



## **MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY**

### **PURPOSE AND GOAL**

The City of Denison seeks to inform its residents, business owners, visitors, and other stakeholders by engaging in a proactive communications system. This approach recognizes that one of the most effective ways to communicate City policies and activities is by working in partnership with the news media. City staff shall become familiar and adhere to the policies and guidelines outlined in this document. Additional helpful information about the City's expectations of the news media can be found in the attached Appendix A: Expectations for Media.

### **POLICY**

Inquiries from the news media are given a high priority by the City of Denison and should be responded to as quickly and efficiently as possible, within reason. Every effort should be made to meet media deadlines and to ensure that all information released is accurate. The Community Engagement Department is responsible for the City's media inquiries, interview requests, and other press issues. The Community Engagement Director ("Director") is responsible for collecting accurate information from departments in order to compile it into relevant media statements and releases, talking points, and other communication pieces. All media correspondence will operate as an objective conveyor of facts and will not add spin. The Community Engagement Department does not handle public records request. These requests should be made to the City Clerk's office.

All City employees should notify the Community Engagement Director regarding media inquiries. The majority of media requests are to be initiated when the media contacts the Community Engagement Director. Due to the pressing nature of media deadlines, it is important that all departments respond as soon as possible when requests are made for information and interviews, if appropriate. Specific guidelines for responding to media requests follow below.

## **MEDIA INQUIRIES**

Any media inquiries received by City staff should be referred immediately to the Director of Community Engagement. An appropriate response to the media would be, “I will give your request to the Community Engagement Department, who will respond to you as soon as possible.” Please obtain the requestor’s name, media outlet, phone number, topic of story, and deadline. City employees should also be prepared to respond to the news media after consulting with the Director of Community Engagement and should be given the appropriate media preparation and other resources if they are expected to be a spokesperson. Staff should also notify their immediate supervisor about any media inquiry.

## **SENSITIVE OR CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES**

All media inquiries regarding sensitive or controversial issues should always be referred immediately to the Director and City Manager. The Director will coordinate with the City Manager on a response including designating a spokesperson and an appropriate course of response to the media. As a matter of general practice, the City of Denison does not discuss current or anticipated litigation or personnel matters. The City’s position on litigation or personnel matters may be made public if it serves the best interest of the City of Denison.

## **PERSONAL POINTS OF VIEW**

The City of Denison strives for a unified approach to communication initiatives. Although it is expected that employees have the right to personal points of view regarding any issue, personal points of view may conflict with the City’s official policy or position. Therefore, City employees who write letters to the editor or other opinion pieces that reflect personal points of view, may not use official City stationery or be otherwise officially connected to the City of Denison. If an employee chooses to identify themselves as a City employee in any personal letter or email to a media outlet, they must include language which states the views set forth 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 approval to be officially representing the City. Employees who are representing the City in any of the above formats must identify themselves as an official spokesperson for the City and have the approval to represent the City from the City Manager.

## **CITY-INITIATED INFORMATION**

Proactive media contact is initiated through the Community Engagement Department. This includes issuing press releases and media advisories. Departments seeking media publicity for

events or activities must contact the Director as soon as possible to ensure the best media coverage of their activities. Departments should not initiate news media contacts without the approval from the Community Engagement Department, unless otherwise specified in this policy. In addition, any requests for quotes from elected officials must be coordinated through the Community Engagement Department and City Manager's office.

Any press release created by the City must be reviewed and approved by the City Manager and Director prior to official publishing. In addition, press releases shall be sent to the City Council and all department directors prior to being released to the press. The Community Engagement Director shall be responsible for distributing all releases to the press and city officials.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES**

Because of the nature of their operations, the Police and Fire/Rescue Departments have personnel designated as media spokespersons and follow specific guidelines when releasing information to the media. In the event that they do not have designated personnel as media spokespersons, the media should be directed to the Community Engagement Department. Any media calls to other City staff regarding a Police or Fire matter should be referred immediately to the Community Engagement Director, as appropriate. All information released to the media by the Police and Fire Departments must be reviewed and approved by the City Manager and provided to the Community Engagement Office prior to issuance.

## **GENERAL MEDIA GUIDELINES**

Staff shall adhere to the following guidelines in order to help make each media contact a positive and beneficial experience.

- When interacting with the media:
  - Be available
  - Be informative
  - Be honest
- Answer all questions accurately and concisely. Reporters often must fit their information into a compressed space or limited airtime.
- Reporters are often asked to write about topics which are unfamiliar to them. As a result, it is important to provide additional background information and situational context about the topic.
- If you do not know an answer to a question, be honest and tell the reporter that you need to obtain additional information. Offer to get back to the person with the accurate information and follow-up in a timely manner.
- Complimenting the reporter on a good, accurate, and fair story can go a long way in establishing productive media relationships.
- There is no such thing as "off-the-record." Do not make off-the-record, off-the-cuff, or sarcastic remarks before, during, or after an interview or in any official media

correspondence. Recorders and cameras are often turned on before and after the interview. If you do not want to read it in print or hear it on a news broadcast, do not say it.

- Treat all reporters equally all the time.
- Do not be afraid to end an interview on your terms.
- Never guess, project, suppose, or expound. If you do not absolutely know the answer, do not provide a response. “I don’t know, but will find out and get back with you,” is an appropriate response.

## **APPENDIX A: EXPECTATIONS FOR MEDIA**

The following is provided to City staff for informational consideration and represents the City's expectations and goals for interacting with the news media. City staff should help manage these expectations through their interactions with the media.

Media can expect:

- A response from the City within a reasonable amount of time. At times, this may include informing the outlet that, "At this time we do not have an answer to your request, but we will continue to pursue."
- The City to request a 24-hour lead time for interviews to ensure staff availability and preparation.
- City staff to request basic information to ensure effective follow up, such as a reasonable deadline and a clear understanding of the topic.
- To submit questions via email in advance of deadlines.
- Additional time to be requested by the City for sensitive or complex topics that require extensive research and coordination.