

**CITY OF SAN BERNARDINO  
CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE  
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM  
Appendix B**

TO: All Departments

FROM: Charles McNeely, City Manager

SUBJECT: Media Policy

DATE: Jan 1, 2011

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Effective communication with the media is critical for the City of San Bernardino's ability to carry out its mission of serving the public and promoting important City programs. Effective media relations best serve the City by:

- informing the public of what we can do for them
- promoting the City's achievements, activities and events of significance
- expanding the general visibility of the City
- ensuring that accurate information is conveyed to the public with transparency regarding incidents and issues of a controversial and/or sensitive nature.

**POLICY**

The Manager of Communications serves as the official City spokesperson and conveys the official City position on issues of general citywide impact or significance or situations that are of a particularly controversial or sensitive nature. Inquiries from the media about such issues should be referred to the Manager of Communications.

Depending on the specific circumstances, the Manager of Communications may designate another Department Manager to serve as spokesperson on a particular issue.

In cases of critical significance to the City, the Manager of Communications will work with other City officials to develop a "fact sheet" to detail the known facts of the situation and summarize the City's position.

In the event of a crisis or emergency situation, the Manager of Communications will handle all contacts with the media, and will coordinate the information flow from the City to the public. In such situations, all departments should refer calls from the media to the Communications office.

**GENERAL PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH THE MEDIA**

Staff is free to respond to requests from the media regarding their professional expertise. In such cases, the Manager of Communications should be notified as soon as possible to inform him/her of the contact. Such notification can be particularly important if follow-up inquiries are made with other City personnel to ensure a coordinated, consistent City response. Media inquiries should be referred to the Manager of

Communications if they involve issues with City-wide significance and/or are of a controversial or sensitive nature.

The Manager of Communications promotes the City through press releases regarding special accomplishments, events and activities, programs and plans. All releases intended for external audiences should be routed through the Communications Office.

Since positive media solicitation is an integral element of the City's communications program, any ideas for articles or pieces that would positively portray the City, its work or its community should also be directed to the Manager of Communications. In a similar manner the Communications Office should be notified about negative occurrences that are likely to rise to the level of a news story.

Guidelines for communicating with the media when the issue is non-controversial and limited to the staff member's area of expertise:

- Obtain the name of the person calling, the media organization and, if available, the anticipated time of release of information in print or broadcast. This information should be included when the notification is made to the Manager of Communications.
- The best approach with the media is to be prompt, helpful and honest. All contacts from the media should be returned as soon as possible, in deference to reporters' deadlines. At the most, a call should be returned within a half-day. If that is not possible, an alternate employee (if appropriate) or Manager of Communications should be asked to handle the call.
- Make sure you understand each question from the media before answering. If you cannot answer the question, or are uncomfortable providing a response, take the reporter's number and advise him/her that someone who can provide the information will contact him/her as soon as possible. Then follow-up by contacting the Manager of Communications.
- Do not offer speculations or gossip. Do not answer a reporter's question with "no comment." Do not be condescending or underestimate the reporter's intelligence, but make sure the reporter understands your responses. Provide your phone number and/or e-mail address for follow-up questions.
- Remember that in responding to the media, you can be seen as representing and speaking on behalf of the City. Personal opinions should be clearly and carefully identified as such.
- Issues that should not be discussed with reporters are 1) legal issues, 2) personnel issues, 3) questions that involve City integrity, such as ethics or issues that may result in harm to others, or 4) a crisis or emergency. Refer all such inquiries to the Manager of Communications.

## **CITY EMERGENCY/CRISIS**

Crisis communications have a lasting impact on reputation and public support. How well we convey our message to the public greatly depends on what is reported to the news media. This is especially true in a crisis, during which the news media is the primary means of communication to our constituencies. Because of the emotions that usually accompany crises, images formed from crisis reporting are especially important in shaping long-lasting public impressions of the City.

In the event of a major crisis involving the City of San Bernardino, it is essential that an effective communications plan be put into effect to disseminate timely, accurate information and to ensure that inquiries are routed to the appropriate sources.

The Manager of Communications along with appropriate public safety individuals is responsible for the development and dissemination of all City communications in the event of an emergency. This includes

internal communications with personnel, as well as communications with the media. The priority will be on maintaining timely and open communications with the media, providing complete and accurate information that has been confirmed about the emergency situation and the City's response to the crisis at hand. Communications with the media will be frequent throughout the duration of the emergency situation. The City of San Bernardino Web site will be utilized as a key medium for updating the public on the details of the emergency situation and actions we are taking to address all related issues.

In an emergency, City staff has a right **not** to speak with the media. Any situations where individuals feel a reporter has abused their rights should be reported to the Manager of Communications.

A communication information center (EOC) may also be established, if a high volume of incoming phone calls are expected.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION:**

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### **SUBMITTING MEDIA REPORT**

In order to make the sharing of media information more convenient, Communications has created two reporting templates. The first is a [Media Contact Report](#). This form allows the user to share the details about any media contact that has already occurred. Submit the report via email directly to Heather Gray, Manager of Communications at [Gray\\_he@sbcity.org](mailto:Gray_he@sbcity.org).

The second form is a [News Advisory Report](#). This form allows the user to share the details of upcoming events or positive, newsworthy stories with the Manager of Communications. Submit the report via email directly to Heather Gray, Manager of Communications at [Gray\\_he@sbcity.org](mailto:Gray_he@sbcity.org)