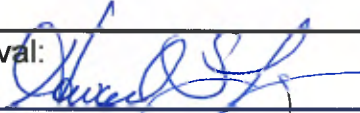




Administrative Policies and Procedures

Policy Title: Guidelines for City Communications	Policy Number: 102
Effective: 6/19	
Supersedes: APR #107, dated 9/92, Revised 2/15, Revised 02/25, Revised 3/13	
Approval: 	Page 1 of 6

1. Purpose and Applicability

The City of Ann Arbor strives to provide the public and representatives of the news and online media with accurate and timely information, communicated in a professional manner, and in accordance with the laws regarding public information. This policy applies to all City-affiliated individuals. The policy outlines City communications procedures, initiatives and services through the following mediums:

- Printed materials such as newsletters, brochures, flyers and promotional materials.
- Electronic content such as email, web, video, social media, online data platforms.
- Media relations such as requests for interviews, news releases, responding to inquiries and seeking media coverage.

The City also recognizes that City-affiliated individuals may sometimes comment on City matters or services outside of their official City capacity. This policy provides guidelines for appointed members of City task forces, boards and commissions when communicating as private citizens on matters pertaining to City business. City employees, interns and volunteers shall refer to the Employee Personal Use of Social Media Policy ([HRPP 2.13](#)) for guidelines governing personal use of social media.

2. Definitions

- **City-affiliated individuals** – City employees, interns and volunteers; appointed members of City task forces, boards and commissions; and any other group or

individual that serves or is affiliated with the City. This does not include Councilmembers.

- **Social media** – Forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, images and videos, and other content. Examples include but are not limited to: Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, dating sites, Pinterest, SnapChat, Vine, YouTube, Instagram, NextDoor, etc.
- **Online data platforms** – Forms of electronic data-gathering and data-distribution through which users provide responses to questions or may access City-collected data. Examples include SurveyMonkey and OpenGov.
- **Media request** – An inquiry seeking information that will be reproduced for public consumption. Examples include inquiries from television, radio, newspapers (print and electronic formats), podcasts, social media sites and websites.

3. Confidential Information

No City-affiliated individual, unit or body shall disclose, without proper legal authorization, any non-public or confidential information in any medium that concerns the property, government or affairs of the City.

4. City Communications

4.1 City News Releases – Production of City news releases shall be coordinated with City communications office staff. It is the responsibility of the City-affiliated individual, unit or body requesting the news release to provide the communications office content that has been verified as accurate, and to obtain all necessary approvals prior to distribution.

4.1.1 The City communications office shall have primary control over City news release distribution.

4.1.2 The following distribution process shall be followed, unless the City Administrator or their designee deems the nature of the news release to be extremely time-sensitive, and directs otherwise:

1. Provide the news release electronically (email) to City Council with a copy to the City administrator, assistant City administrator, service area administrators, communications director and strategic planning project coordinator.
2. The news release may be distributed externally no sooner than one hour after it is provided in accordance with subsection 1.

4.1.3 Urgency Exception – On occasion, if the topic is extremely time-sensitive and within their purview, it may be appropriate for individual service unit managers or their designees to issue informational news items directly to the media. To issue news releases on behalf of the City pursuant to this exception, a manager or designee must first receive authorization from their unit manager and the communications office. A copy of the issued news release shall be provided immediately to the city communications director and communications manager.

4.1.4 More Stringent Area or Unit Policy Prevails – If a service area or service unit has a specific internal policy covering the issuance of City news releases or information to the media that is more stringent than the requirements of this administrative policy, then the more stringent portion of the unit policy shall prevail. A copy of such policy shall be shared with the city communications director. This administrative policy shall otherwise prevail.

4.2 City Newsletters, Brochures, Promotional and Informational Materials – Service unit managers are ultimately responsible for the subject matter and content included in newsletters, brochures, flyers and other promotional materials. A communication toolkit is provided for usage via the city’s intranet, which features approved PowerPoint, news release and other communication templates, tips and city fact sheets, ready for customization. Usage of these templates is highly encouraged to ensure style and branding consistency. The communications office is available to review content and design prior to printing or posting online. Communications office staff may also assist with producing such materials upon request, subject to availability. Review is not required for the printing of ordinances, resolutions or other materials that have previously been approved by the City Council.

4.3 Electronic Media – Any City-affiliated individual who has been assigned or uses a City email account shall follow regulations and policies defined in the City’s Electronic Communications Use Policy ([APR 702](#)). All City email is subject to that APR. See also Employee Personal Use of Social Media Policy ([HRPP 2.13](#)) for guidelines governing personal use of social media covering employees, interns and volunteers.

4.4 City Website – The City’s website (www.a2gov.org) has thousands of informational external webpages to help educate the public about City services, opportunities, policies and events. Each City service area or service unit is responsible for designating a web editor(s) to update and maintain content per city style guidelines to ensure accuracy and accessibility. Web editors shall refer to and comply with the City’s [A2Gov Sharepoint Editing Best Practices and Style Guide](#).

4.5 City Social Media and Online Data Platforms – The City uses social media as well as other online data platforms to promote services, projects, opportunities, policies, events, etc. on behalf of the City as a whole.

4.5.1 No City-affiliated individual shall establish, without written permission from the communications director, an electronic, social media or other online presence of any type that conveys or is reasonably calculated to convey an impression of City sponsorship, approval or official sanction. This includes, but is not limited to: websites, blogs, social media accounts, live-sharing, podcasts, forums, surveys and other electronic engagement platforms. Accounts must be created using official A2 Gov e-mail addresses.

4.5.2 Should the communications director give permission to create electronic, social media or other online account(s) referenced in the subsection above, the City-affiliated individual, unit or body to whom such permission is granted is ultimately responsible to ensure that the information provided is accurate, factual, appropriate and timely. Further, such City-affiliated individual, unit or body shall maintain such electronic, social media or other online presence in a way that promotes respectful and productive engagement. The communications director has the authority to revoke the permission at any time.

4.5.3 The City communications department maintains a list of electronic and social media accounts that have been approved for use on behalf of the City. The City-affiliated individual, unit or body that created or maintains an account that requires permission outlined above shall provide to the communications department as soon as possible: (1) all relevant and current login and password information to such account(s); and (2) means for immediate access to edit or remove content therefrom at the communication department's discretion. The City communications director and City administrator each have the right to terminate any such account at any time without notice.

4.6 Media Relations – The City has a responsibility to keep the public informed about City topics of importance and interest. Communication among the public and City-affiliated individuals is expected and encouraged when the communication is within an employee's job responsibility and expertise.

4.6.1 All media requests, other than for routine information, shall be discussed with the City communications office or appropriate service unit manager prior to responding.

4.6.2 When responding to media requests, City-authorized individuals shall:

- (1) Never speak off the record (expect that all information and statements will be used);
- (2) Obtain the media representative's name and contact information, the list of questions and the deadline;
- (3) Schedule an appointment to respond to the request (prior to the reporter's deadline) to allow appropriate time to collect pertinent facts and information; and
- (3) Never speculate or express their personal opinions.

4.6.3 If the request includes questions about City personnel; potential, threatened or ongoing litigation; an opinion on a City Council policy or directive; or if there are questions whether it is a "routine" matter, forward the media inquiry to communications office staff or your service unit manager to handle. In this case, an appropriate response to the media representative would be, "I'm sorry, I don't have the full information regarding that issue. Let me take some basic information (the reporter's name and contact information, the list of questions and the deadline) and forward your request to the City's communications office. Someone will get back to you as soon as possible."

4.6.4 Routine Information Exception – If the request is for routine, public information such as routine events or services, or for already-distributed news release information (such as a meeting time, agenda or location), provide the information directly and as soon as possible.

4.6.5 Safety services area personnel shall follow specific media guidelines set forth by the chief of police and fire chief. The Ann Arbor Police Department, for example, has designated public information officers to manage media requests.

5.0 Personal Use of Social Media by City-affiliated Individuals

5.1 City employees, interns and volunteers shall refer to the Employee Personal Use of Social Media Policy ([HRPP 2.13](#)) for guidelines governing personal use of social media.

5.2 Appointed members of task forces, boards and commissions shall not comment in their official capacity using their personal social media platforms, unless sharing public, factual City information.

5.2.1 City-affiliated individuals who wish to share public City facts in their official capacity on their personal social media shall: (1) receive the prior approval from the unit manager or City communications unit; (2) make their City status and title known when posting; (3) comment in a professional manner, with only accurate information; (4) refrain from expressing personal opinions or speculating; and (5) refrain from

advocating for or against a City ballot proposal, candidate for City office, or City official.

5.3 Appointed members of task forces, boards and commissions may comment on public City business in their capacities as private citizens. Sections 6.0 and 6.1 of the Employee Social Media Policy (HRPP 2.13) are incorporated as though fully set out herein.

6.0 Consequences – Failure to comply with this APP may constitute grounds for disciplinary action up to and including termination.