



Model Policy

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<i>Subject</i> Recording Police Activity				
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I. PURPOSE

This policy provides officers with guidance for dealing with situations in which they are being recorded, to include photographing, videotaping, audiotaping, or both, by members of the public or the press.

II. POLICY

Members of the public, including media representatives, have an unambiguous First Amendment right to record officers in public places, as long as their actions do not interfere with the officer's duties or the safety of officers or others. Officers should assume that they are being recorded at all times when on duty in a public space.

III. DEFINITIONS

Recording: Capturing of images, audio, or both, by means of a camera, cell phone, audio recorder, or other device.

Media: The storage source for visual or audio recordings, whether by film, analog, or digital means.

IV. PROCEDURES

- A. Persons who are lawfully in public spaces or locations where they have a legal right to be present—such as their home, place of business, or the common areas of public and private facilities and buildings—have a First Amendment right to record things in plain sight or hearing,¹ to include police activity. Police may not threaten, intimidate, or otherwise discourage or interfere with the

recording of police activities. However, the right to record is not absolute and is subject to legitimate and reasonable legal restrictions, as follows:

1. A reasonable distance must be maintained from the officer(s) engaged in enforcement or related police duties.
2. Persons engaged in recording activities may not obstruct police actions. For example, individuals may not interfere through direct physical intervention, tampering with a witness, or by persistently engaging an officer with questions or interruptions. The fact that recording and/or overt verbal criticism, insults, or name-calling may be annoying, does not of itself justify an officer taking corrective or enforcement action or ordering that recording be stopped, as this is an infringement on an individual's constitutional right to protected speech.
3. Recording must be conducted in a manner that does not unreasonably impede the movement of emergency equipment and personnel or the flow of vehicular or pedestrian traffic.
4. The safety of officers, victims, witnesses, and third parties cannot be jeopardized by the recording party.

B. Arrest

1. Persons who violate the foregoing restrictions should be informed that they are engaged in prohibited activity and given information on acceptable alternatives, where appropriate, prior to making an arrest.

¹ In nearly all cases, audio recording of police is legally permissible and subject to the same guidelines as video recording. This is so even in states where eavesdropping statutes require two-party consent.

2. Arrest of a person who is recording officers in public shall be related to an objective, articulable violation of the law unrelated to the act of recording. The act of recording does not, in itself, provide grounds for detention or arrest.
3. Arrest of an individual does not provide an exception to the warrant requirement justifying search of the individual's recording equipment or media. While equipment may be seized incident to an arrest, downloading, viewing, or otherwise accessing files requires a search warrant. Files and media shall not be altered or erased under any circumstances.

C. Seizure of Recording Devices and Media

1. Absent arrest of the recording party, recording equipment may not be seized. Additionally, officers may not order an individual to show recordings that have been made of enforcement actions or other police operations.
2. If there is probable cause to believe that evidence of a serious crime has been recorded, an officer should
 - a. advise and receive instructions from a supervisor;
 - b. ask the person in possession of the recording if he or she will consent to voluntarily and temporarily relinquish the recording device or media so that it may be viewed and/or copied as evidence; and
 - c. in exigent circumstances, in which it is reasonable to believe that the recording will be destroyed, lost, tampered with or otherwise rendered useless as evidence before a warrant can be obtained, the recording device or media may be seized under a temporary restraint. A warrant must be obtained in order to examine and copy the recording and the chain of custody must be clearly documented per department policy.
3. In exigent situations where it is objectively reasonable to believe that immediate viewing of recordings is necessary to prevent death or serious bodily harm of another before a warrant can be authorized, the recording device or media may be seized and viewed.
4. Whenever a recording device or media is seized without a warrant or obtained by voluntary consent, the seized item shall be held in police custody no longer than reasonably necessary for the police, acting with due diligence, to obtain a warrant. The device must be returned at the earliest possible time and its owner/operator given instruction on how it can

be retrieved. In all cases property receipts shall be provided to the owner.

D. Supervisory Responsibilities

A supervisor should be summoned to any incident in which an individual recording police activity is going to be, or will most likely be, arrested or when recording equipment may be seized without a warrant or lawful consent.

Note

This document was updated as part of the IACP's Public Recording of Police (PROP) Project. This project was supported by Cooperative Agreement Number 2013-CK-WX-K005 awarded by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions contained herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. References to specific agencies, companies, products, or services should not be considered an endorsement by the author(s) or the U.S. Department of Justice. Rather, the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues.

Every effort has been made by the IACP Law Enforcement Policy Center staff and advisory board to ensure that this document incorporates the most current information and contemporary professional judgment on this issue. However, law enforcement administrators should be cautioned that no "model" policy can meet all the needs of any given law enforcement agency. Each law enforcement agency operates in a unique environment of federal court rulings, state laws, local ordinances, regulations, judicial and administrative decisions and collective bargaining agreements that must be considered. In addition, the formulation of specific agency policies must take into account local political and community perspectives and customs, prerogatives and demands; often divergent law enforcement strategies and philosophies; and the impact of varied agency resource capabilities among other factors. This document is not intended to be a national standard.

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*[DRAFTING NOTE: This Policy is designed to address the possibility of First Amendment audits. In brief, First Amendment audits are situations in which private citizens video record municipal facilities or employees to determine whether the municipality is complying with the First Amendment. The courts have generally recognized that video recording is a form of speech that is protected by the First Amendment. Therefore, private citizens have the constitutional right to record public employees in public places. That right is not unlimited and may be regulated in nonpublic forums and limited public forums. Municipalities may also regulate conduct to ensure the orderly operation of municipal functions and to protect the rights of their employees and private visitors. The policy below is intended to identify and apply rules within nonpublic and limited public forums under the control of the municipality. The policy below also contains generally applicable rules of conduct for all municipal facilities. **You should consult with your own municipal attorney before adopting or applying this policy.**]*

Policy Regarding Public Access to and Video and Audio Recording on Municipality Property

PURPOSE

The [TOWN/CITY] Council (the “Council”) of the [TOWN/CITY] of [NAME] (the “Municipality”) is committed to protecting the rights of citizens under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, while implementing policies and procedures that protect the health, safety, welfare, and personal privacy of the Municipality’s employees and the general public who do business with or use the services of the Municipality. This policy (this “Policy”) is intended to delineate those portions of the Municipality Property (as defined herein) that are accessible to and observable by the general public from those portions that are accessible on a limited basis, establish rules of conduct that are applicable to all Municipality Property, and specify procedures for Municipality employees who encounter those who wish to access Municipality Property for observational purposes.

DEFINITIONS

“Limited Access Area” means any designated area on Municipality Property that is not generally open to or occupied by the public; is open to or occupied by the public on only a limited, as-needed, or by-invitation basis; or is in an area generally open to or occupied by the public in close proximity to where private third parties conduct business with Municipality employees. Limited Access Areas may be designated by doors, physical barriers, building design features, signage, reception desks or stations, stanchions, ropes, fencing, bollards, or other visible indications. The lack of visible indications shall not prevent the Municipality from considering or treating an area as a Limited Access Area. The Municipality shall retain the right to verbally instruct third parties

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that an area is a Limited Access Area. Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, Limited Access Areas include but are not limited to the following:

- a) Employee offices.
- b) Employee workspaces including copy rooms, mailrooms, and break areas.
- c) Employee parking lots, storage areas, access points, or other outside areas marked for use by Municipality employees or vehicles only.
- d) Areas in close proximity to places, stations, desks, counters, or teller windows at which private third parties conduct business with Municipality employees.
- e) Hallways, staircases, restrooms, elevators, and other areas by purpose or function restricted to limited or transitory occupancy or providing access solely to other Limited Access Areas.
- f) Maintenance, storage, and warehousing facilities.
- g) Public works and public safety buildings, except for any designated waiting or reception areas therein.
- h) Water, sewer, and other public utility facilities.

“Municipality Official” means, for purposes of this policy:

- a) Any Municipality law enforcement officer.
- b) Any person providing security services in any Municipality Property pursuant to contract with the Municipality or with any person, firm, or corporation managing a Municipality Property on the Municipality’s behalf.
- c) With respect to any building, facility, area, or space assigned to a Municipality department, division, or agency, the director or manager of such department, division, or agency, or any person that such official specifically designates in writing.
- d) The Municipality [Manager/Administrator], any Assistant Municipality [Manager/Administrator], [additional officers], or any person that such officials specifically designate in writing.

“Municipality Property” means any real property owned by the Municipality or in which the Municipality has a property interest or property management responsibility

“Public Area” means any area on Municipality Property that is generally open to general public access and occupancy that is not otherwise designated as a Limited Access Area.

“Rules of Conduct” means the specific guidelines set forth in this policy.

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RULES OF CONDUCT ON MUNICIPALITY PROPERTY

To maintain an environment that promotes orderly administrative and business operations, and to take reasonable and prudent actions to protect the health, welfare, safety, and personal privacy of all persons at Municipality Property, the Rules of Conduct in this section apply and are to be enforced at all Municipality Property except where specific rules of conduct or prohibitions have been adopted for designated Municipality Property.

Rules of Conduct Applicable to All Municipality Property. The following Rules of Conduct shall apply at all Municipality Property, including both Public Areas and Limited Access Areas:

- a) No person shall enter, attempt to enter, or remain in any areas of Municipality Property for any purpose other than to conduct legitimate business with Municipality offices or tenants located at Municipality Property, to enjoy publicly accessible amenities in Public Areas, to lawfully assemble for social or public interaction in Public Areas specifically designated for such assembly, or to exercise other constitutionally protected rights. The appropriate Municipality Officials may adopt specific policies with respect to Municipality Property under their custody and control to manage conditions for use of such Municipality Property including without limitation to establish hours and terms of use, reservation protocols, use and user priority, and fees for use.
- b) No person shall engage in any activity on Municipality Property that would constitute a violation of federal, state, or local law or regulation.
- c) No person shall engage in activity that disrupts or interferes with the normal operation or administration of Municipality business at Municipality Property, lawful use by Municipality employees and authorized users at Municipality Property, or Municipality-permitted activities.
- d) No person shall stalk, harass, threaten, intimidate, or otherwise compromise the wellbeing and safety of Municipality employees or private third parties lawfully using Municipality Property. Photography, audio recording, or video recording does not, in and of itself, violate this Rule of Conduct. Likewise, conduct that would otherwise violate this Rule of Conduct shall not be permitted merely because the conduct involves photography, audio recording, or video recording.
- e) No person shall interfere or obstruct the free passage of Municipality employees or authorized third parties in or on Municipality Property, including without limitation by standing in, blocking access to, or occupying areas for purposes of photography, audio recording, or video recording.
- f) No person shall photograph, audio record, or video record in such a manner that would allow capture of, access to, or disclosure of private, personal, confidential, sensitive, or privileged information of private third parties. The Municipality may enforce this Rule of Conduct by imposing minimum standing or separation distances from areas, stations,

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desks, counters, or teller windows at which private third parties conduct business with Municipality employees.

Limited Access Areas The following Rules of Conduct shall apply at all Limited Access Areas:

- a) Limited Access Areas shall be accessible only to the following: (i) employees, elected officials, and appointed officials of the Municipality; and (ii) private parties but only on a limited, as-needed, or by-invitation basis, to include those private parties accessing a Limited Access Area for the express purpose of conducting business with Municipality employees.
- b) Photography, audio recording, and video recording is prohibited in Limited Access Areas, except as follows: (i) any Municipality Official may authorize audio or video recording or photography in Limited Access Areas, for good cause shown, with the consent of all parties to be recorded or photographed, provided that any Municipality Official may impose appropriate and reasonable conditions on the recording or photography to prevent the unauthorized disclosure of confidential information; and (ii) audio and video recording and photography may be permitted in Limited Access Areas when specifically authorized by applicable law or agreements.
- c) No person shall photograph, audio record, or video record any private third party lawfully entering into, using, or occupying a Limited Access Area without the express consent of such third party.

EXCLUSION

If a person violates these Rules of Conduct while in or upon Municipality Property, any Municipality Official may eject and direct such person to leave Municipality Property for a period of up to 24 hours. It shall not be necessary for such Municipality Official to allege any crime or other violation of applicable law other than these Rules of Conduct in order to support such notice of exclusion; *provided* that violation of such notice of exclusion may be deemed a trespass under applicable law. The notice of exclusion shall be in writing, given to the person excluded and signed by the Municipality Official. It shall specify the dates and places of exclusion and shall contain a warning of consequences for failure to comply with the notice of exclusion.

SECURITY PROCEDURES

- a) Any person may photograph, film, or record audio of any Public Area. Any such activity should be reported to a Municipality Official, preferably a law enforcement officer if possible.
- b) Municipality employees should refrain from engaging with photographers and videographers wherever possible. Municipality employees should monitor photographers

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or videographers on Municipality Property, but should refrain from engaging them unless they violate any Rule of Conduct. In the event that engagement is necessary, every effort should be made to respond calmly without escalating the encounter.

- c) A Municipality employee who does not wish to be photographed or recorded may retire to a Limited Access Area.
- d) Municipality employees are not required to respond to questions or demands from any photographer or videographer, and should refrain from doing so if possible.
- e) Municipality employees may invite a private third party conducting business with the Municipality and who do not wish to be photographed or filmed to retire to a more private Limited Access Area in order to complete any business or transaction.
- f) Municipality law enforcement officers may approach photographers and videographers upon a complaint from a member of the public or Municipality employees that the activity is suspicious or based upon their own observation that the activity is suspicious or inconsistent with this Policy. This Policy neither limits nor expands the authority of Municipality law enforcement officers to initiate and pursue investigations, to perform pat downs or frisks based upon reasonable suspicion, or to conduct searches based upon probable cause in accordance with legal authority. Photography, audio recording, or video recording does not, in and of itself, rise to the level of reasonable suspicion or probable cause.