

GUYANA ELECTIONS COMMISSION

RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS

OVERVIEW

Acting on the belief that public enlightenment is a necessary condition for promoting and preserving democracy, the Guyana Elections Commission established a permanent Public Relations Unit. In this context, it is the duty of the Public Relations Unit to provide all stakeholders with fair and comprehensive accounts of the Commission's policies and activities with timeliness, thoroughness and accuracy.

The primary purpose of dissemination of information therefore, is to serve general welfare by informing people about the policies and activities of the Commission thereby enabling them to make informed judgments on the issues at hand. Complying with the public's right to know of events regarding the execution of the responsibilities of the Commission is the overriding mission of its Public Relations Unit.

In Guyana, where social stability rests (partially) upon the agreement of the people that elections are conducted in a free fair and transparent manner, it is essential that the Public Relations Unit, as the medium through which information is released to the public, maintains high standards of efficiency, impartiality and integrity. The Rules of Procedure for the Public Relations Unit of GECOM seek to promote compliance with these principles by providing a framework for regulation.

The Rules contained herein are intended to develop, preserve, protect and strengthen the bond of trust and respect between the Guyana Elections Commission and all stakeholders.

The Rules of Procedure for GECOM'S Public Relations Unit are described in five parts, namely; Issuance of Media Releases; Hosting of Press Conferences/Briefings; Website Maintenance; Responding to Queries/Comments (from stakeholders); and GECOM Newsletter.

1. ISSUANCE OF MEDIA RELEASES

1.1. Authority:

The Public Relations Unit shall make media releases only upon receipt of instructions to do so by the Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission or, in the absence of the Chairman, the Chief Elections Officer.

Commissioners should be routinely apprised of the timing, content and purpose of such releases prior to their release; and appropriate account should be taken of Commissioners' views.

1.2. Independence, good faith, truthfulness, accuracy and impartiality:

The Public Relations Unit shall construct releases to the media in compliance with the principles of independence, good faith, truthfulness, accuracy, completeness and impartiality. There shall be no "spin-doctoring" designed to achieve pre-determined results favourable to GECOM as an institution, or to Officers of GECOM as individuals.

1.3. Consultation:

Media releases prepared by the Public Relations Unit shall be done in consultation with the subject Head of Department relevant to the issue at hand.

1.4. Vetting:

The Chairman, or the Chief Election Officer in the absence of the Chairman, must vet and approve all media releases before they are issued.

1.5. Issuance/Impartiality:

The Public Relations Unit shall issue media releases to every news medium in a timely manner and with impartiality, thereby ensuring that no news medium can honestly claim to have been discriminated against.

1.6. Monitoring and Verification:

The Public Relations Officer shall monitor the publication of media releases to verify that such publication conveys the message of the Commission without distortion.

1.7. Corrections:

Any distortion of messages by media representatives shall be reported immediately to the Chairman, or the Chief Election Officer in the absence of the Chairman, and immediate corrective action shall be taken to assuage any damage caused by such distortion(s). The Public Relations Unit shall also make prompt and complete corrections of mistakes of fact or opinion contained in its media releases.

1.8. Support:

GECOM's Heads of Departments shall, upon request, support the crafting of media releases by providing accurate information on the subject at hand in an accurate and timely manner.

2. HOSTING OF PRESS CONFERENCES/BRIEFINGS

2.1. Authority:

Press conferences/briefings shall be arranged only with the approval of the Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission. Their purpose is to provide accurate information to the public on specific policies/activities of the Commission. The Chairman's approval should usually be given after he has consulted Commissioners; and in any event, Commissioners must be apprised of the intention of GECOM to host a press conference and be entitled to participate.

2.2. Coordination:

Subject to instructions from the Chairman, the Public Relations Officer shall organise the hosting of press conferences/briefings at the appropriate time and place by indicating the issue(s) to be dealt with and inviting (in writing) all media houses to participate. The Public Relations Officer shall also ensure that adequate physical arrangements are in place for the hosting of press conferences/briefings.

2.3. Impartiality:

The Public Relations Officer shall, with impartiality, ensure that all media houses are invited to participate at press conferences/briefings.

2.4. Conduct:

The Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission shall conduct press conferences/briefings. The subject Head(s) of Department(s) may accompany the Chairman at press conferences/briefings to assist with the dissemination of information and responding to queries from journalists as may be warranted by the issue(s) at hand.

2.5. Monitoring and Verification:

The Public Relations Officer shall monitor news reports/commentaries/opinions published as a result of press conferences/briefings hosted by the Commission to attempt to ensure that the intended message of the Commission has been conveyed without distortion.

2.6. Corrections:

Any distortion of messages by media representatives shall be reported immediately to the Chairman, or the Chief Election Officer in the absence of the Chairman, and immediate corrective action shall be taken to assuage any damage caused by such distortion(s). The Public Relations Unit shall also make prompt and complete corrections of mistakes of fact or opinion emanating from any of the press conferences/briefings conducted by the Chairman.

2.7. Support:

GECOM's Heads of Departments shall, upon request, support the crafting of media releases by providing accurate information on the subject at hand in a timely manner.

3. WEBSITE MAINTENANCE

3.1. Editorial Committee:

Information published on the website shall be informed by advice received from the Editorial Committee which shall attempt to ensure that all published information conforms to the ethics of professional journalism. The Editorial Committee shall meet as may be necessary to review and make recommendations on all information proposed for publication on the website. The Editorial Committee shall make recommendations to the Commission through the Chairman, as the situation may warrant (see paragraph 2 of item 4.1) before specific information is published on the website.

The Editorial Committee shall comprise; the Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission; two (2) Commissioners of the Guyana Elections Commission; the Chief Election Office; the Public Relations Officer; one (1) Communications Expert; and one (1) Legal Expert.

3.2. Content:

Development of the textual content of the GECOM website shall be coordinated by the Public Relations Officer with assistance from GECOM's Heads of Departments and other individuals/agencies as may be deemed necessary by the Commission.

The textual content shall usually be restricted to the statutory provisions for electoral practices as well as the policies and activities of the Commission, as approved by the Commission, and shall be developed in compliance with the principles of responsibility, independence, accuracy and impartiality.

3.3. Authority:

All information published on the GECOM website shall be done with the approval of the Chairman after he would have engaged in consultations at Commission level.

3.4. Maintenance:

The updating and maintenance of the GECOM website shall be effected by Sustainable Development Network Project (SDNP) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) or any other competent service provider approved by the Commission, based upon instructions received from the Guyana Elections Commission through the Public Relations Officer of the Commission. In this regard, the Guyana Elections Commission shall be free

to pursue procurement, installation and operation of a server within the IT Department of the Commission.

3.5. Response to Queries:

Responses to all queries relevant to the policies and activities of the Guyana Elections Commission published on the GECOM website shall be crafted by the Public Relations Officer. These responses must be forwarded to the Chairman of the Commission, or the Chief Election Officer in the absence of the Chairman. Such responses must benefit from the input of the Chairman, relevant Head(s) of Department(s) and the Editorial Committee before being forwarded to the service provider for posting on the website.

3.6. Corrections:

The Public Relations Officer shall report any incorrect publication of information on the GECOM website to the Chairman, or the Chief Election Officer in the absence of the Chairman. Immediate corrective action shall be taken to assuage any damage caused by the publication of such incorrect information.

3.7. Support:

GECOM's Heads of Departments shall, upon request, support the textual development and maintenance of the website by providing accurate information on the subject at hand in a timely manner.

4. RESPONDING TO QUERIES/COMMENTS

4.1. Authority to Respond:

All oral or written queries/comments from the public regarding the policies and functions of the Commission must be brought to the attention of the Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission, or the Chief Election Officer in the absence of the Chairman, for approval to respond. Provided that such queries/comments simply require information that is already in the public domain e.g. statutory provisions of electoral relevance, no approval shall be necessary.

In cases where the required responses to queries/comments could be deemed urgent, the Chairman shall authorize such responses after consultation with Commissioners via the "round robin" system. Failure to do so because of the unavailability of Commissioners must be followed up with the Commissioners being informed of the action taken, as soon as possible.

Responses to queries/comments received from the public shall be issued by the Public Relations Officer with the approval of the Chairman, or the Chief Election Officer in the absence of the Chairman.

4.2. Consultation:

The Public Relations Officer shall construct responses to queries in consultation with the relevant Heads of Departments.

4.3. Support:

GECOM's Heads of Departments shall, upon request, support the crafting of responses to queries about GECOM's policies and activities by providing accurate information on the subject at hand in a timely manner.

5. GECOM Newsletter:

5.1.A GECOM Newsletter focusing on the current and forthcoming activities/issues of the Commission and its Secretariat shall be prepared and produced on a quarterly basis by the Public Relations Officer with the approval of the Commission through the Chairman of the Commission. The newsletter shall also focus on significant personal and official staff achievements.

5.2.GECOM's Heads of Departments shall, upon request, submit written reports on the activities of their respective departments to the Public Relations Officer for publication in the newsletter. The publication of such reports shall be subject to the approval of the Commission through the Chairman of the Commission.

5.3.The Commission shall determine the physical and textual features and cost of production of the GECOM Newsletter.

5.4.Circulation of the GECOM Newsletter shall focus primarily on providing information to target groups that do not possess the means of ready access to information about the policies and functions of the Guyana Elections Commission. The GECOM Newsletter shall also be made available to other individuals or groups as approved by the Commission.

Vishnu Persaud
Public Relations Officer
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COMMISSION

Rules of Procedure

for

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