



MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY

GOAL

The City of Pensacola seeks to inform its residents, businesses and visitors by engaging in a proactive communications system. This approach recognizes that one of the most effective and quickest ways to communicate City policies and activities to citizens is by working in partnership with the news media.

POLICY

Inquiries from the news media are given a high priority by the City of Pensacola 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 Communications Office is responsible for the City's media inquiries, interview requests, and other press issues. The Public Information Officer (PIO) is responsible for drawing accurate information from departments in order to compile it to create relevant media statements and releases, talking points, Q&A, and other communication pieces. **The PIO will operate as an objective conveyor of facts and will not add spin.** The PIO does not handle public records request. These requests should be made to the public records director.

All City employees should notify the PIO about media inquiries. The majority of City media requests are to be initiated when the media contacts the Public Information Officer. Due to the pressing nature of media deadlines, it is important that all departments respond as soon as possible when the PIO requests department information. Specific guidelines for responding to media requests follow below.

CITY SPOKESPERSONS

Unless otherwise authorized, the City's spokespersons are:

- Mayor
- City Administrator
- Chief Operations Officer

- Public Information Officer
- Exceptions regarding departmental spokespersons may be made at the discretion of the Mayor, City Administrator and Chief Operations Officer.

MEDIA INQUIRIES

Any media inquiries received by other City staff should be referred immediately to the Public Information Officer. An appropriate response to the media would be, **“I will give your request to my City’s Public Information Officer who will respond to you as soon as he/she is available.”** Please obtain the caller’s name, media outlet, phone number, topic of story (why they are calling) and deadline. City Employees should also be prepared to respond to the news media (if necessary), after consulting with Office of the Mayor and should be given the appropriate media preparation and other resources if they are expected to be a company spokesperson.

EXPECTATIONS FOR MEDIA

Media outlets can expect:

- A response/answer (same day if possible and within as reasonable amount of time as possible). This can even include informing the outlet that “at this time we do not have an answer to your request but we continue pursuit.”
- To ensure accuracy and to assist with the facilitation of details and information it is necessary for the Communications Office to seek answers to the following:
 - What is your deadline? (Hard Deadline or Soft). PIO will set appropriate expectations as to whether or not this deadline is reasonable.
 - What is the story about? (Expect several follow-up questions about this).
- Be mindful with requests requiring interdepartmental research or other such complex requests that involve comprehensive attention. Expecting a short turnaround time on such request is not reasonable and will be communicated by PIO.
- A request late in the afternoon that requires significant research and/or coordination will be handled the following day unless circumstances warrant otherwise.
- For interview requests, we are implementing a 72 hour lead time. This allows for scheduling and to ensure that the interviewee is prepared.

SENSITIVE OR CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

All television, radio, newspaper or other media inquiries regarding sensitive or controversial issues should always be referred immediately to the PIO/COO. The PIO will coordinate with City of Pensacola leadership and coordinate a response including

designating a spokesperson after consultation with the Office of the Mayor and the appropriate department.

LITIGATION, PERSONNEL AND ELECTION ISSUES

As a matter of general practice the City of Pensacola and departments therein do not discuss litigation and/or personnel-related information.

PERSONAL POINTS OF VIEW

The City of Pensacola is striving for a unified approach to communications initiatives. Although it is expected that all employees have the right to their personal points of view regarding any issue, personal points of view may conflict with the City's official policy. Therefore, City employees who write letters to the editor of any newspaper may not use official City stationary. If an employee chooses to identify himself or herself as a City employee in any personal letter or email to the editor, he or she must include language which states the views set forth in the letter 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 through the Communications Office.

GENERAL OR ROUTINE ISSUES

Broadcast media: Calls from broadcast media (TV and radio) should always be referred immediately to the Public Information Officer. The PIO will coordinate with Office of the Mayor and relevant department to coordinate a response including designating a spokesperson after consultation with the City of Pensacola leadership and the relevant department.

Local print media: Calls from local print media regarding departmental procedures and programs should always be referred immediately to the Public Information Officer. The PIO will coordinate with Office of the Mayor and relevant department to coordinate a response to specific questions from print media.

CITY-INITIATED INFORMATION

Most proactive media contact is initiated through the Public Information Officer. This includes issuing press releases and media advisories. Departments seeking publicity for events or activities must contact the PIO 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 Public Information Office (unless otherwise specified in this policy). In addition, any request for mayoral quotes must be coordinated through the Communications Office.

PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES

Because the Police and Fire Departments operate 24/7 and their work generates a high volume of media calls, those departments may have designated sworn personnel as media spokespersons and follow specific guidelines when releasing information. In the event that they do not have designated sworn personnel as media spokespersons, the media should be directed to the Communications Office. Any media calls to other City staff regarding a Police or Fire should be referred immediately to the Communications Office, as appropriate. All information released to the media by the Police and Fire Departments should be provided immediately to the Communications Office so that the Office of the Mayor is brought up to date.

CRISIS OR EMERGENCY ISSUES

During a crisis or major emergency (i.e. flooding), the procedure for handling the media is highlighted in the City's Emergency Plan. The plan designates the City's Public Information Officer as the main point of contact for the media.