
**DOUGLAS COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE
POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

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REVISED:
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COUNTY MANAGER: [Signature]

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SUBJECT: COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

1.0 PURPOSE:

As part of Douglas County's effort to inform its residents, businesses and visitors through a proactive communications program, the County Manager has established this policy to help create a standard workflow and procedures for internal and external communications. This can include, but is not limited to, events, press, photography, web, social media, internal communications distribution, and strategic messaging. Recognizing the County's need to have a uniform and standard form for communications, the overall goal is to communicate effectively with our residents to provide consistent, timely, and accurate information. Credibility and consistency is crucial to effective media relations.

2.0 DEFINITIONS:

2.1 Media- the means of communication, such as radio and television, newspapers, magazines, and the Internet, that reach or influence people widely.

3.0 ELECTED OFFICIALS:

County Commissioners and elected officials respond to media inquiries at their own discretion. The Board of County Commissioners is **strongly encouraged** to notify the County Manager's Office when they have had contact with the media.

4.0 POLICY AND PROCEDURES:

Douglas County employees will direct all media inquiries to the County Manager's Office and Public Information Officer (PIO). If an employee is contacted by the media and/or speaks to the media they must notify the Public Information Officer. The Public Information Officer is the spokesperson for the County unless otherwise designated by the County Manager or discussed with the County Manager's Office. When the Public Information Officer is unavailable, the County Manager will serve as the spokesperson or designate another alternative spokesperson.

4.1 Persons authorized to release county information to the media:

- 4.1.1 Public Information Officer
- 4.1.2 County Manager
- 4.1.3 County Commission Chairperson
- 4.1.4 Designated Department Representatives

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

For any inquiries that require extensive research, involve multiple departments, deal with policy issues, are corporate in nature or may be controversial, the County Manager's Office should be notified immediately before an interview takes place, via phone or email. A designee from the department(s) involved, along with the Public Information Officer, will be responsible for coordinating the response to ensure accurate and complete information is given to the reporter. The County Manager, along with the Department head, will determine who should serve as spokesperson for the media. This must be done in a timely fashion to meet the media deadlines.

4.2 Emergency and Law Enforcement:

Responding to media inquiries at crime scenes, fires, hazardous material spills and or other emergency and/or public safety situations should be handled differently. The response typically must come from the scene and from the designated spokesperson at the scene. Power outages or problems involving utilities should also be included in this exception. The Public Information Officer will come to the scene when warranted if the incident involves Douglas County.

4.3 News Releases:

Douglas County will utilize press releases to announce County programs, services, events, and as a way to inform the public of a certain topic. The PIO will prepare, for review and distribution, all press releases to local, regional and national media. All press releases must be reviewed by the County Manager's Office, or designee, prior to their distribution or release. Douglas County will utilize press statements to add clarity to a particular issue, topic or media story. Press statements will be issued by the designated Public Information Officer under the guidance of the County Manager and/or the District Attorney.

When requesting a press release, please email the PIO and submit the information to be released in detail. Please allow for an adequate amount of time prior to the need for the release, **at least one week prior to the intended distribution date.**

4.4 Editorial Columns On Behalf Of The County:

County staff who is approached or who desires to write an editorial or opinion piece as a representative of Douglas County must receive approval from the County Manager or an elected official. This ensures that the message stays consistent with the County's views and mission. Editorials or opinion pieces that are written in an individual capacity do not require any review or approval

4.5 Website:

Douglas County's web site will serve as a resource for residents, visitors and businesses. The site will convey Douglas County's message while providing current and vital information. The web site will be managed by the PIO. However, each department will be responsible for ensuring that the information on their respective web pages is current and accurate. Each department should review their web content on a regular basis. Should a department run into an issue and need immediate assistance, the PIO can be contacted. If the PIO is unavailable, the department web administrator should contact the County's website provider.

4.6 Presentations/Publications:

Douglas County creates and distributes a variety of communication documents including, but not limited to, press releases, media advisories, brochures, PowerPoint presentations, annual reports, staff reports, newsletters, advertisements, posters, postcards, flyers, etc. All presentations, publications and items purchased with County funds should bear the County logo and web site address. All distributed publications or use of the County's intellectual property (logos, etc.) must be reviewed by the County Manager or designated department director to guarantee that all publications representing the County reflect a consistent message and image.

4.7 Citizen Inquiries/Report A Concern:

Departments should respond to citizen inquiries in a courteous and timely manner. This includes inquiries received by e-mail, telephone, web or U.S. mail. Please notify the County Manager and your department director of inquiries of a sensitive nature. If you receive a request tracker from the website your department must respond within 24 hours.

4.8 Advertising:

The PIO, or a department designee, will approve in advance all paid advertising (print, broadcast, Internet, billboard, newspaper, etc.). This does not include paid advertising utilized for hiring purposes or advertising that meets a state statute such as public notices for purchasing bids. The County will only advertise County programs, services or events in which the County serves as a partner or a sponsor of the event.

4.9 Photography/Photo Usage:

The County will not post photos for which it does not have the copyright or owner's permission to use. The County does not provide photo credit in its publications or postings.

The PIO is available for photo shoots and events. The PIO must be given a one week notice to prepare for an event. This is not applicable in emergency or public safety situations.

4.10 Calendar Announcements:

All County meetings and County-sponsored or partnered events should be posted to the website, if applicable, for inclusion in the County or Department calendar, which is shared with local media and citizen groups and is made available on the County's web site.

4.11 Online Community Forums:

County employees are not authorized to represent the County or its departments on any online community forum. Members of the County who participate in an online forum shall do so under their name and not anonymously or through a pseudonym when the discussion may have an impact on any County operations.

5.0 RESPONSIBILITY FOR REVIEW OF PROCEDURE:

The County Manager shall review this procedure as needed or at least once every five years.