MEDIA POLICY

Administrative Policy on Media Relations

GOAL:

The City of MUNICIPALITY intends to manage media communication with its residents, businesses and visitors by creating a Media Policy. The purpose of this policy is to identify employees who are empowered to speak for the City on significant communications in order to ensure the accurate dissemination of information. It is intended to reduce the likelihood of conflicting, unauthorized information from being released which may be inaccurate and misrepresentative. This policy applies to all employees while acting in the scope of their employment.

It is the policy of the City to foster and encourage an atmosphere of openness in dealing with the media. The release of (or dissemination of) accurate, timely information to the media and public is important not only in complying with the Open Meeting Law, but in maintaining good media relations and fostering an informed public.

The policy is not intended to address public officials. Issues concerning any elected official's contact with the media are exclusively within the purview of the City Council and are presumed to restrict any and all information discussed in closed session pursuant to ss 19.85 until it can be released.

POLICY:

1. The Mayor is the final authority for the City's media communications, with the exception of common or routine public safety issues. All city employees should notify the Mayor's Office about any non-routine media inquiry. The majority of City media requests are initiated when the media contacts a Department Head or Designee.
2. Because the media often works on tight deadlines, it is important that all departments respond as soon as possible when a request is made. Specific guidelines for responding to media requests follow. Inquiries from the news media are given a high priority by the City of Municipality. Requests for information should be responded to as effectively as possible.
    - Every effort should be made to ensure that all information released is accurate. Designated City staff should also assist the media to meet their deadlines.
    - City staff

CITY SPOKESPERSONS:

Unless otherwise authorized, the City's spokespersons are:

1. Mayor and City Council members
2. Communications Manager
3. Department Heads and/or Designees
4. City Attorney, City Clerk
5. Police Department and Fire Department Chiefs and/or Designees

6. Exceptions regarding departmental spokespersons may be made at the discretion of the Department Head with approval of the Mayor.

ROUTINE MEDIA INQUIRIES:

1. Any media inquires received by other City personnel should be referred immediately to the Department Head or Designee.

2. An appropriate response to the media is "I'm sorry I don't have the full information regarding the issue. I will give your request to my Department Head, who will respond to you as soon as he/she is available."

    - Obtain the reporter's name, phone number, topic of story and deadline.
    - Inquire if the reporter has reached out to other departments at the City
3. Before you respond, check with colleagues to see if they have received a similar call to coordinate your answer and provide the most accurate information.

SENSITIVE OR CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES:

1. All television, radio, newspaper or other media inquiries regarding sensitive or controversial issues should always be referred immediately to the employee's Department Head or Designee who will contact the Mayor and coordinate a response.

2. The Mayor and/or Department Head will designate a single spokesperson. The following are examples of <u>potential sensitive issues,</u> which should be reported immediately to the Mayor or your Department Head:

    - Controversial statements, accusations or debates occurring in meetings or advisory boards, committees, or commissions.
    - Disruptions in City services such as broken water mains, water distribution problems, power outages, transit system service delays, garbage collection, sewer system back-ups or lift station outages.
    - Personnel issues such as misconduct, suspensions, employee work stoppages, or terminations.
    - Emergencies such as fires, explosions or accidents that result in damage to City or private property, or injury or death to City personnel.
    - Industrial accidents that involve injury or death to contractor's employees or vendors doing business with the City.
    - Accidents on City property resulting in injury or death to citizens, i.e. a fall in a City building, or drowning at a city park or riverfront.
    - Pending or resolved litigation
    - Incidents involving City personnel and injury or death
        i. Police chase accident, or work vehicle traffic accident.
        ii. Police shooting
        iii. Allegations of a criminal nature

LITIGATION, PERSONNEL AND ELECTION ISSUES:

1. Generally the business conducted by the City of MUNICIPALITY is public and therefore, is public information. Inquiries regarding pending litigation, matters involving a significant exposure to litigation and certain personnel related information are exceptions. (Contact your Department Head or the City Attorney with questions regarding public information or the Open Records Law.)
2. Inquiries regarding pending litigation or exposure to litigation should be referred to the City Attorney and the Mayor.
3. Inquiries regarding personnel related information should be referred to the Human Resources Department and the Mayor.
4. Inquiries regarding election and campaign issues should be referred to the City Clerk or Deputy City Clerk. The City Clerk will contact the Mayor and City Attorney as appropriate.
5. If it appears that other City staff is likely to be interviewed as part of the same story, a post-interview briefing may be in order. Allow other staff members to be informed of what was covered in order to avoid conflicting statements.

PERSONAL POINTS OF VIEW:

1. It is recognized that all employees have the right to their personal point of view regarding any issue. However, personal points of view may conflict with official City policy.
2. City employees who write letters to the editor of any newspaper may not use official City stationery. If an employee chooses to identify himself or herself as a City employee in any personal letter or e-mail to the editor, **he or she must include a statement that the views set forth in the letter do not represent the view of the City. The letter must clearly explain that it contains the employee's personally held opinion(s).**
3. Similar disclaimers must be given if an employee addresses a public meeting, participates in a radio talk show, or is interviewed for a radio or television program, unless the employee is officially representing the City under direction of the Mayor.
4. Employees who are representing the City in any of the above formats must identify themselves as an Official Spokesperson for the City. No employee shall speak as an Official Representative of a different City Department than their own without the prior approval of that Department.
5. **City employees posting to social media sites must follow the same guidance and give the same disclaimers.**

CITY INITIATED INFORMATION:

1. City staff is encouraged to think of new and creative ways of engaging the news media, including proactively suggesting positive news coverage.

2. Proactive media contact is initiated through the Mayor and Department Heads. This includes issuing press releases and media advisories, and personal contacts with reporters and editors for non-routine news coverage.
3. Departments seeking publicity for events or activities should bring the issue to the Mayor's Staff Meeting as soon as practical to ensure the best media coverage of their activities. Departments should not initiate non-routine news media contacts before notifying the Mayor.
4. Construction or repair projects that require barricades, rerouting of traffic, detours and/or any other service interruptions should be discussed with the Department Head and passed on to the Mayor with enough lead time to get the message out and avoid any embarrassment to the City.