



# *Memo*

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## **Office of the City Administrator**

October 27, 2004

**To:** Agency Directors  
**From:** Deborah A. Edgerly, City Administrator  
**Re:** Media Relations Policy

Attached is the new Media Relations Policy. Please review it with your managers and public information officers.

**The media relations policy should help achieve three clear objectives:**

- **Elevate the level of media contact to directors, managers and PIOs who have been trained in media relations**
- **Eliminate expressions of personal opinions to reporters.**
- **Keep the CAO informed of any media contacts or anticipated stories.**

You may contact me directly on media matters, or, if I am unavailable, contact Cheryl, Niccolo or Jayne.

In addition, I have attached these documents to assist you:

- Tips for Positive Media Relations
- Handling Media Calls and Interviews
- Guidelines for News Releases, News Conferences and Briefings
- News release template
- Sample media advisory

**Please confirm or forward the name of your Agency's public information contact to Jayne by the end of this week.** She will arrange additional training or assistance for PIOs as needed.



## **MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY**

### **Purpose**

The media is one of our most important means of communicating with the public. Media relations is a two-way street: the media needs us as sources for information, and we need them to get our stories out to the public. Therefore, it is important that we maintain a positive, responsive, credible relationship with the media, and that we provide consistent, accurate and timely information. Personal opinions are never appropriate.

This policy establishes guidelines for responding to and interacting with the media.

### **Who speaks for the City?**

The Mayor and City Administrator are the official spokespersons for City administration, and handle media requests on citywide matters. In the City Administrator's absence, the Assistant City Administrator, Deputy City Administrator, or the CAO's communications officer will act as spokesperson.

Agency Directors, designated spokespersons or PIOs handle requests from the media on Agency matters. Agencies must notify the CAO of media contacts and anticipated stories, and must forward news releases to CAO communications officer prior to release.

### **Responding to calls from the media**

Media calls should be handled, whenever possible, within one hour. If an immediate response is not possible, a courtesy call should be made to the reporter advising when the requested information or spokesperson will be available.

When contacted by the media, staff should record and forward the following information to the Agency PIO or CAO's communications officer: *the name of the reporter; the media affiliation; the subject matter or information requested; the reporter's deadline; the reporter's contact information (phone, cell, and email if appropriate).*

### **Handling calls from the media**

Staff responding to media inquiries must provide facts only. As representatives of the City, staff must not express personal opinions. (See "Tips for Positive Media Relations" and "Handling Media Calls and Interviews", published by CAO communications office.)

Routine media requests: Designated department spokespersons and PIOs may respond to media inquiries for *facts or incidental information*, such as event schedules, basic services, published notices, or factual information relating specifically to his/her function.

Non-routine media requests should be referred to the Agency PIO or Agency Director, who will consult with the CAO's communications officer or City Administrator, depending on the scope of the issue. Non-routine inquiries include those that require the *interpretation of policy, future programs, services and developments; employee information; or emergency situations*. Examples include items before the City Council or recently adopted; retirements or new hires; reorganizations; new programs; development projects; unusual public safety 911 events.

Sensitive or controversial issues should be forwarded to the City Administrator or the CAO's communications officer in order to prepare for or respond to media inquiries. Sensitive or controversial issues are those that may *represent a threat, existing or potential, to life, health or property; may negatively affect public confidence in City government; may have legal implications, existing or potential; may be of particular interest to the public or have captured the attention of several reporters or of someone threatening to "go to the press"*. Examples may include infrastructure failure that affects ability to deliver service; layoffs or labor issues; ethics or corruption charges; arrests of city employees; budget reductions; claims and lawsuits; injury or death of employees.

### **Procedures for handling media inquiries**

#### *City employee responsibilities and guidelines*

Notify your supervisor or Agency PIO or Director of significant events or issues that occur and may be of news interest to the general public.

Notify the Agency PIO of any contact from the media.

If the inquiry is non-routine, involving policies, plans or positions, respond only after consulting the Agency Director and with the Director's knowledge of the response. No employee should give a media interview unless approved by the Agency Director.

#### *Agency Director responsibilities and guidelines*

Immediately notify the City Administrator or CAO's communications officer of significant events or sensitive/controversial issues that may be of major news interest to the general public.

Keep the Agency PIO informed on current issues to maintain a credible first response.

Notify the CAO (City Administrator, Assistant City Administrator, Deputy City Administrator or CAO communications officer) of any contact from the media or anticipated stories. Send all news releases and advisories to CAO prior to release.

#### *CAO responsibilities and guidelines*

Upon receiving a media inquiry for information not immediately known, contact the appropriate Agency Director, Agency PIO, or the City Administrator. Work with the Agency to develop a simple strategy to respond. The Agency Director may forward the inquiry to a designated spokesperson or staff member.

Immediately inform the City Administrator of any non-routine or sensitive media inquiries.