
Government Media Relations Training Course: Spokespeople, Briefings and Press Office Planning

14 – 18 December 2026
Madrid





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Programme Summary

Government media relations is the subject of this one-week training course for communication directors, press office heads and senior officials, ending in a press office plan for one live communication need. Public bodies must inform citizens and answer the press accurately while messages stay consistent across institutions. The programme links mandate, audience evidence, message design, briefings and crisis response, then applies each tool to one issue. Mars Training Centre UK delivers this programme on government media relations to mixed-organisation cohorts.

The Business Case

Weak media handling in a public body shows quickly as contradictory statements, slow replies and rumours that fill silence. Leaders who manage government media relations with a clear mandate, prepared spokespeople and a tested response routine protect public trust and give ministers and technical teams a dependable channel to the press.

- Message Consistency: Improves as statements are drawn from one agreed message house and shared across institutions.
- Response Time to Press Queries: Shortens as question banks, holding statements and briefing notes are prepared in advance.
- Public Trust in Official Information: Strengthens as communication is planned, evidence-led and evaluated rather than reactive.

Principles and Evidence Base

- OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government: It frames public communication as a core government function and anchors the mandate work in Sessions 1 and 2.
- OECD Report on Public Communication: It guides the strategic approach of objectives, audience insight, coordination and evaluation used in Sessions 2 to 4.
- OECD public communication principles: They separate institutional communication from partisan messaging and shape the spokesperson and briefing rules in Sessions 3 and 4.

Intended Participants

- Communication directors who set the media approach for a ministry or agency.
- Press office heads who run briefings, queries and daily media handling.
- Senior officials who act as spokespeople or approve public statements.
- Advisers who coordinate messages between several institutions.
- Crisis and information managers who respond to rumours and misinformation.



Typical functions include health, transport, education and municipal administration.

Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to define the public communication mandate of an institution and separate it from partisan messaging.
2. Participants will be able to diagnose media coverage and audience gaps from evidence.
3. Participants will be able to construct a message house and briefing note for a chosen issue.
4. Participants will be able to evaluate a spokesperson's performance in a rehearsed interview.
5. Participants will be able to design a crisis and misinformation response protocol.
6. Participants will be able to justify a press office plan with measures of results.

Programme Structure

Day 1: Public Communication Principles and Mandate

What distinguishes government media relations from partisan messaging, and what does the mandate allow?

- OECD Open Government Recommendation Reading Guide
- Public Communication Mandate Statement
- Stakeholder and Audience Map
- Media Landscape Scan Sheet
- Press Office Role and Responsibility Chart

Day 2: Audience Evidence and Media Diagnosis

How is audience evidence used to judge what the press office currently does well and badly?

- Audience Insight Evidence Table
- Media Coverage Audit Template
- Message Gap Diagnosis Grid
- Spokesperson Readiness Self-Assessment
- Misinformation Signal Log

Day 3: Message Design and Spokesperson Preparation

How are messages built, tested and delivered consistently by different spokespeople?

- Core Message House
- Question and Answer Bank Builder
- Briefing Note Template
- Spokesperson Interview Rehearsal Protocol
- Cross-Institution Message Coordination Calendar



Day 4: Briefings, Crisis Response and Press Office Planning

How does a press office plan briefings and respond when a story moves faster than the facts?

- Press Briefing Run Sheet
- Holding Statement Library
- Crisis and Misinformation Response Protocol
- Press Office Staffing and Shift Plan
- Media Evaluation Scorecard

Day 5: Applying the Tools to One Press Office Plan

Do the mandate, evidence, message and response tools hold together for one real communication need?

- Applying the Session 2 Diagnosis to the Chosen Issue
- Building the Message House from the Session 3 Template
- Running the Session 4 Briefing Run Sheet in a Rehearsal
- Scoring Results with the Evaluation Scorecard
- Completing the Press Office Plan

Methodology

The programme uses a structured exercise method built on anonymised briefing notes, press coverage extracts and short written cases from health, transport and municipal bodies. Participants work in small press office teams on one issue, rehearse interviews and briefings with peers, and receive facilitator feedback on every message, statement and plan.

- Suggested activity: Rehearsing a press briefing with role-played journalists and scoring the answers.
- Suggested activity: Auditing a set of coverage extracts and listing the message gaps.
- Suggested activity: Drafting a holding statement for a fast-moving rumour.

Capstone Output

Each participant completes a press office plan for one live communication need. It holds a mandate statement, an audience map, a message house, a question and answer bank, a briefing run sheet, a response protocol and an evaluation scorecard. The plan is used at work to brief leadership, align institutions and guide the next media cycle.



Frequently Asked Questions

Is training in government media relations suitable for officials who have not worked in a press office?

Yes. The programme assumes familiarity with the work of a public body and builds government media relations skills from mandate and message design upward.

Which models does government media relations rest on in this programme?

It rests on the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government, the OECD Report on Public Communication and the OECD public communication principles.

How is the press office plan for government media relations used at work?

You use it to brief leadership, agree roles and messages across institutions, and plan briefings and responses for the next period.

How does learning government media relations differ from a programme on digital diplomacy?

It centres on spokespeople, briefings and press office planning for domestic audiences, while digital diplomacy centres on online engagement with foreign audiences.