

Media Policy**Section 6.1.3****PURPOSE**

To ensure that the public is informed about all aspects of City government by maintaining positive media relations and ensuring that accurate information is provided to the media in a timely manner.

POLICY

The news media are an important component of the City's ability to communicate with and serve the public, accomplish public policy goals, and provide high quality and responsive municipal services.

Inquiries from the news media are a high priority and must be responded to by the appropriate person as quickly and efficiently as possible. Every effort must be made to meet media deadlines and to ensure that all information released is accurate. The City does not centralize media information requests through any one office. Reporters may request interviews and seek information directly from any City Department, and Departments should respond consistent with this policy. The City Manager's Public Outreach Office is responsible for coordination and ensuring accuracy and quality in responses, and can assist Departments when necessary in responding to the media.

It is the goal of the City of San José to keep the public informed about City achievements and efforts. The City seeks opportunities to proactively communicate by notifying local, professional, and trade media about City achievements, awards, accomplishments, and innovations.

Generally, the business conducted by the City of San José 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. The City Attorney's Office should be consulted if there are questions as to whether certain information must be made available to the media.

A) DEPARTMENTAL MEDIA POLICIES

Department directors or where appropriate, departmental media relations staff, should develop and update media policies for their departments that ensure that news media inquiries will be responded to by the appropriate person, in a timely fashion, and with accurate information. Policies should designate which employee may respond to media inquiries, and under what circumstance. Policies should also establish a procedure to ensure that the department director and the City Manager's Public Outreach Office are informed of media inquiries (see D. Notifications and Referrals). Where appropriate, media inquiries should be coordinated with departmental media relations staff. These departmental policies should be consistent with marketing and communications plans of the departments.

B) DEPARTMENT POLICY-RELATED INQUIRIES

News media inquiries on departmental policy issues should be answered only by a department director, or the director's designee. Every attempt should be made to meet reporters' deadlines, however information should only be released when it is known to be factually accurate.

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With the approval of a supervisor or manager, news media inquiries regarding operations within a department may be answered by the departmental employee who has the most relevant knowledge and experience. Every attempt should be made to meet reporters' deadlines, however information should only be released when it is known to be factually accurate. When in doubt, check with a manager at the Executive Staff level or higher, or with the City Manager's Public Outreach Office.

D) NOTIFICATIONS AND REFERRALS

- (1) Whenever a news media contact is of citywide significance, is likely to result in controversy, has a practical and/or political impact on a large segment of the community, or relates to an emergency situation, the City Manager's Public Outreach Office should be notified immediately.
- (2) When a department receives an inquiry from the news media regarding issues involving more than one department, responses must be coordinated with the other relevant department(s) and with the City Manager's Public Outreach Office.

E) PUBLIC RECORDS REQUESTS

Requests from the media for public records should be handled promptly and consistent with the City's Public Records Policy. When there are questions about whether the information requested can be released, departments should consult with the City Attorney's Office. In addition, the City Manager's Public Outreach Office should be notified whenever such a request is received. This requirement is in addition to any notification requirements contained in the City's *Public Records Act Policy*.

F) CORRECTIONS, COMMENTARY, LETTERS

The City has an obligation to help the news media provide accurate information to the public. Therefore, factual errors should be corrected in an appropriate and timely way.

Commentary, opinion columns, and letters to the editor that are written to represent the City's view regarding operations, policies, or City positions should be coordinated with the City Manager's Public Outreach Office. Individual City employees may express personal opinions, but not as representatives of the City unless they have prior approval by the City Manager's Public Outreach Office.

G) CONSULTING ASSISTANCE

The City Manager's Public Outreach Office is available for advice and consultation on media relations matters. Training in media relations procedures and techniques is periodically coordinated by the Public Outreach Office.

H) NEWS CONFERENCES/EVENT PLANNING

News conferences or other efforts to attract media attention about an issue or for an event should be coordinated with the City Manager's Public Outreach Office, the Mayor's Communications Office, and/or the affected City Councilmember(s).

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Requests from the office(s) of the Mayor and/or a City Councilmember for assistance with, or participation in, a news conference or other efforts to attract media attention should be coordinated with the City Manager's Public Outreach Office. When in doubt, check with the City Manager's Public Outreach Office.

I) MAYOR AND COUNCIL ROLES

(1) Notification

Whenever an event of citywide or council district significance occurs, the City Manager's Office should be notified immediately. Notification must be made to a live body, not just voicemail or email. The notifying party and the City Manager's Office will coordinate appropriate and timely notifications to the Mayor and/or City Councilmember(s).

Events of citywide or district significance are events that have or could have a significant practical or political impact on the City as a whole, on a significant portion of the community, or on a neighborhood. This includes but is not limited to any incident or issue that is likely to attract media interest.

(2) Media Inquiries to the Mayor's Office

Media inquiries are frequently directed to the Mayor's Communications Director. When such a request involves operational issues, the Mayor's Office may refer calls to the appropriate department personnel. In responding to such a referral, department personnel should respond consistent with the department's media policy and should ensure the request is responded to with accurate information in a timely manner.

J) EMERGENCY PUBLIC INFORMATION

In the event of an emergency, the City's *Emergency Operations Plan* designates the City Manager's Public Outreach Manager as the Chief of the Public Information Branch. The plan also designates a line of succession to this responsibility when the Public Outreach Manager is absent or when a second shift is required.

Department directors should ensure that Departmental Emergency Operations Plans address the communications component of any departmental vulnerabilities. Plans should address who speaks for the department in an emergency, off-hour availability and contact information of key staff, and training, and they should include fact sheets on issues and services that are likely to be of concern in an emergency.

Approved:

/s/ Les White
City Manager

May 31, 2006
Date