

Deschutes County Administrative Policy No: GA-3

Effective Date: September 9, 2009

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DESCHUTES COUNTY COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

STATEMENT OF POLICY

It is the policy of Deschutes County to deliver messages internally to employees, volunteers, elected officials and agency partners, and externally to the public and the media in a manner that is consistent, appropriate, effective and accurate.

APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all employees, volunteers and agents of Deschutes County. Adherence to certain portions of this policy, including but not limited to notice, representation of personal opinions, news conferences and releases, spokespersons and statements, is not required of elected officials, although elected officials are encouraged to use this policy as a guideline. In addition, this policy recognizes that the provisions of ORS 260.432 regarding advocacy of political positions during working hours does not apply to elected officials.

POLICY AND PROCEDURE

In General

All employees shall inform communications staff in County Administration of all media contacts, and opportunities for media interaction.

Departments with staff who create internal and external messages, public information, public outreach, or marketing collateral shall inform communications staff of all projects or campaigns prior to their execution. This includes, but is not limited to press releases, fliers, brochures, notices, Public Service Announcements, and social media content. Staff should coordinate their efforts with communications staff in County Administration in advance to ensure all public communications reflect County goals and objectives are aligned with the agency brand and messaging

Communications staff in County Administration will review and may assist in the stages of development and proofing of County press releases, print collateral, social media content, and marketing projects. Employees should refer to the process for the development and review of press releases, print collateral, social media content and marketing projects on the County Intranet. These processes are available on employee Intranet under County Administration - Communications.

Information Exempt from Disclosure

Unless approved by County Administration, in consultation with County Legal Counsel, employees shall not disclose or provide to any person, records or information contained in records that are exempt from disclosure under ORS 192.501, ORS 192.502 or any other state or federal public records statute. Employees shall not disclose or provide to any person, records, materials or information contained in such materials that are distributed in an executive session held pursuant to ORS 192.660, unless the information is not exempt from disclosure. In addition, employees shall not disclose to any person the substance of discussions held in executive session.

Incidents

To the best of their ability and in as timely a manner as possible, departments will notify the County Administrator and/or Deputy County Administrators of newsworthy incidents that may receive media attention, prior to these items becoming public knowledge. The County Administrator and the Deputy County Administrators will notify the Board of County Commissioners and department managers as necessary.

Newsworthy incidents are those that have received or are likely to receive media interest. Examples include employee arrests, significant accidents on the job, investigations, and other events of similar importance. Notification must occur as promptly as possible. Departments must provide notification when media coverage is known to have occurred about the incident.

Media Inquiries

Department staff shall notify communications staff in County Administration of all inquiries from the media. The County Administrator and/or their designee will notify the Board of County Commissioners and other key staff as necessary.

Inquiries may include requests for interviews or requests for agency information. Every effort should be made to notify County Administration ahead of time, or as soon as possible thereafter, when an interview, information or access is provided to the media. ,

Minor inquiries (for example: spelling of an employee's name, the date and time of a meeting, etc.) do not require notification.

All employees are expected to practice common sense and professionalism in interactions with media representatives and in determining the appropriate response to media inquiries. All employees are to practice open, honest and factual communications without guessing or making assumptions when responding to the media. Employees shall be respectful of news media deadlines that are considered reasonable, and should not withhold documents and information that is routine or has already been made public. Employees are within their right to decline a media request for any reason, including an unreasonable deadline. If in doubt on how to respond to media inquiries, employees shall refer to their supervisor or department head. Departments are encouraged to contact communications staff in County Administration for media guidance, media training and/or advice, if needed.

When speaking to the media or members of the public, employees shall not, under any circumstances, predict or state the certainty of future Board of Commissioners' action on any matter.

Countywide Emails

All employees will contact communications staff in County Administration prior to sending countywide email messages except as provided for herein. All staff email messages will be considered on a case-by-case basis for message urgency and topic. *All staff messages may be sent without prior approval* in cases of Human Resources and Risk Management department trainings and announcements, countywide outages of telephone, HVAC or other support systems, or in cases of scheduled computer maintenance that will limit access to programs and applications. Please refer to Policy #IT-1, **Computer Usage** for further details.

Branding

To ensure that all marketing materials developed by County have a unified look and feel and meet the same quality standards, departments should follow the County's brand guidelines, which are available on the County Intranet. Departments shall use standard templates (email signatures, brochures, flyers, business cards, letterhead, PowerPoint templates etc.) outlined in the Brand

Guide whenever possible.

Marketing Campaigns

Department staff will coordinate with communications staff in County Administration prior to launching any marketing initiative to ensure consistent County-wide design standards and quality.

Advertising

Approved Deschutes County logos are available on the County Intranet. All advertising for county programs and services, whether paid or unpaid, will identify the County with the words “Deschutes County” and one of the approved County logos.

Departments that coordinate their own ad placement shall have all ads approved by the communications staff in County Administration prior to the purchase of advertising space for the ad and prior to the start of any advertising campaign. This provision is intended to complement and not conflict with Policy #GA-5, “Advertising (at Knott Landfill).” Conflicts between these two policies shall be referred to the County Administrator for resolution.

Collateral Materials (brochures, annual reports, newsletters, vinyl banners, flyers, etc.)

Using the County’s brand guidelines and templates, departments will develop materials as necessary to support their communications goals and strategies. All collateral materials will appropriately identify the County and will always include one of the approved Deschutes County logos and the name “Deschutes County” on the face of the brochure/flyer or other materials. All collateral materials developed by departments must be reviewed by communications staff in County Administration prior to the scheduled printing of such materials.

All collateral materials will include appropriate accessibility language, which is available on the County Intranet.

With the exception of Deschutes 9-1-1, the District Attorney’s Office, Fair & Expo Center, and the Sheriff’s Office, departments and offices (including programs and teams) shall not develop new logos. Departments and offices should use approved logos as outlined in the County’s brand guide. Requests for new logos should be submitted to the County’s Communications Director for evaluation.

Representation of County Positions and Personal Opinions

No County employee, when acting in their official capacity, shall submit a letter to the editor or opinion piece to any newspaper, periodical or online forum that has not been approved in advance by the County Administrator or the Administrator’s designee. The County Administrator and/or the Communications Director will notify the Board of County Commissioners and department managers as necessary. In no event shall meetings with editorial boards of any news organization be held without the prior notification of the County Administrator and/or Communications Director. Correspondence to media shall reflect strategic alignment between employees and Department management. Staff is welcome to consult with the Communications Director in advance for advice on these types of media correspondence.

Failure to adhere to the provisions of this section of this policy shall be grounds for disciplinary action. Consistent with the provisions of ORS 260 as it currently exists or may from time to time be amended, this policy is not intended to restrict an employee’s first amendment right to freely express their personal opinions in print or electronic media or other public forum. However, when commenting on County issues as a private citizen, such expression should clearly state that the employee is offering his or her personal view and is not speaking on behalf of the County. When speaking to the public or the news media in their official capacity as a county employee,

employees should offer only the officially adopted positions, policies and staff recommendations of the County.

Social Media

Employees should refer to Social Media Policy No GA-21 for specific guidance related to social media.

News Conferences

Departments are encouraged to plan news conferences with the assistance of communications staff in County Administration. Departments shall notify the Communications Director of their intention to hold a news conference prior to scheduling and announcing the event. The Communications Director will notify the Board of County Commissioners and department managers as necessary.

News (Press) Releases

All news releases shall be drafted or reviewed and issued by County Administration. Departments are responsible for coordinating with community partners or agencies mentioned in news releases. All news releases shall include a County contact that is immediately available to media representatives at the time the media release is distributed.

Spokespersons

Departments are encouraged to identify a spokesperson that is authorized to speak on behalf of the department. The authorized spokesperson may be the department head or any other person designated by the department director.

No one will speak on behalf of the Board of County Commissioners or on behalf of the County Administrator unless expressly authorized to do so by the individuals themselves.

If an employee speaks to the media, they shall speak truthfully and factually; not repeating rumors or hearsay. Employees shall not speculate about other's motives or thoughts, and may speak only on actions that have been taken. At all times, employees shall be aware if they speak untruthfully (even if the item was heard from someone else), the employee may be subject to a defamation claim. The County is not required to defend or indemnify an employee who makes allegedly defamatory statements, if the employee was not speaking in the course and scope of their employment or if the statement constituted malfeasance in office or willful or wanton neglect of duty. The employee may be required to pay for their own legal expenses if a legal action is filed as a result of their conversation with the media.

So as to avoid prejudicing the outcome of an investigation or official proceeding by having it "tried in the media," employees should refrain from talking to the news media about personnel and legal matters or claims under investigation by the County or about the investigative proceedings themselves during the course of an ongoing County investigation. Employees shall refer media inquiries to County Legal Counsel if questions arise regarding a County investigation or other official proceeding.

Employees shall not provide to the media any information that is protected from disclosure under local, state and federal regulations.

If employees are uncertain about speaking to the media, they may refer the media contact to the department spokesperson. If that contact is not available, the media representative can be referred to County Administrator or Legal Counsel.

Approved by the Deschutes County Board of Commissioners

Nick Lelack
County Administrator

