

City of College Station

Media Relations Procedures

I. Purpose

This policy establishes procedures and guidelines for all City employees concerning communication with members of the news media when the employee is on the job or acting as a City employee. The City seeks to provide consistent, accurate, and timely information in a coordinated manner to the media while keeping city officials informed of emerging media issues. To accomplish this goal, the City maintains a systematic, well coordinated and decentralized communications policy.

II. City Representation

- A. General. All paid employees are permitted, but are not required, to respond directly to members of media at their discretion. Employees should limit their discussion of city operations to those areas where they have specific knowledge, referring other requests to the appropriate person in accordance with this policy. After speaking directly with members of the media, employees are to promptly notify the appropriate department director (or designee), who will then notify the Public Communications Director. When communicating with the media, employees should remember that they represent the City and conduct themselves accordingly.
- B. Official Spokesperson. The Public Communications Director is the City's official spokesperson for all City departments except as indicated in Sec. II-C or as directed by the City Manager. The Public Communications Director promotes and provides background information about city issues, projects, and services to both the news media and the public.
 - a. The Public Communications Director is on-call 24 hours a day in order to facilitate the City's media relations policy, answer questions, respond to developing situations, and offer assistance as needed.
 - b. The Public Communications Director is available to all employees for advice, consultation, and assistance in media relations. Upon request, the Public Communications Director can be present for any arranged interviews with media personnel.
 - c. When the Public Communications Director is unavailable to serve as the city's spokesperson, an alternate spokesperson shall be designated by the City Manager.

- C. Public Safety. The Police Chief and Fire Chief each shall designate a member of their respective department to serve as the City's official spokesperson for public safety incidents, including but not limited to criminal reports and fire scene reports. The Public Communications Director and Police and Fire designees shall jointly coordinate the release of all other material to news media outlets. On the scene of an active police or fire incident, the incident commander shall serve as the media contact until the departmental or City spokesperson is present, or unless an alternate spokesperson is designated by the Chief.

III. Application to Staff

A. Department Liaisons

- a. Each director shall assign one or more staff representative(s) to serve as the media liaison (primary contact) for the respective departments. The Public Communications Director shall maintain a list of all department liaisons and shall make that list available to all directors.
- b. The role of the liaisons is to present official, accurate information to the media on behalf of their departments and the City.
- c. The Public Communications Director will provide basic instruction and training in media relations to media liaisons.
- d. Each director shall make employees within each department aware of the identity and role of the media liaison(s).
- e. Each liaison shall inform the Public Communications Director and the appropriate departmental director of all media requests for information and other contacts with the media.

B. Subject Experts

- a. Each director may designate members of his or her department as "subject experts" on one or more specific topics. These subject experts shall serve as the city's primary spokesperson for media contacts related to that specific topic. The Public Communications Director shall maintain a list of all subject experts and shall make that list available to all directors.
- b. The Public Communications Director will provide basic instruction and training in media relations to all designated subject experts.
- c. Subject experts shall inform the Public Communications Director and the appropriate departmental director of all media requests for information and other contacts with the media.

C. Other City Staff

- a. Readily Available Requests. When an employee other than a designated liaison is contacted by the media requesting readily available information about City operations that is known to be public, the employee shall make a reasonable effort to provide it. Such information includes, but is not limited to, city staff names, titles and extensions; public meeting dates, locations and agendas; provisions of city ordinances or city charter; and copies of materials prepared by the City for public distribution. If the employee is unsure whether the requested information is considered public, he or she shall forward the request to the appropriate department director.
- b. Other Requests. When an employee who is not designated as a media liaison is contacted by the media for information about City operations that is not readily available, the employee shall refer the request to the appropriate department liaison or to the Public Communications Director. The employee shall inform the appropriate department director, who then will notify the Public Communications Director, of all media requests for information and other contacts with the media.

D. Staff Training

- a. Training Coordinator. The Public Communications Director shall serve as coordinator for media relations training for City employees.
- b. Mandatory Training. All department directors, management staff, departmental liaisons and designated subject experts shall complete a training course on applied media relations.
- c. Optional Training. All other paid employees of the City shall have the option, with supervisor's approval, of attending a basic media relations course.
- d. Elected and Appointed Officials. Elected officials of the City, and those appointed by the City Council to serve on City boards and commissions, shall have the option of attending any media relations course coordinated by the Public Communications Director.

IV. Standard Procedures

- A. Confidential Matters. Items of confidential or litigious matter shall not be addressed or discussed with the media. Such items include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - a. Medical records
 - b. Certain personnel records (including disciplinary actions)
 - c. Pending employee discipline investigations

- d. Actual proceedings of executive sessions of City Council
- e. Draft correspondence (preliminary notes or intra-city memoranda not yet finished)
- f. Records pertaining to pending litigation where the City is a party
- g. Legal opinions of City attorneys
- h. Certain law enforcement records
- i. Certain fire and EMS records
- j. Matters related to internal and external security measures
- k. Third-party proprietary information held by the City

B. Formal Media Interviews

- a. An employee who receives a request from the media for scheduled interviews, tapings or recordings shall forward the request to the appropriate department liaison and the Public Communications Director.
- b. Employees shall attempt to provide a timely and thorough response to all interview requests, but may ask for and expect to be afforded additional time to research relevant issues and to prepare for the interview.
- c. The Public Communications Director is available to advise employees on interviews with the media.
- d. Media interviews conducted with City employees or elected/appointed officials may be taped (video or audio) when subject matter relates to City matters.

C. Emergency / Crisis Situations

- a. In the event of a declared emergency or crisis, the Public Communications office shall serve as the formal media area and official spokesperson for the dissemination of information.
- b. Employees are encouraged to direct all reporters and media personnel to the officially designated spokesperson, as described in the Emergency Operations Plan.
- c. The Public Communications Department and department liaisons shall be available to assist media personnel in the Emergency Operations Center and / or the Public Communications office.