



CITY OF OAKLAND
ADMINISTRATIVE INSTRUCTION

SUBJECT/AGENCY	Media Relations City Administrator's Office	NUMBER	351
REFERENCE		EFFECTIVE	May 17, 2018
SUPERSEDE	None		

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this Administrative Instruction (AI) is to establish protocol, procedures, and guidelines for responding to and interacting with the news media.

II. BACKGROUND

The news media is one of the City of Oakland's most important vehicles for communicating with the public. News media includes traditional outlets such as television, radio, wire services, and print (i.e., newspapers, magazines, professional journals), as well as digital media sources such as Internet news sites and blogs. The City's policy regarding Social Media is addressed in a separate AI.

The City of Oakland is an open, transparent government, and places a high value on being responsive to the information needs of the media and the community it serves. The City has a duty to provide residents and businesses with clear, accurate, accessible information about its services and policies. Timely communication is also critical to the democratic process so that the public can provide input and feedback during decision-making processes, contribute to policy-making discussions, and be efficiently informed in the face of emergencies and unexpected community needs. Prompt, accurate responses to media requests are also key to building and maintaining relationships with members of the media and, by extension, fostering community confidence in City government.

Media relations is a two-way street: the media need City staff to provide information about City government, and City staff need the media to inform the public about City programs, services, and issues. It is important to maintain a positive, responsive, trustworthy relationship with the media, and to provide consistent, accurate, timely, and objective information to them. Personal opinions are never appropriate.

Deadlines are often immediate, and reporters can post—and update—their stories online in a matter of minutes. Rapid internal communication is critical so that the City can best manage its media relations.

The primary objective of this media relations AI is to ensure that the City speaks with one consistent voice. This policy will ensure that the Mayor and City Administrator are kept informed about media inquiries and that they are provided the background, facts, and information necessary to allow them and others on their behalf to respond to media inquiries in a complete, timely, and accurate manner.

The City's goal is to inform, not to persuade. Information will be provided as promptly as possible to any media representative. The news media will have access to any information except that which is exempted from disclosure by law, such as personnel matters, executive/closed sessions, pending legal matters, or confidential information.

III. POLICY

A. Who Speaks for the City?

The Mayor and City Administrator are the official spokespeople for the City of Oakland's executive branch (which includes all City departments). They may designate others to speak on their behalf, including:

- Mayor's Communications Director
- Citywide Communications Director (City Administrator's Office)
- Assistant City Administrators
- Deputy City Administrators
- Department Directors
- Public Information Officers
- Subject-area experts identified by Department Directors or the Citywide Communications Director

Department Directors and their designated Public Information Officers (PIOs) or communications specialists are authorized to handle media requests on issues specific to that Department, provided they comply with the procedures set forth in Section IV.

B. Designated Department PIOs & Communications Specialists

Each City department must identify one or more Public Information Officers (PIOs) or communications specialists who are tasked with facilitating responses to media inquiries. Department PIOs or communications specialists may respond to routine media requests directly pertaining to that department only; see Section IV below for procedures for handling inquiries that involve more than one department or that are complex, high-profile, sensitive, or controversial.

PIOs are required to attend regular media relations, crisis communications, emergency response, and public information officer training as recommended by the Citywide Communications Director.

The following departments have an assigned Department PIO:

- City Administrator's Office
- Oakland Public Works/Department of Transportation (shared)
- Planning & Building Department/Housing & Community Development Department (shared)
- Economic & Workforce Development Department
- Oakland Police Department (two sworn officers)
- Oakland Public Library

Other departments have assigned communications specialists who function as liaisons between their department and the City Administrator's Communications Office.

Specific media relations responsibilities of PIOs and communications specialists include:

- Receiving media inquiries and interacting with reporters to identify the nature of the inquiry or story angle;
- Coordinating with key people in the Department to craft a strategy for a swift response;
- Gathering facts and data to respond to the inquiry; and
- Keeping appropriate officials informed according to the protocols set forth in this policy.

Department PIOs may serve as spokespeople for their Department at the discretion of the Department Director, and in some cases the Citywide Communications Director. Departments are required to notify the Citywide Communications Director about all media inquiries they receive (see "Procedures" below).

IV. PROCEDURES

A. Responding to Media Inquiries

Departments must inform the City Administrator's Communications Office of all media requests received, and at a minimum provide communications staff with the information detailed below. The City Administrator's Office must have a comprehensive view of the topics and stories being reported by the media on a day-to-day basis so that staff may optimize communication efforts and ensure that the City conveys complete, accurate, timely information to the public through the news media.

Media calls should be handled within one (1) hour whenever possible. When a media inquiry is received, the employee who receives the request should find out the following basic information:

- Name of reporter
- Name of media outlet
- Phone number and email address
- Topic, questions, or information being requested
- Who else the reporter is speaking to on this topic, if they will divulge that
- Deadline

Below is a recommended e-mail format to use when notifying the City Administrator's Communications Office of a media inquiry. If the inquiry is about breaking news or determined to be of high importance or sensitivity, the PIO should immediately alert the Citywide Communications Director via text.

Subject Line: Media Request: [reporter's name], [name of media outlet], wants to speak re: [request summary], deadline: [date/time]

Body of Email:

- **Reporter's request:** Summarize reporter's request
- **Top 3 points to cover:** {provide suggested message points as bullets below}
 - 1) Message 1
 - 2) Message 2
 - 3) Message 3
- **Best person for more background details:** [Staff name, phone, email address]
- **Known background details and links to documents and sources if possible**

If an immediate response is not possible, as a courtesy the reporter should be contacted and advised as to when the requested information or spokesperson will be available. It is not appropriate for an employee to tell a reporter that they are not authorized to speak to the media. Instead, the employee should tell the reporter that they will look into or consider the details of the request, determine who is most appropriate to respond to the questions, and provide a response as soon as possible.

When responding to media inquiries, provide facts only; it is never appropriate to express personal opinions or to speculate. If you do not know the answer to a question, say so. Tell the reporter you will respond to them with accurate information and provide a time estimate for when you will do so. Refer to Section V for additional guidance on responding to media inquiries.

Given the high daily volume of media inquiries pertaining to routine law enforcement activities, the OPD PIO Team should notify the Citywide Communications Director and

Mayor's Communications Director of all media inquiries or requests for interviews that pertain to non-routine, sensitive, high-profile, or controversial issues.

i. High-profile, Complex, Sensitive, or Controversial Issues

Media inquiries involving more than one department or pertaining to high-profile, complex, sensitive, or controversial issues must be forwarded immediately to the Citywide Communications Director, who shall consult with the appropriate individuals to develop a strategy for a swift response and identify the most appropriate spokesperson to address the media. In these instances, the Citywide Communications Director should be texted or called to alert them to the inquiry.

High-profile, complex, sensitive, or controversial issues include those that may:

- Represent a threat—existing or potential—to life, health, or property
- Negatively affect public confidence in City government
- Have legal liability or political implications, existing or potential
- Involve multiple departments or complex issues
- Be of particular interest to the public or have captured the attention of several reporters or the national media
- Involve high-profile individuals or celebrities which will automatically generate news attention
- Generate significant media attention (e.g., policy issues; infrastructure failure that affects ability to deliver service or has a significant impact on human health or the environment; layoffs or labor issues; ethics or corruption charges; arrests of City employees or high-profile individuals; budget reductions; claims and lawsuits; injury or death of City employees or officials; etc.)

Any time a Department is contacted by the national media for an interview, especially television media, the Department Director and designated spokesperson will consult with the Citywide Communications Director to develop a response and prepare for the interview.

ii. Non-routine Requests

Non-routine requests should be immediately communicated to the Department Director and then referred to the Citywide Communications Director who shall consult with the appropriate individuals to develop a strategy for a swift response and identify the most appropriate spokesperson to address the media.

Non-routine requests include those that require the interpretation of policy; involve issues related to budget or personnel; pertain to emergency situations; pertain to future programs, services, and developments; or involve more than one City agency/department or outside agencies or organizations.

Examples include: items under consideration or recently adopted by the City Council; new programs or policies; major development projects; new hires or terminations; and unusual public safety incidents.

iii. Routine Media Requests

Designated Department PIOs or communications specialists may respond to media inquiries for facts or routine, incidental information relating specifically to the day-to-day operations of the department they are designated to represent. Routine information includes event or meeting schedules; basic services; published notices, reports, and minutes; or factual information. Subject-area experts may serve as spokespeople only upon authorization of the Citywide Communications Director, the City Administrator, or their designee(s).

B. Protocol for Sending News Releases/Media Advisories

Department PIOs or communications specialists should work with subject area experts in the department to draft the release or advisory and follow their department's protocol for internal review of media materials.

The final draft of the news release or media advisory shall be sent to the City Administrator's Communications Office for approval prior to release, with 24-hours' notice whenever possible.

Once approval has been given, Department PIOs or communications specialists should send the release or media advisory to the news media and post it on the Department's web page and in the City Newsroom on the website, with a photograph or other graphic image whenever possible.

C. Protocol for Setting up News Conferences/Media Events

The City has many different stories to tell, but we don't want to tell them all at the same time, so the timing of news conferences is important for good relations with the media. Following these steps when scheduling a news conference or media event will help ensure that the City can avoid conflicts or the appearance of working at cross purposes.

- Inform the Department PIO or communications specialist of the interest in holding a news conference or media event. The Department PIO or communications specialist shall coordinate with other City staff as appropriate, depending on the topic, and facilitate the planning effort.
- The Department PIO or communications specialist shall contact the Citywide Communications Director with the request at least two weeks in advance, whenever possible, providing the following details:
 - What: purpose
 - When: potential dates

- Where: location
 - Why: background information
 - Who: proposed participants
- If the Mayor’s participation is desired, the Department PIO or communications specialist shall copy the Mayor’s Communications Director on the request so it can be coordinated with the Mayor’s schedule.

D. Roles and Responsibilities

Responsible Party
City Employees

Action

1. Notify the Department’s designated PIO/communications specialist of significant events or issues—positive or negative—that may be of news interest to the general public.
2. Notify the designated PIO/communications specialist of any contact from the media.
3. No employee should give a media interview unless approved by the Department Director in consultation with the department’s PIO and Citywide Communications Director.

**Department PIO or
Communications Specialist**

1. Inform Department staff of protocol for handling media inquiries.
2. Keep the Department Director and Citywide Communications Director and their Communications Team informed about all media inquiries.
3. Immediately notify the Department Director and the Citywide Communications Director of any non-routine, complex, high-profile, sensitive, or controversial inquiries, or of inquiries pertaining to multiple departments.
4. Routinely scan and review media coverage and keep an eye on news cycles, trending stories, social media posts, and other news that may involve the City so as to be aware of potential media inquiries (e.g., if national news is covering cannabis stories, the City can expect inquiries about Oakland’s policies and procedures as a national leader.)

Department Directors

1. Keep the Department PIO/designated communications specialist informed on current issues—both positive and negative—to maintain a credible first response.
2. Immediately notify the Citywide

Communications Director of significant events or sensitive, controversial, complex issues that may be of news interest to the general public.

3. Notify the Citywide Communications Director of any media contact or anticipated stories.

Communications Office

1. Advise and coordinate with executive leadership team, including City Administrator, Mayor, and Mayor's Communications Director. Keep them apprised of sensitive media inquiries.
2. Develop and implement communications strategies to address complex, high-profile, sensitive, or controversial issues.
3. Initiate and support citywide communications initiatives.
4. Anticipate critical issues and develop strategic communications plans to address them.
5. Notify the appropriate Department Director, Department PIO, or communications specialist about media inquiries pertaining to issues or projects involving that department. The Department Director may forward the inquiry to a designated spokesperson or staff member.
6. Review final media coverage and ascertain if there may be follow-up coverage and if so, anticipate what the next steps, inquiries, and timing may be in order to be prepared to respond to ongoing or evolving stories.

V. TIPS FOR POSITIVE MEDIA RELATIONS

1. **Respect media deadlines** (usually before 5 p.m. that day, but often earlier). Respond to calls promptly, even if you still need to gather more information. Ask a reporter what their deadline is and strive to meet it.
2. **Prepare.** Ask the reporter what the angle of their story is and what they need to know so you can be prepared. Anticipate the reporter's questions (*who, what, when, where, why, and how much*) and prepare clear, concise responses. Include relevant facts and figures. Be accurate. Provide documentation. Prepare for the one or two questions you *don't* want to hear.
3. **Know your message.** Select three key messages you want to communicate to the public and frame your responses around them.
4. **Listen carefully.** The reporter's question may include inaccurate assumptions or be framed as a negative to put you on the defensive. Correct any factual errors and

respond objectively, accurately, and concisely. Do not allow a reporter to put words in your mouth, and correct any inaccuracies right away.

5. **Be objective.** Avoid a debate or argument— it’s not personal. Remember that you are representing a City department, not yourself.
6. **Never say “no comment.”** If you cannot comment, say so and say why. “No comment” sounds uncooperative and as if you’re hiding something. If you cannot divulge information, or if the facts are still being verified, say so in a matter-of-fact way.
7. **Nothing is ever “off the record.”** Always assume everything you say is “on the record.” If you don’t want what you say to appear in a news story, don’t say it.
8. **Do not speculate.** If you don’t know the answer, just say so. If appropriate, refer the reporter to the Department PIO or the Citywide Communications Director in the City Administrator’s Office to identify someone who can provide the information.
9. **Be yourself.** The more at ease you are, the more credible you are.
10. **Always tell the truth.**

VI. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

When drafting a news release, remember the following characteristics that make an item newsworthy.

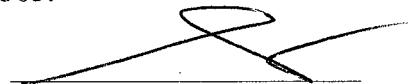
Timeliness	When the event happened determines its newsworthiness. News is what is happening now!
Impact	Impact could be the number of people affected, dollar amounts, or other factors. The greater the impact, the more newsworthy an item is.
Prominence	Who is involved? The more “known” they are, the more newsworthy the item is.
Human Interest	Human interest stories may be of interest even if they don’t have some of the other characteristics. Human interest stories appeal to emotion and enable the audience to identify with the subject.
Trends	The media love to identify the next big trend. Three or more instances are considered a trend. Look for similar things that have occurred recently. For

example, while announcing holiday parking, also mention other recent parking successes (e.g., new meters installed, courtesy notices, etc.). The more that you can position something as a trend the more interested the media will be.

VII. DEFINITIONS

<u>Term</u>	<u>Definition</u>
Media Advisory	Used to invite the media to a media event, news conference, or other activity. Provides less detail than a news release but enough info to pique the media's interest and encourage them to cover it.
News Release	Provides details, facts, and context of an activity or incident of news value. Usually includes quotes from prominent leaders (Mayor, City Councilmembers, City Administrator, Department Director, or subject-area expert). The intent of a news release is to have the media disseminate the information to the public through their outlet.
Statement	If multiple media inquiries are received on the same topic, it may be helpful to issue a statement. Statements typically are attributed to the Mayor or City Administrator, and in some cases to a Department Director.
Fact Sheet	Provides more details than a news release and is usually distributed at a news conference.

Please direct any questions regarding this AI to Karen Boyd, Citywide Communications Director, at kboyd@oaklandnet.com or (510) 238-6365.



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