



Administration & Regulatory Affairs Department Policy

COMMUNICATIONS - MEDIA

Policy No.
3-3

Effective Date:
Upon Approval

1. AUTHORITY

- 1.1 Ordinance Article XVI, Section 2-503, Director-Powers and Duties.

2. PURPOSE

- 2.1 To provide policy and procedures regarding employee communication with the News Media.

3. OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 To establish a standard of responsible and effective communication that facilitates the maximum level of services, thereby safeguarding the integrity of information disseminated by the Department.
- 3.2 To establish a procedure that defines the steps, for both written and oral communications to the News Media, by or on behalf of any division within the Administration & Regulatory Affairs Department (ARA).

4. DEFINITIONS

- 4.1 News Media - The news media includes, but is not limited to, the representatives of TV stations, newspapers, magazines, radio, podcasts, and/or electronic information providers.

5. SCOPE

- 5.1 This policy applies to all ARA employees.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES

- 6.1 Manager/Supervisor:

- 6.1.1 Is responsible for ensuring employees who report to him/her read and acknowledge this policy.

- 6.2 Employee:

- 6.2.1 Is responsible for adherence to this policy.

- 6.3 Designated Spokesperson(s):

- 6.3.1 Are the official Department's Public Information Officer (PIO) and Communications Director, designated by the Director, who are centrally responsible for the coordination of information disseminated by the Department to the News Media in compliance with this policy.

- 6.4 ARA Communications Team is responsible for:

- 6.4.1 Assuring that a Department spokesperson will be available to the News Media when required.

Approved: DocuSigned by:

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Date Approved:

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- 6.4.2 Ensuring all inquiries and requests received from the News Media are distributed to and handled by the appropriate designee.
- 6.4.3 Preparing and distributing news releases to the News Media.
- 6.4.4 Authorizing and coordinating interviews, media events, news conferences, and providing the facilities and equipment necessary to communicate to the News Media.
- 6.4.5 Serving as a liaison between the general public, News Media, the Department Director, and other Department employees to facilitate compliance with this section.
- 6.4.6 Authorizing and coordinating events and/or programs with the News Media designed to enhance awareness about the Department and its functions to include providing speakers on various topics.
- 6.4.7 Consulting the Legal Department to ensure compliance with City and Department's policies, applicable federal and state law, or when a request involves unusual circumstances.

7. POLICY

- 7.1 It is the policy of the ARA Department to ensure that information disseminated to the News Media is carefully planned, executed, and delivered in an accurate and timely manner.
- 7.2 ARA's policy does not apply to dealings with the News Media on personal matters that do not in any way involve matters related to the employee's employment in the ARA Department or City of Houston. In these cases, the employee should clarify that he/she is not representing the Department nor the City of Houston.
- 7.3 Discussion, verbal, or electronic communication is considered representative of the City of Houston when it involves policies, initiatives, or business practices that directly correlate to the employee's responsibilities or business area.
- 7.4 Each employee is identified as a representative of the City of Houston.
- 7.5 All News Media inquiries, requests, and interviews should be referred to the Director, Communications Director, or Department PIO.
- 7.6 The Department PIO and/or Communications Director shall authorize and coordinate all media inquiries, requests, and interviews for the Department.
- 7.7 Initiating contact with the News Media should be done with the utmost discretion. Contact should not undermine section 7.1 above. If an employee initiates contact with the News Media regarding Department business, it must be coordinated with the Department PIO, Communications Director, or designee.

8. PROCEDURE

- 8.1 All News Media inquiries, requests and interviews should initially be referred to the Department's Public Information Officer (PIO) or Communications Director.
- 8.2 Depending on the specific circumstances, the Director may designate another ARA employee as a spokesperson on a particular issue.
- 8.3 Employees contacted by the News Media shall:
 - 8.3.1 Present a friendly and respectful professional response.
 - 8.3.2 Obtain information that should be included when the notification is sent to the PIO and/or Communications Director such as:
 - 8.3.2.1 The name of the person contacting the Department.
 - 8.3.2.2 The name of the media outlet or organization.

- 8.3.2.3 If available, the person's deadline and anticipated time of release of information in print or broadcast.
 - 8.3.2.4 Contact information of the person making the request.
 - 8.3.3 Make sure he/she understands each question from the News Media.
 - 8.3.4 Advise the person that someone who can provide the information will contact him/her as soon as possible.
 - 8.3.5 Provide the Communication Director and/or PIO's contact information if requested.
 - 8.3.6 Keep in mind that when responding to the News Media, they can be seen as a spokesperson for the Department or the City of Houston. Do not offer speculation or gossip. Do not respond with "No comment."
 - 8.3.7 Refer all inquiries and requests to the Department Communications Director and/or PIO, through their supervisor, as soon as possible.
 - 8.3.8 Not release information, documents, or consent to be interviewed in any manner unless designated to do so by the Director or ARA Communications Team.
 - 8.3.9 Refer any News Media inquiries that involve open records requests for information to the appropriate open records request contact. All open records requests are to be handled in strict compliance with State law.
 - 8.3.10 If required, cooperate with the ARA Communications Team to gather information in a timely manner for release to the News Media.
- 8.4 Upon receipt or referral of an inquiry, or request from the News Media, the Communications Director, PIO, and ARA Communications Team shall:
- 8.4.1 Return the News Media's call and if needed, coordinate a one-on-one interview with the appropriate Department employee(s) and the News Media.
 - 8.4.2 Process News Media inquiries and requests for information/interviews in the order in which he/she received them, or prioritize according to reporters' deadlines, if necessary.
 - 8.4.3 If necessary, work with other employees to develop a written statement outlining the Department's position for dissemination to the News Media.
 - 8.4.4 Develop a reactive Q&A in preparation for an interview.
 - 8.4.5 Work with external departments, through the Mayor's Communications Team, to address complex inquiries.
 - 8.4.6 Coordinate all messaging with the Mayor's Communications Team to ensure that all written or verbal correspondence has been approved for distribution to the media.
- 8.5 In the event of an emergency/crisis, the PIO and/or Communications Director shall be responsible for the development and dissemination of all Department communications to the News Media in compliance with the Department's Emergency Preparedness Employee Handbook.

9. COMPLIANCE

- 9.1 Adherence to this policy is mandatory. Any employee that violates this policy may be subject to disciplinary action. Policy exceptions and/or violations shall be brought to the attention of the Department Director for review and for recommended course of action.