

## **1100.09 Media Management**

### ***Scope***

This policy applies to all City of South Padre Island employees.

### ***Policy***

#### **I. Statement of Purpose:**

The purpose of the standard operating procedures (SOP) is to provide guidelines for the City of South Padre Island to keep the media and the public fully, fairly and accurately informed of programs, services, events and issues in a timely and forthright manner.

Efficient and effective communication with the media is critical to the City of South Padre Island's ability to carry out its mission of open, transparent communication. Coordination, uniformity, accuracy and timeliness are the cornerstones of strong and productive media relations. Working with the media gives the City an opportunity to share its message.

The SOP exists to support the mission of the City, as defined by the City Council, Comprehensive Plan, Home Rule Charter and most importantly, the citizens.

#### **II. Goals of SOP:**

Effective media relations best serve South Padre Island by:

- Providing accountability to the public and transparency of government.
- Ensuring that timely and accurate information is conveyed to the public regarding incidents or issues of a sensitive or controversial nature.
- Establishing and maintaining an accurate public perception of the City.
- Increasing the visibility of the City of South Padre Island on local, statewide and national levels.
- Informing residents of City programs and services.
- Promoting the City's achievements, activities and significant events.

#### **III. Policy:**

The Public Information Officer serves as the primary spokesperson for the City of South Padre Island and conveys the official City position on media inquiries, issues of citywide significance and situations that are sensitive and controversial in nature. The Officer is also the gatekeeper to elected and appointed City officials. All media inquiries should be directed to this position. When appropriate, the inquiries will be forwarded to the City Manager, Department Directors or the Mayor for response. In all cases, the City Manager and the Public Information Officer should be informed concerning all media inquiries.

The Public Information Officer promotes the City through press releases, social media and other avenues regarding special accomplishments, events, activities, programs and plans. All releases intended for external audiences should go through this office. Most releases should be proactive, relating a story currently not before the public.

Since positive media solicitation is an integral element of the City's communication strategy, any ideas for articles or media pieces that would positively portray the City, its work or its image, should also be directed to the Public Information Officer.

In a similar fashion, the Public Information Officer should be notified about negative occurrences that are likely to attract Media interest and possibly rise to the level of a news story.

Guidelines for responding to TV and radio interview requests:

When receiving a request for an on-air interview, an employee should collect the following information:

- Reporter's name
- Media organization
- When the interview will air
- If it will be a live or taped interview

Direct the reporter to the Public Information Officer, and then forward the request to the Public Information Officer. Giving the Public Information Officer advanced notice of the reporter's request may help expedite the release of information.

Unique requests during busy times, like Spring Break, Fourth of July, etc. should always be shared with the City Manager by those involved and the Public Information Officer. This involves network or syndicated television shows seeking special access, such as taping in the emergency operations center, police ride-alongs, etc. Under no circumstance will the Media be allowed to have special access, unless approved by the City Manager.

When the media are on City property, they should be escorted at all times.  
Do not discuss the following areas with reporters:

- Legal issues, including liability issues and pending litigation
- Personnel issues, either current or former employees
- Questions involving City integrity, such as ethics
- Community-wide situation or emergency

Please do not say you are not allowed to talk to the media, but say, instead, that it is City Policy that all media requests be directed to the Public Information Officer. Inform the Public Information Officer and the City Manager about any requests regarding the areas above.

#### IV. Media relations during emergencies:

The City of South Padre Island has an emergency preparedness plan, which includes a public information element. This is the governing document during emergencies. In these cases, the

only immediately authorized individuals who may speak on behalf of the City are the Mayor and the Public Information Officer. Additionally, the City Manager, or designee, and the Emergency Management Coordinator are authorized to speak on behalf of the City.

All media inquiries during an emergency are to be sent to the Public Information Officer. It will be the responsibility of the Public Information Officer to keep the City Manager informed of all inquiries.

V. Media relations concerning citywide, controversial issues:

Non-emergency, but critical issues, that may come before the City should be coordinated by the Public Information Officer. If appropriate, certain department directors may be authorized to speak on behalf of the City. At no time will a City employee below the rank of a department director be allowed to speak on behalf of the City concerning controversial topics.

The goal is always clear, accurate communication with the media. It is critical in emergencies and controversial issues that there is one message. This message is the accurate, honest message from the City to the public through the media. Proper handling of communication in any crisis situation will improve City relationships with the public and the media.

In all cases, the key is to offer a calm, helpful presence. The confidence shown by those being interviewed will transfer to the public. The City will be open and responsive to questions.

The City's first priority is always the safety of its residents and visitors.

When approached about City election issues, facts about a bond issue, or the like, may be shared; however, in no circumstance can the comments advocate a voting position. The City will not comment on candidates for election.

VI. Responsibilities of departments during a crisis or emergency situation:

Although a certain department may not be directly involved in communicating through the media, they may have the information critical to share with the public. In this regard, any request from the Public Information Office, the Mayor and/or the City Manager must be handled promptly with accurate information.

For example, in a hurricane situation, television crews may want to shoot video of preparations, such as removing items from the beach, creation of sand berms, re-entry sticker distribution, sand bag distribution, etc. It is critical that the Public Information Office have information on what is happening, when it is happening and where it is happening.

If hours are set for a project, like distribution of sand bags, issuing of re-entry stickers, etc., we must stick with those hours. If hours and locations change, we lose credibility with the media and the public.

In a breaking news situation, such as an accident, fire, etc., the City Manager, Mayor, and Public Information Officer can share immediate facts with the media.

VII. Online blogs or opinion sites:

Employees are not authorized to represent the City in online blogs or opinion sites in such a way that it may be perceived that the views and opinions reflect the official policy or position of the City. If such a site is shown to be sharing inaccurate facts, this should be pointed out to the Public Information Officer for a possible response. This does not apply to City initiated blogs or opinion sites.

Approved by City Manager, Joni Clarke on September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012.