

## Media Policy

## Section 1.6

### PURPOSE

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 as quickly and efficiently as possible. Every effort will be made to meet media deadlines and to ensure that all information released is accurate.

The purpose of the policy is to ensure that the public is informed about all aspects of City government by maintaining positive media relations; encouraging media coverage of the services and accomplishments of the City; and responding to the media with accurate and timely information.

### POLICY

#### A. General

1. The Public Information Officer (PIO) serves as the official City spokesperson.
2. The PIO serves under the management of the City Manager and is responsible for the coordination of citywide media relations and for ensuring accuracy, consistency and quality in the City's overall responses to media.
3. If a department is contacted by the media, all requests should be forwarded to the Office of the City Manager and the PIO immediately. The City Manager and PIO may respond or designate a staff to speak to the media.
4. It is important to note that the El Monte Police Department (EMPD) has their own PIOs who respond directly to inquiries by the news media. The EMPD should provide the City Manager and PIO updates on media inquiries, coverage and press releases.

#### B. Proactive Media Relations

1. It is the goal of the City to keep the public informed about achievements and efforts of the City and staff. The City seeks opportunities to proactively update news media outlets about City achievements, awards, accomplishments, and innovations.
2. The Office of the City Manager will keep an up-to-date copy of media outlets for print, television, radio and more. The PIO will be responsible for updating the list continuously.

#### C. Open Government

1. The business conducted by the City is generally public and therefore is accessible as public information.
2. Inquiries regarding pending litigation, matters involving a significant exposure to litigation and certain personnel-related information are exceptions under state and City policy.
3. The City's commitment to transparency is contained in the *Open Government Ordinance* in the El Monte Municipal Code.

#### D. Employee Conduct

1. City officials and employees represent the City itself. For this reason, City staff will not respond to news media inquiries on behalf of other agencies, businesses or organizations regarding policy, operations or incidents.
2. The PIO and employees who have been authorized to speak to the media should be helpful to reporters by referring such inquiries to the appropriate organization.

#### E. Social Media and Online Monitoring

1. Increasingly, reporters are using a variety of social media platforms to report, update and share news stories. The City's *Web Governance and Social Media Policy* provides a framework for the City to disseminate information and correct misinformation.
2. The PIO will proactively post and actively monitor social media and online news and commentary sites relevant to the City issues and operations. When online commentary becomes inaccurate, unhelpful for customers and public, or detrimental to the City and its personnel, the PIO will work with designated staff to determine when or whether it is appropriate to participate in an online discussion, submit a correction or develop a response suitable for the specific discussion site and issue.

#### F. Ethics

1. Occasionally representatives from certain trade, business, or commercial media seek commitments for City advertising or access to lists of contractors or vendors in consideration for publishing a story. The City will not participate in any "pay to play" media proposal, and it will not provide lists of vendors or other potential advertising contacts to publications or other media as a condition for publication of a story.
2. Employee's who receive such requests, should immediately notify the Office of the City Manager and the PIO.

### DEPARTMENT ENGAGEMENT

#### A. Inquiries

1. While the PIO serves as the primary spokesperson for the City, departments may designate specific employees who may respond to media inquiries as directed by the City Manager and the PIO. The designated employee should have the most relevant knowledge and experience.
2. Although every effort should be made to meet reporter's deadlines, information should be released only when it is confirmed to be factually accurate. When in doubt, check with a manager at the Department's Executive Staff level or higher or with the Public Information Officer.

#### B. Referrals

1. The Office of the City Manager and PIO must be notified immediately when a department receives a media inquiry. This holds of significant value when a news media inquiry concerns a matter of broad community significance, is likely to result in controversy, could have a practical and/or political impact on a large segment of the community or relates to an emergency situation.
2. When a department receives an inquiry from the news media regarding issues involving more than one department, responses will be coordinated with the other relevant department(s) and with the Office of the City Manager and PIO.
3. News conferences or other efforts to attract media attention about a departmental issue or event should be coordinated with the Office of the City Manager and PIO.
4. Requests from the City Council for assistance with, or participation in, a news conference or other efforts to attract media attention should always be coordinated with the Office of the City Manager and the PIO.

## **INFORMATION REQUEST**

- A. Request for Records
  - 1. Requests from the media for public records should be handled promptly and consistent with the City's Public Records Policy.
  - 2. When there are questions about whether the information requested can be released, departments should consult with the City Attorney's Office and the Office of the City Manager.
  - 3. In addition, the PIO should be notified whenever such a request is an unusual, extensive, affects multiple departments, or appears to be related to a news media investigative effort. This requirement is in addition to any notification requirements contained in the City Public Records Policy.

## **CORRECTIONS, COMMENTARY, LETTERS**

- A. Corrections
  - 1. 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.
  - 2. The Office of the City Manager and the PIO will be responsible for drafting requests for retractions or request to correct misinformation.
- B. Opinion Pieces
  - 1. Commentary, opinion columns, and letters to the editor that are written to represent the City's view regarding operations, policies, or City positions must be coordinated with the Public Information Office.

## **MAYOR AND COUNCIL ROLES**

- A. City Council
  - 1. The Mayor and City Councilmembers also serve as spokespersons for the City.
  - 2. The Mayor and the City Council can be valuable resources for providing policy and political perspectives in response to specific news media inquiries; helping to disseminate City news and information to constituents and identifying stakeholders who should be informed; participating in news media events; and providing statements for news releases.
- B. Media Requests to City Council
  - 1. If a member of the news media contacts a City Councilmember, the Office of the City Manager and the PIO should be contacted immediately.
  - 2. In response to media inquiries, the Office of the City Manager and the PIO will coordinate to develop unified responses.
- C. Request for City Council Participation
  - 1. Departments should coordinate their requests for participation from the City Council with the City Manager's Office.

## **NOTIFICATIONS**

- A. Contacting Staff
  - 1. Whenever a major event of unusual significance occurs, the City Manager's Office should be notified immediately. As much as practical, notification must be made to a live body; voicemail, email, or text messages can supplement that notification.

2. The notifying party and the City Manager's Office will coordinate appropriate and timely notifications to the Mayor and appropriate Councilmembers.

## **EMERGENCY PUBLIC INFORMATION**

### A. Emergency Operations Plan

1. In the event of an emergency, the City's Emergency Operations Plan designates the City Manager's Office – Public Information Officer as the Emergency Point of Contact.
2. The Plan also designates a line of succession to this responsibility when the Public Information Officer is absent or when additional coverage is required.
3. The City Manager's Office coordinates regular training and exercises for staff involved in the emergency public information function.
4. Department directors should ensure that departmental emergency operations plans address the essential communications component of any departmental vulnerability. The plan should address who speaks for the department in an emergency, off-hour availability and contact information of key staff, and training. Departmental plans also should include the development of fact sheets and similar materials on operations, issues, and services that are likely to be of concern in an emergency.