

**CITY OF OAKLAND**  
**Office of Parks and Recreation**

POLICY: 91-A2

TITLE: Approaches for Effective Media Relations

EFFECTIVE: May 30, 1991

UNTIL: Rescinded

1. Purpose: To establish and maintain an ongoing working relationship with the media in order to protect and maintain a positive image of OPR, its employees, facilities and programs.
2. Scope: This procedure covers the process for responding to and referring inquiries and requests from newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations, reporters, editors, writers, etc.
3. Definitions: The types of information the media may seek includes requests for specifics on OPR programs, requests for interviews with OPR employees, requests for official OPR commentary or statements; requests for OPR documents, reports or policies; inquiries into recent events, activities, happenings, issues, i.e.: casualty, legal actions, disaster, etc.
4. Responsibilities:
  - a. Public Information Representative (PIR):
    - (1) Produces and distributes all OPR publicity.
    - (2) Coordinates with the requestor for public information material to verify content, develop the concept and outline production specifics.
    - (3) Files Publicity Request Forms, Attachment 1, in chronological order in binders maintained in the Public Information Unit Library.
    - (4) Assist the requestor in preparing copy, production schedule and in arranging design, typesetting and/or desktop publishing and printing.
    - (5) Maintain current media mailing lists and arrange distribution (mailing) or placement of publicity/advertising.
    - (6) Maintain historical records of all computer public information materials by subject in binders maintained in Public Information Unit Library.
    - (7) Stamp approval on original material prior to duplicating/printing.

b. Supervisors:

- (1) Approves the content and initials Publicity Request Forms prior to being forwarded to the PIR.
- (2) Coordinates with the PIR on publicity content and planning.

5. Procedures:

- a. OPR employees must refer all media inquiries and requests for general information about department programs to the PIR via the supervisor. If the supervisor is not available the referral may go directly to the PIR; however the employee must immediately notify the supervisor of the action taken.
- b. All requests for public information materials must be received in the timeframe(s) established by the PIR. The PIR may deny the request if it is not received within the established timeframes.
- c. All public information materials must be stamped "approved" prior to final printing/duplicating to ensure quality control.
- d. Any public information material distributed without the Public Information Unit will be considered to be in violation of OPR Policy 91-7 and this procedure.
- e. Employees not complying with this policy will be subject to disciplinary action.

6. References:

- a. OPR Policy 91-7, Public Information
- b. Title VI, Compliance Against Discrimination 43 CFR, 1.76(b)

Federal and City of Oakland regulations strictly prohibit unlawful discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, handicap, or sexual orientation. Any person who believes he or she has been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility operated by the Oakland Office of Parks and Recreation should contact the Director, Audree Jones-Taylor at 250 Frank Ogawa Plaza, Oakland, CA 94612, or call 510-238-7532.

7. Attachments:

- a. Attachment 1, Publicity Request Form
- b. Attachment 2, Sample Brochure
- c. Attachment 3, Sample Flyer
- d. Attachment 4, Sample Events Calendar

e. Attachment 5, Sample Manual/Directory

APPROVED: \_\_\_\_\_  
OPR Director

Distribution:  
Manual Coordinator  
OPR Wide

**POLICY: 91-02**

**TITLE: Media Communication**

**TO: OPR WIDE**

**EFFECTIVE DATE: August 29, 2010**

**UNTIL: Rescinded**

**POLICY STATEMENT:** Within OPR there is a need to ensure that everyone understands the critical nature of effective and immediate communication to the Director, City Administrator and the Mayor's Office in the event of an emergency or disaster.

**REQUIREMENTS:**

Contact the Director immediately following an incident. It is acceptable to indicate "more information to come". Never make the decision not to contact the fore mentioned individuals and allow the community and the press to make an injury prior to your notification. That action places the City leadership in an awkward and insensitive position. Please be aware that timing is everything.

Line staff should contact their immediate supervisor. If the supervisor isn't available, it is alright to move the chain of command for the purpose of ensuring the information has been communicated. Should all avenues fail, please contact the Public Information Officer for the City of Oakland at (510) 238.6365, so that they may be able to respond to the media.

When in doubt as to how to respond please review AI

**APPROVED:** \_\_\_\_\_

Audree V. Jones-Taylor, Director  
Office of Parks and Recreation

**Distribution:**  
OPR Wide



# ***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.



## Guidelines for News Releases, News Conferences and Briefings

### **News Releases**

News releases should be issued only when there is news. News releases seldom generate feature stories.

#### *Preparation*

News Releases must be prepared on the Agency's or the City's news release template, and must be distributed by the Agency PIO or CAO's communications officer. If a news release is co-authored with another jurisdiction or organization and carries the City's logo, it must include a City staff contact. News releases must be approved by the Agency Director or City Administrator, or their designees.

#### *Content, Format and Style*

See the sample news release, attached.

#### *Dissemination*

All news releases should be distributed by the Agency PIO or CAO's communications officer, who maintain email and fax media contact lists. Releases should be sent first via email to Mayor, Council, Agency Directors, City Attorney, City Auditor, City Administrator, Assistant City Administrator, Deputy City Administrator, CAO's communications officer, all Agency PIOs, and the Webteam. News releases may then be sent to the media.

### **News Conferences and Briefings**

#### *News Conference*

Be sure to have visuals for television. Notify KTOP well in advance if you wish to have coverage. Provide talking points, an order of speakers, and the news release to the moderator and speakers prior to the news conference.

Distribute your news release to the reporters as they arrive. Have the reporters sign in with name, affiliation and phone numbers, for your follow up.

#### *News Briefings*

Briefings may be convened by an Agency Director or City Administrator to provide background on complex topics such as the proposed budget. Have detailed information available for the reporters, and have them sign in.

#### *Media Alert*

Announce your news conference or briefing one business day in advance with a Media Alert. This announces the subject, time, location and participants. You may give a sentence or two about the topics to be covered, but do not give away your story – if you do, there will be no reason for the media to attend.

Use the Media Alert template and distribute in the same manner as a News Release. Make follow up calls the morning of the news conference to increase attendance.



## Tips for Positive Media Relations

**Respect media deadlines.** Call back promptly, even if you need to gather more information. Find out all the reporter's questions and call back.

**Know your message.** Pick 2-3 key messages you want to communicate to the public and frame your responses around them.

**Prepare.** Anticipate the reporter's *who, what, where, when, why, and how much* questions and prepare clear, concise responses. Include facts and figures. Prepare for the one question you don't want to hear.

**Listen carefully.** If the question includes negative or inaccurate assumptions, correct factual errors and explain the issue objectively. Do not reinforce negative language or become defensive. Do not allow the reporter to put words in your mouth.

**Never say "No Comment."** Explain that the facts are still be verified, or why the information cannot be released, in a matter-of-fact way.

**Always assume everything you say is "on the record".** If you don't want to see it on the front page, don't say it.

**If you don't know the answer, say so.** Don't speculate or express a personal opinion. If appropriate, refer the reporter to the Agency PIO or CAO's communications officer to identify someone who can provide the information.

**Always tell the truth.**



## Handling Media Calls and Interviews

If you are the designated spokesperson on a particular issue, remember that you have rights and responsibilities when dealing with the media.

### You have a right to know:

- Who is interviewing you
- What the interview is about, and the angle the reporter is taking
- Who the audience is
- When and where the interview will take place
- Who else is being interviewed

### You have a responsibility to:

Provide information that is factual, timely and appropriate to the situation.

Never answer a question without knowing the subject of the story.

Never express a personal opinion or make judgmental comments about the Mayor, Council or official City policy.

Do not offer legal opinions on City policies or activities.

Do not discuss employees or personnel actions.

Do not speculate on what action the City will take.

Delay responding if you do not know the answer or are unsure of your information. You may tell the reporter that you will check and get back to him/her, then do so. If you cannot provide the information before the deadline, call and let the reporter know when it will be available.

Notify the Agency PIO and/or CAO's communications officer of all media inquiries. The CAO's communications officer will apprise the City Administrator, Assistant City Administrator and Deputy City Administrator, as appropriate. In the case of sensitive or controversial issues, the City Administrator will notify the Mayor and Council.