CHAPTER SEVEN

White House Government Accountability Office Interagency Collaborators Citizens Congress Office of Management and Budget Interest Groups and Associations Interagency Councils State and Local Governments Unions White House Policy Councils Media Inspectors General

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THE WHITE HOUSE

By Thurgood Marshall, Jr.

One of your greatest challenges will be to balance the daily demands of your challenging job with the important task of making progress on your agency's long-term priorities and goals. One key stakeholder that can be of great assistance to you in accomplishing your agency's mission is the White House. The greater your ability to work closely and effectively with the White House, the more success your agency will enjoy. Your goal will be to have your talented team interact seamlessly with their White House counterparts, their colleagues in other executive branch agencies, and representatives in and out of government.

Working with the White House

It is important to have realistic expectations. It is highly unlikely that you will be "called" to the White House on a weekly basis. But you will have opportunities to interact with the White House throughout your tenure. Most of your dealings with the White House will be program or policy specific or because of some crisis. When a crisis arises you will be working with them intensely for a short period of time, then you will be off their radar screen until the next emergency situation.

Your job will be to make sure that your agency gets the most out of those interactions. You should get to know those in the White House who are assigned or interested in your agency. You and your staff must work to make sure that your agency is in sync with the White House.

Some direct familiarity with the White House will help to pave the way to a smoother working relationship when, as invariably occurs, you find yourself or members of your team presented with a project that calls for collaboration under pressure. Be prepared to lend some resources and staff to the White House. You must remember that the White House staff is lean and they are always seeking to augment their limited resources. Loaning a talented staffer to the White House will both improve the information flow between the White House and your agency and create goodwill for your agency.

Coordinating Your Agency Calendar with the White House

It will be incumbent upon you to build your agency calendar and process in parallel with the administration and the White House. With any administration, a series of action-forcing events fills the internal and external

calendars. These events establish a rhythm that can help you to schedule actions and plan the announcement of good news and bad news. Internally, a blizzard of regular meetings can be expected to dictate the flow of events through the course of the day. Unexpected events will trigger other meetings, and your team may need to inject itself on occasion. Externally, a relentless and recurring series of events trigger activity at daily, weekly, monthly, and annual intervals. Those events can include regularly anticipated monthly reports such as economic updates, as well as breaking news.

Working with the White House Communications Office

Your team will need to be able to interact with many of the White House offices, some more routinely than others. You can expect daily contact with the White House Communications Office. With regard to the communications operation, for example, you will and should be expected to amplify the administration's message and its accomplishments in your meetings and speeches. By the same token, you will need to work with the White House to inject your policy initiatives and accomplishments into the message for the president, as appropriate. Internally, your staff should be in the habit of tracking the onrecord and off-record exchanges that the president's press secretary has with the press corps. In addition, you owe that office, for your sake and for theirs, a heads-up on noteworthy news involving your portfolio, whether it is good or bad, along with background material and suggested responses.

Be on the lookout for constituent anecdotes that highlight the positive impact that the president's programs administered by your agency is having so that those stories can be incorporated into the presidential message process. Get a sense of the rapid-response apparatus at the White House and have a plan in mind for your office to plug into that process if a crisis arises. You should establish a pipeline of good-news deliverables that you can share with the president, vice president, and their spouses. They will significantly enhance exposure for your projects and bring more breadth to the press coverage of your agency.

Working with the White House Office of Legislative Affairs

Your congressional lobbying team ought to be performing their tasks in close tandem with your counterparts throughout the executive branch and the White House. They should be attuned to the relationships that the president has with members of the House and Senate who exercise authorization or appropriation authority over your agency. That can serve as an early warning system to opportunities or potential problems on the horizon. Make sure that you cultivate your own strong relationships with the House and Senate leadership on both sides of the aisle.

At a Glance: Key White House Offices

The Office of Presidential Advance coordinates all logistical arrangements for presidential visits.

The Office of Cabinet Liaison is the primary point of contact between the White House, cabinet members, and executive agency heads.

The White House Counsel's office advises the president on all legal issues concerning the president and the White House.

The Communications Office is responsible for the planning and production of the president's media events.

Intergovernmental Affairs serves as the president's liaison to state, local, and tribal governments.

The Office of Legislative Affairs serves as the president's liaison to the United States Congress.

The Office of Political Affairs ensures that the executive branch and the president are aware of the concerns of the American citizen.

The Office of Public Liaison promotes presidential priorities through outreach to concerned constituencies and public interest groups. This includes planning White House briefings, meetings, and large events with the president, vice president, and other White House staff.

The Presidential Personnel Office recruits, screens, and recommends qualified candidates for presidential appointments to federal departments and agencies.

The Presidential Scheduling Office is responsible for the planning, organization, and implementation of the president's daily and long-range schedules. All requests for appointments, meetings, or events with the president are directed through this office.

The Office of Speechwriting is charged with crafting the president's message in formal speeches and other remarks.

Adapted from www.whitehouse.gov.

Working with the White House Policy Councils

Your ability to engage with the various policy councils and strategic planning offices will be an essential component of your job, and it will require your personal time, supported by the expertise possessed by your department-wide team. As you advance your agency's agenda along and tackle a long list of presidential promises framed during the election campaign, keep in mind that significant action can be undertaken with the power of the president's

pen. This power will be an especially welcome option during the first 100 days of the administration and during periods of harsh partisanship.

Interacting with Other White House Offices

There are a number of process-oriented offices at the White House. They include the offices of Cabinet Liaison, Scheduling, and Advance. They will provide valuable information and opportunities. It will be important to keep those offices well informed on events within your department. Handled well, those individuals can act as surrogates for you within the White House operation to ferret out information and to advance your interests. When you and your team are asked to deploy in support of the president, be sure that the White House chief of staff is aware so that you don't find yourself working for a junior staffer rather than the president.

Important outreach offices will support your priorities and establish valuable bridges for your initiatives. Public Liaison and Intergovernmental Affairs are the foremost examples. Working in tandem with those outreach efforts will yield benefits in the short term and the long term by explaining the rationale underlying your agency programs and promoting them to important and influential stakeholders who can then build valuable support with key communities and interest groups. Similarly, your legal team should be well connected to the White House Counsel's office. In addition, you should make sure that you are regularly apprised of the priorities set forth by the Office of Political Affairs.

Don't Forget the Office of Management and Budget

Be sensitive to cues from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The viability of your programs will be at stake. In addition, a number of management cues will come from OMB through the President's Management Council, where you can expect that you or the deputy secretary of your department will have an important seat at the table to share your best practices and learn from others.

Every day will bring new challenges and fresh opportunities to harness the skills and expertise of your agency team in ways that will enable the president to serve with great distinction. Few jobs offer risks and rewards that can rival that.

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