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# CITY OF LONG BEACH

## *PUBLIC RELATIONS/COMMUNICATIONS POLICY*

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### **I. POLICY STATEMENT**

The City of Long Beach (“City”) has a responsibility for providing the public with accurate, timely, and consistent information of public interest at all times, especially during times of emergency. In furtherance of that responsibility, the City hereby establishes this Public Relations/Communications Policy (“Policy”), which will set forth protocols and procedures for communication between the City, the public and the media.

### **II. GOAL**

The goal of this Policy is to establish the framework for communication with the media and press, as well as with the public through the use of self-generated communication tools (e.g., City newsletters, the City website, City social media accounts, e-mail blasts, robocalls and related efforts) in order to disseminate information of public interest and concern in an accurate, complete, and timely manner.

### **III. POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

1. The City Manager shall designate a Public Information Officer (“City PIO”) who shall be responsible for the implementation of this Policy. When the City PIO is unavailable, he or she shall coordinate with the City Manager to designate one of the authorized City spokespersons as the Acting City PIO. All such designations shall be in writing.
2. All official City PIO communications, messages and any other forms of public interactions are subject to the approval of the City Manager in order to ensure that such communications and interactions remain consistent with the goals, objectives and vision of the City.
3. City Council members who receive press inquiries will inform the City PIO. City employees, interns and volunteers will refer press inquiries immediately to their department head who, in turn, will immediately forward the contact and inquiry to the City PIO for response. Prior to responding, the City PIO will report to and obtain approval from the City Manager or, when unavailable, the Acting City Manager.
4. Press inquiries should be responded to as quickly and efficiently as possible. Every effort should be made, within reason, to meet media deadlines and to ensure that all information released is accurate and complete. When the City PIO requests information needed to respond to a press inquiry, department heads must provide the City PIO with the most accurate and complete information known to him or her.

5. If the City PIO determines that the City's goals can best be achieved by having someone with more background or expertise speak for the City on a particular topic, he or she may designate one of the authorized spokespersons to assist with, or to provide the City's response, with the approval of the City Manager.
6. To assure that the City's elected officials have accurate, complete, and timely information to fulfill their responsibilities in representing their constituents, the City PIO shall inform all City elected officials of the substance of the press inquiries and releases, who will be responding, and of the City's official response before the response is issued. This shall be accomplished by email. If the City PIO reasonably believes the response is likely to result in the press or public directly contacting City Council members, then the City PIO will inform the City Council members by phone call and/or text message.

#### **IV. CITY SPOKESPERSONS**

Authorized City spokespersons that the City Manager, in his or her judgment, may designate in addition to the City PIO for a particular response are:

1. The Deputy City Manager
2. City Council Members
3. The Corporation Counsel
4. All Department Heads
5. All Commissioners (e.g., Fire, Police, Public Works)
6. City employees with expertise on a specific issue

#### **V. RECORDS REQUESTS**

1. Press requests for records will be handled in accordance with this Policy and in accordance with applicable federal, state, and local laws, including but not limited to, New York's Freedom of Information Law ("FOIL"), Public Officer's Law, Article 6, §§ 84-90.
2. The City's designated FOIL officer will immediately notify the City PIO and the City Clerk upon receipt of a records request from the press. Both the City Clerk and FOIL officer are responsible for addressing such records requests in accordance with applicable law and in an accurate and timely manner.
3. A copy of all records provided to the press in response to such requests shall be attached to a copy of the request and archived by the City Clerk.
4. The records produced in response to press requests shall be readily available for public viewing upon FOIL request.

## **VI. PRIVILEGED AND CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION**

1. The vast majority of City records and its affairs are public information. Accordingly, citizens, including the press, have the right to access these materials in accordance with applicable law. All public information subject to disclosure under applicable law must be provided to the press upon proper request and in a timely fashion.
2. Certain matters, however, are governed by privileges and laws intended to advance important public policy goals. Examples of these privileged and/or confidential matters include but are not limited to, privileged attorney-client communications, ongoing investigations, information regarding litigation or the threat of litigation, personnel issues, real estate transactions, medical and mental health matters, private data regarding citizens, and documents in draft form. Accordingly, the City has the right to reject certain information requests or limit the City's response as provided by applicable law.
3. When a press request for an interview or for records appears to involve a subject matter that may be privileged or private, the City PIO should consult with the Corporation Counsel and the City Manager. The Corporation Counsel will review the request and promptly provide legal counsel to the City Manager and City PIO.

## **VII. PERSONAL POINTS OF VIEW WHEN SPEAKING/COMMUNICATING AS AN AUTHORIZED CITY SPOKESPERSON**

1. Designated/authorized City employees who speak or prepare a written response on the City's behalf as provided in this Policy are speaking/communicating as an agent of the City and in the course of their official duties. Accordingly, employees shall refrain from injecting his or her own personal opinion when speaking or responding to the press/media on the City's behalf.
2. The City recognizes that all employees, volunteers and interns, when speaking/communicating as citizens, have a First Amendment right under the U.S. Constitution to express their points of view on matters of general public concern. However, personal points of view may conflict with the City's official policy and could confuse or mislead the public into thinking that such statements and/or views represent official City views. City employees, volunteers, and interns making statements or expressing their personal points of view outside the scope of their employment, must refrain from doing so under their official City title.

## **VIII. CITY-INITIATED PUBLICITY**

1. City-initiated publicity must be processed through the City PIO. This includes, but is not limited to press releases, media advisories, and personal contacts with reporters and editors for coverage.
2. City employees seeking to publicize City events or activities, or needing to collaborate with the media to communicate important information to the public, must coordinate with the City PIO first.

## **IX. CITY WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

1. The City PIO shall designate City employee(s) as Webmaster(s). Webmaster(s) are responsible for regularly updating the City's official website to achieve the City's goal of disseminating information of public interest and concern in an accurate, complete, and timely manner.
2. Webmaster(s) shall coordinate with the City PIO who will consult with the City Manager before publishing any new information on the City's official website.
3. If employees of a City department wish to create and operate social media site(s) that are specific to the respective department's activities, the department head must request and obtain written approval from the City PIO and City Manager first.
4. The City PIO will then coordinate with the department head to designate a social media liaison for that specific department. Once designated, the social media liaison is solely responsible for maintaining the department's social media site(s). No other City employee, volunteer or intern may publish information to that department's social media site(s). If the department's social media liaison is unavailable, the City PIO may designate an acting department social media liaison in his or her place for a specific period of time or to complete a specific task.
5. Department social media liaisons shall coordinate with the City PIO, who will consult with the City Manager and department head, before publishing any new information on the department's social media site(s).

## **X. PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS**

1. The Long Beach Police Department ("LBPD") and Long Beach Fire Department ("LBFD") operate 24/7 and the work of these departments generates a high volume of media inquiries. Accordingly, the LBPD and LBFD shall designate an officer as each department's Public Information Officers ("LBPD PIO" and "LBFD PIO"), who must adhere to specific guidelines when releasing information. These guidelines will be promulgated by the Commissioners of the LBPD and LBFD, subject to the approval of the City Manager. The designated LBPD PIO and LBFD PIO shall be subject to the same requirements and restrictions of the City PIO.

2. When the City, LBPD, or LBFD PIO is notified of a media call regarding a police investigation, general criminal activity, and/or a matter of public safety involving the LBPD and/or LBFD, the City PIO will immediately coordinate with the LBPD PIO or LBFD PIO to generate the appropriate response.
3. All information released to the media regarding the activity of LBPD and LBFD should be reviewed by the City PIO, who will be responsible for forwarding the information by email to elected officials.
4. Media inquiries concerning matters of police and fire personnel, general police and fire policies and procedures, or in any way reflecting upon the competency or integrity of police and fire personnel or police and fire administration will be routed to and handled directly by the City PIO as provided in this policy.
5. In law enforcement and emergency response situations, on-scene requests for press interviews will be referred to the LBPD PIO/LBFD PIO. The City PIO may write and distribute press releases based on information provided by the LBPD PIO/LBFD PIO.
6. The LBPD PIO/LBFD PIO will immediately notify the City PIO if an on-scene interview was conducted.
7. In combined law enforcement/fire/EMS situations, only one person will speak on behalf of the City, as determined by the City PIO.
8. During a crisis or major emergency (i.e. flooding, hurricane, mass casualty incident, etc.) the City PIO will coordinate with the City Manager, Police Commissioner and Fire Commissioner to designate the appropriate course(s) of communication with the media and the public. The City PIO will be assisted by alternates, including the LBPD PIO and LBFD PIO, to prepare and disseminate emergency public information.

**ADOPTED: MAY 24, 2022 BY CITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION # 77/22**