

NORTH OGDEN CITY

MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY

I. GOAL:

North Ogden City seeks to establish “transparency in government” by working cooperatively with the media to disseminate information of public interest and concern in an accurate, complete and timely manner.

II. POLICY:

(1) To achieve the City’s goal, the City Manager is designated as the City Public Information Officer or “CITY PIO” for North Ogden City and shall be responsible for the implementation of this policy. When the CITY PIO is unavailable, he or she shall designate one of the authorized City spokespersons as the “Acting CITY PIO.”

(2) The press should be treated like a customer of the City and all City employees or officials who engage with the press shall do so in a courteous, polite and professional manner. Any media inquiries received by City staff will be referred immediately to their Department Head who, in turn, will immediately forward the contact to the CITY PIO for response.

(3) Inquiries from the news media are given a high priority by North Ogden City and should be responded to as quickly and efficiently as possible. Every effort should be made to meet media deadlines and to ensure that all information released is accurate and complete.

(4) When contacted by the CITY PIO for information to respond to a media inquiry, all department heads shall immediately provide the CITY PIO the most accurate and complete information available for the response.

(5) If the CITY PIO determines that the City’s goal can best be achieved by having someone with more background or expertise speak for the City on a particular topic, he or she may designate one of the authorized spokespersons to assist with or give the City’s response.

(6) To assure that the City’s elected officials have accurate, complete and timely information to fulfill their responsibilities to represent the public in City affairs, they shall be immediately informed by telephone or email of the substance of every media inquiry and of the City’s official response. They shall be notified of

all official City press releases and other proactive media contacts prior to release of information to the media.

(7) The CITY PIO shall keep a log of all media contacts indicating the date and time of the contact, the substance of the inquiry, the substance of the City's response, the identity of the person making the response for the City and the date and time of the response.

(8) Verbal requests from the media to any City elected official or employee that are not public safety, crisis or emergency inquiries shall be sent in writing to the CITY PIO and elected officials. Responses to the media shall be sent in writing and copied to the CITY PIO and elected officials. Copies may also be sent to other City spokespersons as needed.

III. CITY SPOKESPERSONS:

Authorized City spokespersons that the CITY PIO, in his or her judgment, may designate for a particular response are:

- The Mayor and City Council members
- The Deputy City Manager
- The City Attorney
- All Department Heads
- The Police Chief

IV. RECORDS REQUESTS:

(1) Media requests for records will be handled in accordance with this policy, to the extent it is consistent with the Government Records Access and Management Act or "GRAMA" as contained in Utah Code Ann. § 63G-2-101 et. Seq.

(2) The CITY PIO will be notified of all media records requests.

(3) He or she will then forward the request to the City Recorder who is the official custodian of all City records.

(4) The Recorder will be responsible to see that media records requests are handled in an accurate, complete and timely manner.

(5) The Recorder will immediately notify all elected officials by telephone or email of each media records request received by the City.

(6) The Police Department shall continue to respond to media requests for records concerning investigations according to police department policy.

(7) Media records requests shall be made in writing on a form prepared by the City for that purpose; the form shall include:

- a. an accurate and complete description of the record(s) requested;
- b. the name of the person and organization making the request;
- c. the date and time of the request;
- d. the telephone number and mailing address of the requestor;
- e. the name of the City employee assigned by the Recorder to respond to the request; and,
- f. the date and time of the response.

(8) A copy of all records disclosed to the media in response to the request shall be attached to the completed form and archived by the Recorder in chronological order.

(9) The records produced in response to media requests shall be readily available for viewing at City Hall upon request by any elected official.

V. PRIVILEGED AND PRIVATE INFORMATION:

(1) The vast majority of the records and affairs of North Ogden City are public information which citizens, including the press, have the right to know. All public information should be provided to the press upon request without unnecessary delay.

(2) Some matters, however, like ongoing investigations, information regarding litigation or the threat of litigation, personnel issues, real estate transactions, medical and mental health matters, private data regarding citizens, documents in draft form, to name a few, are governed by privileges and laws intended to advance important public policy goals.

(3) When a media request for an interview or for records appears to involve a subject matter that may be privileged or private, the CITY PIO, Police PIO or Recorder should consult with the City Attorney. The City Attorney will review the request without delay and promptly provide counsel to the CITY PIO or Recorder.

VI. PERSONAL POINTS OF VIEW:

(1) It is recognized that all employees have the right to express their personal points of view regarding matters of general public concern.

(2) However, personal points of view may conflict with the City's official policy.

(3) Therefore, City employees who write letters to the editor may not use official City stationary. If an employee chooses to identify himself or herself as a City employee in a letter or email to the editor, he or she must state that the views set forth in the letter do no represent the views of the City but are the employee's personal opinions.

(4) A similar disclaimer must be given if an employee addresses a public meeting, participates in a radio talk show, or is interviewed for a radio or television, unless the employee has been designated by the CITY PIO as a spokesperson for the City.

VII. CITY-INITIATED INFORMATION:

(1) Proactive media contact on behalf of the City is processed through the CITY PIO -- this includes press releases, media advisories and personal contacts with reporters and editors for coverage.

(2) Departments seeking publicity for events or activities, or needing to collaborate with the media to communicate important information to the public, will coordinate with the CITY PIO.

(3) Departments (except law enforcement on matters pertaining to investigations) may not unilaterally initiate media contacts.

(4) When the CITY PIO approves a proactive media contact, he or she shall notify elected officials of the substance of the contact by telephone or email prior to the information being released.

VIII. PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES:

(1) Because the Police Department operates 24/7 and its work generates a high volume of media calls, it shall designate an officer or officers as Police Public Information Officers or "Police PIO's" and follow specific guidelines when releasing information.

(2) When the CITY PIO is notified by a City staff member of a media call regarding a police investigation or general criminal activity, the CITY PIO will immediately forward the contact to the Police PIO for the appropriate response.

(3) All information released to the media by the Police PIO should be provided immediately to the CITY PIO who will forward the information without delay by telephone or email to elected officials.

(4) Media inquiries concerning matters of police personnel, general police policies and procedures or in anyway reflecting upon the competency or integrity of police personnel or police administration will be routed to and handled directly by the CITY PIO as provided in this policy.

IX. CRISIS OR EMERGENCY ISSUES:

During a crisis or major emergency (i.e. flooding, earthquake, etc.), the procedure for communicating with the media is highlighted in the City's Emergency Plan. The plan designates the CITY PIO as the main point of contact for the media. The CITY PIO is assisted by alternates, including the Police PIO, who prepare and disseminate emergency public information.