

International Astronomical Union

Communication Policy

Scope

This policy applies to all IAU Members (Individual Members, Junior Members, Honorary Members, and Associates), Officers, Staff and Staff at the IAU Offices. It is meant to ensure that their communications to and with external audiences are consistent with Union policy.

General Overview

The IAU values open discussion on scientific matters and communications within and between the Divisions, Commissions, Offices and Working Groups. However, in today's interconnected world, with its proliferation of digital and mobile communication channels, news and opinions travel quickly and can have outsized impacts and unintended consequences. Journalists and other influencers trawl online sources and social media looking for something potentially interesting or controversial and do not hesitate to distribute information if it is publicly accessible. Moreover, it is easy to make off-the-cuff comments in online posts or media interviews that can cause problems for the Union even if made with the best of intent.

IAU's externally facing messages are crafted and disseminated by approved Officers and Staff in order to protect the Union from this risk.

Regarding external communication, section [V.23 of the IAU Working Rules](#) states, *“Public statements that are attributed to the Union as a whole can be made only by the President, the General Secretary, or the Executive Committee. The General Secretary may, in consultation with the relevant Division, appoint Individual Members of the Union with special expertise in questions that attract the attention of media and the general public as IAU spokespersons on specific matters.”*

Repeated violations of the rules highlighted in this document could result in sanctions to be decided by the IAU Executive Committee.

Specific Policies & Procedures

Only the President, General Secretary, Executive Committee, or Members designated by the General Secretary as IAU spokespersons may represent the IAU — or claim to represent the IAU — when speaking to the press or posting/commenting online and in social media using accounts owned/managed by the IAU. In no case shall any of these persons, or any other Members, represent or claim to represent the IAU using personal accounts or other non-IAU accounts.

All external and internal IAU communications, including intra-Division and intra-Commission communications, that come from anyone other than the President, General Secretary, Executive

Committee, or a Member designated by the General Secretary as an IAU spokesperson must clearly indicate that the authors do not represent or speak on behalf of the IAU.

Furthermore, all external and internal IAU communications, including intra-Division and intra-Commission communications, must respect the [IAU Code of Conduct](#).

1. Print, Broadcast, and Online Media

1. All media inquiries seeking an official IAU reply, whether received by phone, email, text, social media, or other channel, must immediately be forwarded to the IAU Press Officer (Lars Lindberg Christensen, lars.christensen@noirlab.edu, +1 520-461-0433) without responding.
2. Topics of a purely scientific nature are typically not sensitive. However, if an IAU Member corresponds with the press on a subject of their expertise and the IAU figures into the discussion in any way, the Member should inform the IAU Press Officer in case IAU leadership wishes to follow up with the media.
3. IAU Members may not comment, respond, or speak to the press on behalf of the IAU unless approved to do so by the General Secretary or the Press Officer.
4. IAU Members may speak to the media about the IAU without permission of the IAU, provided that they clearly state that the views expressed are their own and do not necessarily represent the view of the IAU.

2. Social Media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)

1. When posting about the IAU on social media using *their own personal accounts*, IAU Officers, Staff, Staff at the IAU Offices and Members must clearly state that the views expressed are their own and do not necessarily represent the view of the IAU. Appropriate disclaimers include “tweets are my own” and “postings on this site are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of IAU.”
2. Nothing must be posted on behalf of the IAU unless delegated to do so, or the message is approved by the President, General Secretary, Press Officer or Executive Committee; such posts must be made using accounts owned, managed, and approved by the IAU. These will respect the [IAU social media House Rules](#).
3. If an IAU Member sees a need to create a new public social media account for official IAU business, they must first coordinate with the IAU Press Officer. Social media networks, blogs, and other types of online content sometimes generate media attention.

3. Intra-Division, Intra-Commission and Intra-Working Group Communications

1. When communicating internally between Commissions, Divisions and Working Groups — by email, web pages, social media messages etc. — leaders cannot speak for the IAU as a whole and must avoid claiming to do so or giving the impression that they do so. All communication inside the IAU Working Groups, Commissions and Divisions should clearly indicate that it does not speak on behalf of the IAU.
2. Messages from Division or Commission leaders should be clearly aimed at the Division or Commission they lead, both in form and substance, and should be clearly signed or otherwise

attributed to their respective authors. Such messages should pertain only to the scientific body's topic area or internal organisational matters.

3. Note that the topics of media relations and public communication, as distinct from topics in the astronomical sciences, are the remit of Commission C2. Accordingly, any Division or Commission preparing a statement or comment on issues of media relations and/or public communication should coordinate with the President of Commission C2 and the IAU Press Officer.

4. Best Practices in Science Communication

Everyone affiliated with the IAU should keep in mind the following recommendations from science-communication experts:

1. Before creating online content or posting on social media, consider the potential risks and rewards.
2. Separate your personal and professional presence in social media as much as possible.
3. It is prudent to distinguish your personal use when setting up your personal profile. If you choose to indicate that you are an IAU Member, people may assume that you represent the IAU. Accordingly, include a disclaimer when possible on personal sites; see section 2.1.
4. Make sure that you are honest and accurate when posting information and if you make a mistake, correct it quickly. Be transparent about any previous posts you have subsequently altered.
5. Remember that the Internet archives almost everything; therefore, even deleted postings can be searched. Do not post any information or rumors that you know or suspect to be false about the IAU, people working on behalf of the IAU, or fellow scientists.