

## **MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY**

### **Purpose**

The City of Tulsa (City) seeks to inform the residents of the city of Tulsa, businesses, and visitors by engaging in a proactive communications program. The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities for working with the media within those operations of the City government under the authority of the City.

It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, the intention is to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media and to maintain consistent high-quality public relations for the City.

The City sincerely desires to do business in an open, honest and straightforward manner. However, sensitive legal or personnel matters remain confidential. All efforts will be made to comply with the Oklahoma Open Records Act and the Freedom of Information Act.

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### **Procedure**

#### **A. Media Inquiries**

Inquiries from the media are given a high priority by the City and should be responded to as quickly and efficiently as possible with a focus on accuracy. Every effort should be made to cooperate with the media and ensure that all information released is timely. To facilitate these objectives, the City Communications Director and/or Manager is principally responsible for coordinating the City media relations, with the exception of most public safety issues.

The majority of media requests are initiated when the media contacts the Communications Director and/or Manager. Since the media often works with tight deadlines, it is important that departments respond as soon as possible when the Communications Director and/or Manager or designee requests information or a spokesperson. Specific guidelines for responding to media requests are provided in the following sections.

## **B. General or Routine Response to Media Inquiries**

1. If a department does not have a designated spokesperson, media inquiries should be referred immediately to the Communications Director and/or Manager or the Communications Department, who will work with the appropriate City staff to coordinate a response for the media.
2. In the event that no spokesperson is designated for a department, Communications will work with the appropriate department head(s) to designate a spokesperson, if needed, to speak on departmental topics.
3. Other authorized spokespersons for the City of Tulsa will be designated and included as they are added (please see the attachment to this policy).
4. It is the responsibility of the spokesperson to notify the Communications Director of any media contacts. The Communications Director will in turn contact the Mayor's Office if deemed necessary.

## **C. Authorized City of Tulsa Spokespersons**

1. In order to expedite consistently high quality and accurate information going to the media, Communications will work to designate a spokesperson to speak on all topics within the realm of their responsibilities. In the event that no spokesperson is designated for a department, media inquiries will be directed to the Communications Director or designee.
2. A designated spokesperson will possess excellent communication skills, as well as the ability to extemporaneously respond to media inquiries involving difficult issues and problems. The spokesperson will act as the primary media source for statistics, history, description of projects and programs, facilities, services and other public information. During media interviews, employees serving as spokespersons should not speculate or state their personal opinion.

## **D. Litigation and Personnel Issues**

1. Generally, the business conducted by the City 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.
2. Media inquiries regarding pending or potential litigation should be referred to the City Legal Department or the Communications Director and/or Manager. Media inquiries regarding personnel matters should be referred to the Communications Director and/or Manager and the Director of Administration. As a rule, the City declines comment on pending litigation and pending personnel matters.

### **E. Personal Points of View**

1. It is recognized that all employees have the right to their personal points of view regarding any issue. However, personal points of view may conflict with the City official policy. Therefore, employees who write letters to the editor of any newspaper or other media outlet may not use City stationery. The same rule applies to “blogging” or commenting on any social network or news outlet Web site. Personal viewpoints can be shared but should not be done on City time or City computers.
2. If an employee chooses to identify himself or herself as a City employee in any personal letter or e-mail to print, electronic media, or an additional media outlet, or in any similar personal statement published or submitted for print/media publication, he or she must include language which states that the views set forth therein do not represent the views of the City, but rather are the employee’s personally held opinions. 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 has received prior approval to serve as an official representative of the City.
3. Violations of the above policies could result in disciplinary action after being reviewed by Communications and HR.

### **F. City of Tulsa Initiated Public Communications**

1. Most proactive media contact is initiated by the City Communications Director and/or Manager. This includes issuing press releases, media advisories, and personal contacts with reporters and editors for coverage.
2. All news releases must be approved by the Communications Department unless otherwise agreed upon by the specified department head, with the exception of the Police Department.
3. Departments seeking publicity for events or activities should complete a copy of the “*Department Project Form*” (available on the City of Tulsa intranet, under the Communications Department) or contact the Communications Director and/or Manager via phone or e-mail as soon as possible to ensure the best media coverage of the activities. The Communications Director and/or Manager or designee will work with the department to create the best possible news release or other type of presentation.
4. Departments should not initiate news media contacts before notifying the Communications Director and/or Manager.
5. It is the intention of the City to make every effort to publicize the good work of City departments. If an employee, whether in management or otherwise, believes something to be newsworthy, he or she is encouraged to make it known to the Communication Director and/or Manager.



Communications Department  
Policies and Procedures  
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6. Any department that creates and determines they need a media communications policy, such as photos or external communications must submit their policies to the Communications Department for approval.