDING STATEMENT:

"As an institution, we have not always understood or prioritized diversity, equity, or inclusion, but going forward we must, and we will." - General Berger.

RESOURCES:

Commandant of the Marine Corps Policy Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

KEY MESSAGES:**Theme 1: Unified Force**

Message 1: The Marine Corps values and draws its collective strength from all its Marines, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, creed or any other marker.

Message 2: Organizations across the Marine Corps are actively examining processes, policies, and even cultural attributes of the Corps to identify opportunities to eliminate prejudice or racial or gender inequality while maintaining our elite warfighter standards.

Theme 2: A Diverse Force Is A Stronger Force

Message 1: The Marine Corps is committed to making concerted efforts to attract, mentor, and retain the most talented men and women who bring a diverse background of culture and skill in service to our Nation. To defeat our enemy in the next fight, we will rely on a diverse force that brings a wide range of experience, ideas, and knowledge. Those with different backgrounds will be able to contribute by applying their personal experiences in everything from wargaming to operational planning.

Message 2: We will be a stronger and more capable force with a more diverse force. The Marine Corps' tactical and operational success in complex and rapidly changing security environments demands an adaptable and versatile force with a broad range of capabilities.

Theme 3: Diverse Force For All Americans

Message 1: We want every individual who meets our high standards and is eligible for service in the U.S. military to see a place for themselves within the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps values a diverse force. Diversity fosters innovation and problem-solving by encouraging everyone to apply their unique perspective. Once we recruit them, we want to retain them. Retention hinges on inclusivity; if members of a group feel included and valued, they are more prone to see a future in the Corps.

Releasable Facts and Potential Tie-ins:

- In the last 10 years, MCRC has grown enlisted accessions from diverse backgrounds by more than 12%.
- In the last 10 years, MCRC has nearly doubled the percentage of officer accessions from diverse backgrounds.
- In FY20, more than 34% of officer candidates were from traditionally under-represented groups, while more than 13% were women.
- Over the last 10 years, enlisted accessions from diverse backgrounds have increased from 33% to more than 43%.
- The Marine Corps led the ban on Confederate symbols April 2020.
- Removal of photographs from promotion and board packages to encourage equity.
- Review of grooming and height/weight standards to account for diversity.
- Reinvigorated diversity review board and assigned a General officer as the Corps chief diversity officer .

COMMSTRAT POINT OF CONTACT:

COMMSTRAT OFFICER, YOUR UNIT, ontherecord@usmc.mil, 703-614-4309

POTENTIAL QUESTIONS: DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Reporter 's / Audience Member's Name:

Affiliation:

Questions:

This isn't the first time a Commandant of the Marine Corps has stated that diversity is important. What is different now?

For priding itself on adaptability and being "first to fight for right..." the Marine Corps has a long history of being the last to enact social change from racial integration to the lifting of gender restrictions on combat MOS'...the latter of which the Marine Corps asked for an exception. Inclusivity is a new word the Marine Corps is using in conjunction with diversity, how does the Marine Corps hope to demonstrate inclusivity when it has a history and even prides itself on being exclusive? (If they don't understand the question, why is inclusivity an important concept?)

The Marine Corps is approximately 9% women. A vocal minority have the opinion that more women will make the Marine Corps less lethal. Do you think the Marine Corps risks becoming less lethal by focusing on recruiting and retaining more females and minorities, perhaps at the expense of males given that the end-strength of the Corps is a fixed number?

Given that the most basic photo or video of a female Marine on social media still results in a flood of derogatory comments, do you think the culture in the Marine Corps has truly changed since Marines United, or are those acts now just captured better by policy and law? What has changed since Marines United?

A recent article pointed out that the Marine Corps was the only remaining Service to require women to wear their hair a bun or otherwise contained in an up-do. Do you think the Marine Corps should consider an update to the current uniform standards to allow ponytails?

As a Marine Corps leader, how do you talk to your Marines about diversity and inclusivity?

If you were the Commandant of the Marine Corps or Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, what would you do to shape the culture of the Marine Corps?

Would you want your daughter to join the Marine Corps if she was 18 years old today? Why or why not?

Is there anything you would like to add?

Commandant of the Marine Corps Policy Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Marines make the Marine Corps. We do not define ourselves by our equipment, organizational constructs, or even warfighting concepts. Our identity has been forged, and remains defined, by the character, intelligence, courage, and fitness of our people. That will never change.

As an organization that draws its collective strength and identity from all its Marines, it is critical that we prioritize policies that maximize the individual strengths of every Marine, regardless of race, sex, sexual orientation, creed, or any other marker. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are not buzz words, but tenets of the culture and conditions we seek in our Corps. As an institution, we have not always understood or prioritized diversity, equity, and inclusion, but going forward, we must, and we will.



Diversity. Teams that include diverse perspectives and modes of thinking solve problems faster and more creatively. Diversity gives us as a competitive warfighting advantage against our adversaries, particularly those who place a premium on uniformity of thought. To capitalize on the perspectives, skills, abilities, and experiences of the whole force, we must create and foster a culture where the contribution of every Marine is respected and valued.

Equity. Our job as leaders is to create an institutional playing field that is even, allowing all Marines an equal opportunity to succeed and enabling our most talented to advance. We must also seek to create a game that is equitable, where all players have the right equipment and a thorough knowledge of the rules. Today, some Marines have the leadership abilities, intelligence and fitness to succeed, but lack the mentorship, experiences, or education that would enable them to take full advantage of their skills. Fostering equity in the force is about identifying, and then eliminating, structural impediments that limit our Marines from reaching their full potential.

Inclusion. We are “The Few and the Proud,” known across the globe as an elite force with elite standards for leadership, intelligence, and fitness. While we will never lower our high standards, once an individual earns the title “Marine,” they have made the grade. Our culture will remain compelling to all segments of society when people see that others like them who earned the title are treated with dignity and respect.

Our policies on diversity, equity, and inclusion are fundamentally about improving respect and fairness in our ranks, and I expect every Marine to give these policies their full support.

Semper Fidelis


David H. Berger
General, U.S. Marine Corps
Commandant of the Marine Corps

SCENARIO: MOLD

BRIEFING CARD: MOLD IN HOUSING

Scenario (Interview):

In response to receiving an invite to participate in the DOD Tenant Satisfaction Survey, a member of your command and their spouse have started a movement on social media regarding mold in base housing and the barracks. They have a large following and have had multiple people confirm that they also are fighting an unending battle with mold in their living arrangements. Photos and videos of the mold covering not only walls and ceilings of residences but also covering the clothes in their closets / wall lockers. The Commander, based on recommendations of his staff, has decided to host an open town hall and allow media to participate and also ask questions. The Commander, his spouse, his senior enlisted advisor and their spouse will all be on the stage answering questions.

Scenario (Panel):

You have been asked – and accepted – to participate in a panel regarding diversity in the Marine Corps.

Background:

DoD has contracted with two independent third-party survey firms to administer the Department's annual tenant satisfaction survey for all DoD government-owned, government-leased, or privatized family housing, and all privatized unaccompanied housing. The survey began last week for the Marine Corps. Each household received a link to access the survey via email from these third-party contractors. Only one survey can be completed by each household and survey participation is voluntary and confidential. No personally identifiable information (PII) collected as part of this survey will be provided or shared with DoD as part of this survey process. Each household will have at least 45 days to provide their input. Residents should contact their installation military housing office if they have questions, need technical support, or their housing has not receive an email containing a survey link.

The annual tenant satisfaction survey will be administered to approximately 250,000 households using the same survey questions for all households, regardless of military service (or survey firm). The survey results will provide a strategic perspective on tenant satisfaction with the overall experience of living in DoD privatized and government-owned/leased housing, including property conditions, resident services, and community amenities.

The surveys will be announced by the DoD Chief Housing Officer (CHO) by memo published on defense.gov on November 30, 2021; by the CHO memo and supplemental memos from military leadership provided as hyperlinks as part of the contractor's email asking for resident participation in the survey; and on installation websites and billboards to ensure that any household that did not receive the survey email (e.g., they have a new email address) knows who to contact to receive a copy. Privatized housing landlords may advertise the survey consistent with DoD policy and requisite military department approval.

PA POSTURE:

Active

HOLDING STATEMENT:

“W. Jordan Gillis, assistant secretary of defense for sustainment and the Defense Department’s chief housing officer, is inviting DOD housing residents to participate in the department’s annual housing satisfaction survey, which was launched last week.

“Each year, DOD, working through the military departments, surveys current residents of government-owned, government-leased, or privatized family housing and current residents of privatized unaccompanied housing. The goal is to obtain feedback regarding their living experience.

“Survey participation is voluntary, and Gillis encourages residents to share their views about their current housing, resident services and community amenities. According to Gillis, “Resident feedback is important to help the department improve the quality of housing and customer care available to residents.”

RESOURCES:

- DoDI5405.03, “Development, Submission and Approval of PPAG,” February 18, 2016.
- MHPI Tenant Satisfaction Survey Policy for DOD Privatized, Owned or Leased Housing, which is consistent with:
- Section 3058 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, Public Law 116-92: Requires each installation of the Department of Defense use the same satisfaction survey for tenants of military housing, including privatized housing and government owned or leasing housing.
- Section 2891a(d)(5) of title 10, United States Code, as added by section 3014 of the FY 2020 NDAA, prohibits landlords of privatized military housing from conducting promotional events to encourage tenants to complete satisfaction surveys, without the approval of the chief of the housing management office.
- Memo from Assistant Secretary of Defense, Sustainment, “DOD Housing Satisfaction Survey” (dated November 30, 2020)
- Defense.gov article, “DOD Annual Housing Satisfaction Surveys Soon Underway” (dated November 30, 2020)

KEY MESSAGES:

Theme 1: Encouraging Survey Participation

Message 1: DoD wants to hear from service members about their housing experience.

Message 2: The FY 2021 tenant satisfaction survey is an important opportunity for service members to provide their valuable insight on their experiences living in DOD privatized or government-owned/leased housing.

Message 3: Feedback from Tenants is used to improve housing conditions and resident services for current and future service member tenants and their families.

Message 4: Participation is voluntary and confidential – no personally identifiable information is shared with DoD or privatized housing landlords.

Theme 2: Caring for Housing Residents

Message 1: The health, safety, and security of our residents are a top priority. We live, work, and play in the same communities in which we serve.

Message 2: We honor the sacrifice that military members and their families make to our nation every day. They deserve a safe and secure place to live.

Message 3: Recent concerns raised by many military families about housing call for immediate attention and underscore a need for greater accountability.

Message 4: Resident feedback as part of the housing satisfaction survey will help inform plans for improvements to housing, resident services, and community amenities to provide a better quality of life for service members and their families.

Theme 3: Sustained Progress in Improving the Housing Experience

Message 1: DOD, Military Departments, and privatized housing landlords are working together to ensure safe, high quality, affordable housing is provided where service members and military families want — and choose — to live. This includes providing increased opportunities for tenant engagement and ensuring that tenant concerns are addressed in a timely, transparent, and accountable manner.

Message 2: Implementing a uniform tenant satisfaction survey across all DOD privatized housing and government-owned and government-leased family housing as required by the FY 2020 NDAA is an important step for the Department to improve trust and accountability of our leadership to provide safe, healthy homes for our military and their families. It will ensure Department leadership has the best data to inform decisions and improve housing conditions for our most valuable asset – our people.

Message 3: In addition to the tenant satisfaction survey, the Department continues to take actions to improve its oversight and enhance the living experience for service members and their families.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Q1. What is the annual DoD housing satisfaction survey?

A1. The annual DoD housing satisfaction survey is a third-party survey funded by DoD and distributed to Department-wide to residents of government-owned, government- leased and privatized family housing, and to residents of privatized unaccompanied housing. The survey provides each household a voluntary and confidential opportunity to share open and honest feedback on their housing experience. The survey results are provided to DoD and service leadership to help inform near-term and future plans for improvements to housing, resident services, and community amenities, and to inform decisions and investments regarding privatized housing. Following DoD review, the survey results are also shared with privatized housing landlords. Again, the survey results are anonymous and contain no personally identifiable information about any of the survey respondents.

Q2. When is the survey going to be available to residents?

A2. Though exact timelines vary by service and will be announced separately, a link to the Annual DoD Housing Tenant Satisfaction Survey is expected to be released to one primary resident of each household via the primary email address on file with the military department and/or the privatized housing landlord during the first two weeks of December 2020. The survey for each military service will be open at a minimum of 45 days.

Members are encouraged to be on the look-out for the housing survey referenced in the linked memo from Assistant Secretary of Defense, Sustainment, Gillis.

Q3. How many surveys can be submitted per household?

A3. While non-military family members can complete the RSS survey, only one survey submission is allowed per household.

Q4. Are the surveys anonymous?

A4. Yes. All survey responses will be confidential and anonymous. No requests to be contacted regarding survey questions or input will be shared with DoD or the privatized housing landlords. Any residents who have a housing issue or suggestion that they want to discuss with someone should contact their installation's government housing office or privatized housing landlord.

Q5. How does resident feedback impact the housing program and individual housing sites?

A5. DoD housing continues to be a positive quality of life program supporting service members and their families. In order to ensure the program continues to provide residents with the best possible housing experience, resident feedback gathered through the annual survey is used to inform near-term and future plans to improve housing, resident services, and community amenities.

Q6. When will the results be ready from the survey? Who sees them?

A6. Once the survey concludes, the third-party survey firms tabulate and analyze the data and then provide reports to each of the military services. The survey results are generally provided to the services within two months of survey completion. The services will review the data for accuracy and completeness before approving the results. Once the results have been approved, they will be shared across service Military Housing Offices and provided to MHPI project landlords. Again, the survey results do not contain any personally identifiable information about individual respondents.

Q7. How are the survey results processed and scored?

A7. Both survey firms use the same questions across all housing types, locations, and military services, regardless of the survey firm administering the survey on DoD's behalf. The survey primarily utilizes Likert scales for responses to individual questions. The survey scoring system is proprietary in nature, but provides a consistent methodology for evaluating survey results.

Q8. Is this year's survey any different from last year's?

A8. Yes, there are some differences between the surveys. This year all survey questions are identical regardless of military service or housing type or whether the housing is government-owned, government-leased, or privatized. This is consistent with requirements in the FY20 NDAA and will help ensure the survey results are comparable to improve the DOD's overall understanding of the current state of housing across all services and housing types. In addition, this year all privatized housing surveys are being completed under contract by the military services, with none of the surveys funded or contracted by privatized housing landlords.

Q9. Who should residents contact if they have any other questions regarding the annual DoD housing satisfaction survey?

A9. Residents should contact their installation Military Housing Office. If no member of their household receives an email link by 18 December 2020, they are asked to contact their installation government housing office for assistance.

COMMSTRAT POINT OF CONTACT:

COMMSTRAT OFFICER, YOUR UNIT, ontherecord@usmc.mil, 703-614-4309

QUESTIONS: MOLD IN HOUSING

Reporter 's / Audience Member's Name:

Affiliation:

Questions:

This isn't the first time DOD has issued a Tenant Satisfaction Survey, yet each year it seems that the same questions and issues are brought up. What is different now? Will actions be taken to actually correct these problems this time?

The photos and videos being shared online are disgusting. No one should be forced to live in such conditions, especially not here in America. As a supposed leader of Marines, how do you sleep at night knowing your Marines are living in such conditions?

What should the Marine Corps do right now to improve the living conditions for all Marines?

Knowing what you do about how not only the barracks but also base housing living conditions are: Would you want your child to join the Marine Corps if they were 18 years old today? Why or why not?

Is there anything you would like to add?

SCENARIO: SUICIDE

BRIEFING CARD: SUICIDE

Scenario:

Your command has had 3 suicides, verified by NCIS, in as many weeks. The Commander, based on the recommendations of his staff, has decided to host an open town hall and allow media to ask questions in addition to attending. The Commander, senior enlisted advisor, and senior medical advisor will be on the stage answering questions.

Background:

We cannot afford to lose any Marines to suicide. Suicide is an enterprise-wide concern that has lasting harmful effects on Marines and Families. The Marine Corps strategy for reducing suicides in the Marine Corps from the all-time high in CY2020 focuses on four lines of effort: 1) prevention and skill building, 2) use of data and research, 3) communication, and 4) collaboration. We understand that COVID-19 may be a critical factor influencing increased number of deaths by suicides in the USMC. The impact has been observed across the DoD, and in the civilian population as well.

The two Marines and one sailor were well liked in the command and it came as a shock to everyone within the command when they died by suicide.

PA POSTURE: Active

RESOURCES:

- The Military Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255, Press 1; DSN 118) is a 24/7/365 call center providing phone, chat, and text capability provides free and confidential support.
- Marine and Family Programs website: www.usmc-mccs.org/services/support/suicide-prevention/#local
- Training resources available at www.thegearlocker.org within the Marine Awareness and Prevention Integrated Training (MAPIT) Dashboard and the Suicide Prevention Commander's Toolkit pages

KEY MESSAGES:

Theme 1: Marine Corps Suicide Prevention

Message 1: In the Marine Corps, Suicide Prevention is a commander's program. Every leader must know each one of their Marines to recognize unhealthy stress responses, promote an environment in which mental wellness is prioritized, and utilize the Marine Corps Suicide Prevention System (MCSPS) to care for Marines at risk for suicide. The MCSPS includes medical providers, non-medical counselors, chaplains, and many more throughout the Marine Corps who are committed to support the efforts of commanders to prevent suicide. HQMC provides multiple programs and preventative resources to support commanders in creating an environment that champions mental health and psychological fitness as critical to individual, family and unit level readiness.

Message 2. All Marines are required to receive annual training that addresses prevention and skill building as well as warning signals of suicide, risk factors, and their responsibilities to intervene when a fellow Marine shows signals of severe distress. Operational Stress Control and Readiness (OSCAR) Team Training builds on these concepts, and additional training resources to supplement annual training are available to all Marine units to reinforce the concepts taught in annual training.

Theme 2: Leadership at all levels takes suicide seriously

Message 1: Leadership involvement builds the skills needed to prevent crisis. HQMC-developed resources and communications help leaders build the personal resilience and skill within their Marines to prevent the crisis. Prevention in action includes monthly newsletters, mitigation strategies based on annual results of the Death by Suicide Review Board (DSRB), year around installation level suicide prevention themes and slogans, and updating training to teach stress mitigation skills to family members as well as Marines.

Message 2: Although one death is too many, death by suicide is not a common result of an ideation. A Marine can have persistent thoughts of suicide and never attempt suicide, but another Marine might also attempt suicide after only briefly experiencing a single suicidal ideation. It is important that all comments about suicide and suicidal behavior be taken seriously, and the individuals involved are immediately connected to those trained to help.

Message 3: Leadership involvement interrupts thoughts of self-harm suicide. To assist commanders and unit leaders in this effort, HQMC communicates with the command of a Marine who has an attempt or an ideation to disrupt the line of thinking that contribute to the event. This is done through the Marine Intercept Program. Marines are provided follow up communication, risk assessment, safety planning, and skill building by non-medical counselors with the aim of reducing repeated suicide-related events.

Message 4: Everyone experiences stress. Stress can be caused by a number of factor such as finance, relationships, legal concern, changes in stature or other forms of loss. Commanders appoint Marines to be part of their OSCAR team, along with medical and religious personnel in the unit. A strong and well-trained Operational Stress Control and Readiness (OSCAR) team reinforces the commander's suicide prevention program by providing the knowledge and resources to build resilience, mitigate the negative impacts of stress, identify when outside resources may be needed, and connect Marines to those resources.

Theme 3: Suicide prevention takes a community

Message 1. Most people face challenges with family, finances, work, and relationships. Serving in the military and defending the nation can add further demands and pressures. In such a high stress environment, suicidal ideations can be more common than many would expect. Just as Marines were trained to be problem solvers in the field, Marines can be further equipped to manage their stressors in healthy and productive ways.

Message 2. For every Marine, a network of Marines, family members, friends, leaders, and sometimes counselors and chaplains are needed to recognize distress, support healthy stress responses, and work together to identify when the stress has become unmanageable and professional support is needed.

Releasable Facts and Potential Tie-ins:

	CY20 Full Year	CY19 Full Year	CY18 Full Year	CY17 Full Year
Active Component (AC) Suicides	62*	47	57	43
Reserve Component (RC) Suicides	10*	9*	19	10
AC Reported Attempts	320	357	333	312
AC Reported Ideations	1,328	1,288	1,403	1,121

COMMSTRAT POINT OF CONTACT:**COMMSTRAT OFFICER, YOUR UNIT, ontherecord@usmc.mil, 703-614-4309**

QUESTIONS: SUICIDE

Reporter 's / Audience Member's Name:

Affiliation:

Questions:

This isn't the first time a Marine Corps command has had a service member die by suicide or even multiple service members die by suicide. What are you doing to ensure you don't lose more Marines and Sailors to this invisible enemy? Will actions be taken to actually correct these problems this time?

As a Marine leader, how do you sleep at night knowing your Marines are taking their own lives? Potentially because of policies you are enforcing?

What should the Marine Corps do right now to reduce the number of suicides every year?

Knowing what you do about suicide numbers in the Marine Corps: Would you want your child to join the Marine Corps if they were 18 years old today? Why or why not?

Is there anything you would like to add?

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