



## COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS MEDIA POLICY

### **I. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Media Policy is to provide guidelines for the City of Naperville to keep the media and the public fully, fairly and accurately informed of programs, services, events and issues in a timely and forthright manner.

Efficient and effective communication with the media is critical to the City of Naperville's ability to carry out our mission of Great Service – All the Time. Coordination, uniformity, accuracy and timeliness are the cornerstones of strong and productive media relations.

This Media Policy exists to support several components of the City of Naperville's Values Statement including, but not limited to:

- We value the importance the “sense of community” has on the quality of life in Naperville.
- We value high quality, efficient municipal services and the impact they have on the lives of our residents and businesses.
- We value our residents, their hard work and contributions they make to our community.
- We value the exceptional level of service residents receive for their tax dollars.
- We value our business community and the benefits of their hard work and contributions to our city.
- We value the benefits received from planning ahead and using rational decision-making.
- We value the hard work required to maintain our community at the high standards we have set.

## **II. GOALS OF MEDIA POLICY**

Effective media relations best serves the city through:

- Providing accountability to the public and transparency of government
- Ensuring that timely and accurate information is conveyed to the public regarding incidents or issues of a sensitive or controversial nature
- Establishing and maintaining an accurate public perception of the city
- Increasing the visibility of the City of Naperville on local, statewide and national levels
- Informing residents of city programs and services.
- Increasing the visibility of the City of Naperville on local, statewide and national levels.
- Promoting the city's achievements, activities and significant events.

### III. POLICY

The Community Relations Manager serves as the primary spokesperson for the City of Naperville and conveys the official city position on routine media inquiries, issues of citywide significance and situations that are sensitive and controversial in nature. **The Naperville Police and Fire Departments operate under specific departmental policies and dedicated PIOs.**

Directors and other designees currently receive and handle routine media inquiries themselves when pertaining to their department and should continue to do so. When a director or designee participates in a media interview or inquiry **on a topic which may need to be closely monitored in the media or has the potential to present the city in an unfavorable light**, please inform the Community Relations Manager via e-mail or phone for the sake of tracking topics and information in order to maintain consistency in our responses. Inquiries of a controversial nature that have citywide impact should be directed to the Community Relations Manager.

In cases of community-wide significance, defined as a significant operational event that is likely to disrupt or alarm members of the community, the Community Relations Manager will work with other city leaders to develop a written statement to detail the known facts of the situation and summarize the city's position. Please see Section V for the communication plan dealing with community-wide issues.

In the event of a community-wide crisis or significant emergency situation, the Community Relations Manager will handle all contacts with the media and will coordinate the information flow from the city to the public as well as from the City Manager's Office to city staff. Examples of these types of situations include severe weather events, flooding, major power failures/outages or major water/gas service disruptions. In such situations, all city departments should refer calls from the media to the office of Community Relations. This is in accordance with our city emergency plan.

Depending on the situation, the City Manager may designate another or an additional city leader to serve as the spokesperson. In such a situation, initial media calls will originate in Community Relations. A single initial media contact ensures uniformity and consistency in coordinating a focused and targeted city message. Several uncoordinated responses increase the risk of contradictory information being disseminated, which will leave the public confused and ultimately mistrusting of the administration.

#### IV. GENERAL PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

Routine inquiries on topics specific to a project or department may be handled by the appropriate staff person within the department. Community Relations should only be notified **on a topic which has the potential to present the city in an unfavorable light**. Such notification can be particularly important if follow-up inquiries are made with other city staff to ensure a coordinated, consistent city response.

Media inquiries should be referred to Community Relations if they involve issues with city-wide significance and/or are of a controversial or sensitive nature. This enables Community Relations to track pertinent issues and to anticipate problems or concerns in the proactive development of the city's message.

The Community Relations Department promotes the city through press releases and other avenues regarding special accomplishments, events, activities, programs and plans. All releases intended for external audiences should be routed through Community Relations.

Since positive media solicitation is an integral element of the city's communications strategy, any ideas for articles or media pieces that would positively portray the city, its work or its community should also be directed to Community Relations.

In a similar manner Community Relations should be notified about negative occurrences that are likely to rise to the level of a news story.

Guidelines for communicating with the media when the issue is non-controversial and limited to the staff member's area of expertise:

When fielding a media inquiry, it is not necessary to respond immediately. It is acceptable to gather your notes and thoughts and call the reporter back. Be cognizant that the reporter is on deadline. If necessary, you may obtain **in writing via e-mail**: the name of the person calling, the media organization, the deadline, the anticipated time of release of information in print or broadcast and **their questions**. Request that they copy the Community Relations Manager on their inquiry. Additional questions to ask are the content of the story and the other sources the reporter will be utilizing.

Guidelines for dealing with TV and radio interviews:

When you receive a request for an on-air interview, please contact Community Relations and provide the reporter's name and affiliate. CR will handle scheduling the interview and will be available for consultation before the interview.

The best approach with the media is to be prompt, helpful and honest. All contacts from the media should be returned as soon as possible, in deference to reporters' deadlines. At the most, a call should be returned within a half-day. If that is not possible, an alternate employee (if appropriate) or the Community Relations Specialist should be asked to handle the call.

Issues that should not be discussed with reporters are

- 1) Legal issues, including liability issues and pending litigation
- 2) Personnel issues, including those surrounding existing and former employees
- 3) Questions that involve city integrity, such as ethics, or
- 4) A community-wide situation or emergency.

Refer all such inquiries to the Community Relations Manager or City Manager.

## **V. COMMUNICATIONS PLAN FOR COMMUNITY-WIDE ISSUES**

This portion of the policy excludes Police and Fire emergency situations. Attached to the City of Naperville's Media Policy is the Police Department's General Order.

A community-wide situation can have a lasting impact on the city's reputation and public support. How well we convey our message to the public is largely dependent on what the media reports. This is especially true in a community-wide situation, as the media will be our primary means of communicating with our stakeholders. These situations are generally accompanied by a high level of emotions, which can further shape public perception of the City of Naperville.

In the event the city becomes embroiled in a high-profile or sensitive media situation, the city's first priority (aside from solving the issue) is to quickly assess the situation and resolve it through a coordinated, uniform, factual and timely response to the media. If handled improperly, such an event can lead to long-term damage to the city's reputation and a loss of public confidence.

The goal in such a situation is to allow clear and accurate communication to the media, the public, residents, community partners and other stakeholders which will instill confidence in and continuity of city governance. A well-managed crisis can not only preserve the city's reputation and credibility but can also enhance it.

The first 24 hours are critical to gaining control and managing a situation. Within the first 24 hours, the following steps should have already occurred:

1. Emergency meeting with City Manager, Community Relations Manager, and other departments involved. This entails a briefing on the situation, gathering and coordination of facts to create a clear, accurate, timely and uniform statement or position on the situation. This meeting will identify key messages and anticipate questions that may be asked by media.
2. Appoint a single spokesperson for the situation. The City Manager may designate the Mayor, Community Relations Manager, Chief of Police, Chief of Fire or another person as the single media contact during the situation.
3. In the event of a long term situation that requires multiple media briefings and responses over an extended period of time, a team of public information officers will be assembled and kept up to date on all developments.
4. In extreme situations, a Joint Information center (JIC) will be established in accordance with the city's emergency plan.

## **GENERAL GUIDELINES IN A COMMUNITY-WIDE SITUATION**

- Immediately respond to press inquiries with whatever information is available. Even in negative situations, it is pertinent to get the city's message out there. Let the public know that the city is dealing with the situation. After an initial press briefing, a press conference schedule should be established.
- Gather information as quickly as possible – basic who, what, when and where. The how and the why may be revealed later. Discuss with the City Attorney and the relevant city department(s) and officials what information can be released and what information should be withheld.
- Instill confidence and credibility with the public by involving top city leadership in press briefings. The Mayor, City Manager, Chief of Police, Chief of Fire or other appropriate spokesperson will calm and assure the public that the situation is being handled and is under control.
- Inform internal audiences at the same time the media is informed. If the sole source of staff information is the press, employee morale can be damaged. Keeping a clear message with internal audiences assures a uniform message is being disseminated and reduces the risk of internal speculation and press leaks. This can be accomplished via e-mail, Inside Naperville and special departmental meetings.
- Maintain a calm and gracious presence. Show confidence and be helpful to the media. Offer reassurance to the public; be clear on actions being taken and resources being provided. Openness and responsiveness increases credibility and respect with the media.
- Handle practical details to make an on-site media briefing as smooth as possible; i.e.: parking, malt box, chairs, etc.
- Keep a log of reporters that have called and their questions, deadlines and the city's response.
- Include Community Relations in strategy and decision making – each decision has a public ramification.
- Consider third party endorsements to increase credibility, garner public attention and speak in support of the city.
- Update information frequently and regularly. Post press releases, positions, and statements on the Web site and on WCNC.
- Monitor media reports and correct errors and misconceptions immediately.
- After the crisis has been resolved, evaluate the effectiveness of the crisis communication plan and update it accordingly.

## **VI. CONTACT INFORMATION**

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