

Communications Policy

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Why policy matters

- City governments communicate constantly: with residents, businesses, media, partner agencies, and employees.
- Every email, press release, social post, and public statement reflects the city's credibility.
- A communications policy ensures those messages are clear, consistent, lawful, and trustworthy.

Consistency and Accuracy

- Without a policy, messaging can become fragmented—different departments or leaders saying different things.
- A communications policy defines who speaks for the City, how information is approved, and what standards apply.
- This consistency prevents confusion, reduces rumors, and helps residents understand what the City is actually doing.

Trust and Legal Protection

- A communications policy supports transparency while also ensuring compliance with public records laws, privacy requirements, and accessibility standards.
- It reduces the risk of unauthorized statements, misinformation, or legal exposure—protecting both the City and its officials.



Role of Elected Officials

- Elected officials have a unique role as public leaders and communicators.
- A communications policy clarifies when officials are speaking on behalf of the city versus in a personal or political capacity.
- It does not restrict free speech—it provides guardrails so officials can communicate confidently, accurately, and fairly, while ensuring all residents receive the same core information.



Practical Examples - Contradictions

In many cities, problems arise when different officials or departments publicly share conflicting information about a project, budget issue, or development proposal.

A communications policy establishes:

- Official channels for verified information
- A process for updates as facts change

This prevents confusion and preserves public confidence in city leadership.



Practical Examples – Media

When reporters contact multiple employees or officials for comment, inconsistent answers can unintentionally create headlines about “disagreement” where none exists.

A policy helps ensure accurate information is shared first, with elected officials adding context and leadership perspective.



Practical Examples – Emergencies

During emergencies—such as wildfires, water advisories, or infrastructure failures—well-intentioned but uncoordinated social media posts or media interviews by individual employees or officials can spread outdated or incorrect information.

A communications policy:

- Identifies official channels during emergencies
- Aligns elected officials with staff messaging

The result is faster, clearer communication that protects public safety.



Crisis Communication Plan

In addition to the Communications Policy, a Crisis Communication Plan gives specific direction during a public safety emergency, major service outage, image crisis, or other urgent matters.

- The Crisis Communication Plan can be integrated with the Communication Policy or act as an appendix to the Emergency Operations Plan.



It's a Best Practice

- A communications policy is not about control—it's about coordination, accountability, and trust.
- It helps the City speak with one voice, support elected leadership, and better serve residents.
- Effective communication is essential to effective governance.

Questions or Comments?

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