

WASHINGTON COUNTY MEDIA RESPONSE POLICY AND PROCEDURE

I. Purpose

Washington County (“County”) has an overriding interest and expectation in deciding what is presented as the County’s official position to traditional media representatives and on social media sites. This policy establishes the County’s requirements with respect to interacting with traditional and social media organizations. A related policy addresses the appropriate use of social media tools.

II. Policy

The County encourages open and responsive relations with news entities with the goal of supporting the mission, vision and guiding principles of the County organization. The County reserves the right to “speak with one voice” and to coordinate its responses to inquiries from any traditional or social media organization through a single point of contact.

III. Scope

This policy applies to all County employees and will be administered by the County Administrator’s Office in accord with the Washington County Charter (Chapter III, Section 34) and Code of Ordinances (Section 2.04.100). This policy is not applicable to the County’s elected officials.

IV. Definitions

“Social media” is an umbrella term for various forms of communication consisting of user-created text, audio, video or other content published in a shared online environment, such as over the Internet or through mobile telephone networks.

Different forms of social media generally have the common characteristic of allowing personal participation and feedback in a fast and informal manner. Social media is also typically open to vast multitudes of people to observe, copy, and use, often with few (if any) access restrictions.

Examples of social media tools include but are not limited to:

- Social network sites, such as Facebook and Google Plus
- Business networking services, such as LinkedIn
- Blogs and micro blogs such as Twitter
- Content-sharing services, such as YouTube and Flickr
- Texts

- Internal forums/message boards
- Podcasts
- Wikis, such as Wikipedia

“Traditional media organizations” or “news organizations” is defined as:

A. Any general or associate member newspaper of the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association, a broadcast member of the Oregon Association of Broadcasters or a member of the Associated Press; or

B. A newspaper that the County uses for publication of public notices that meets the requirements of ORS 193.020; or

C. An entity recognized by the County as being a news source that:

1. Is organized and operated to regularly and continuously publish, broadcast, transmit via the Internet or otherwise disseminate news to the public, and that regularly reports on activities of the County or matters of the nature under consideration by the County; and

2. Is determined by the County to be a business entity that is institutionalized (meaning long-established or well-established) and is structured to support the terms of ORS 192.660(4) governing media attendance of executive sessions.

V. Roles and Responsibilities

The County shall be organized as follows with respect to interacting with the news media:

A. County Administrative Office

The County Administrative Office (CAO) shall play a leadership role with respect to traditional or social media-related coordination and policy setting for the organization. The CAO shall promote organization-wide interests and initiatives, provide executive-level content for public dissemination, and designate a point-of-contact for traditional and social media inquiries about the organization.

B. Departments

County Departments and offices shall play a leadership role with respect to traditional or social media-related coordination and interest in the delivery of specific County services. Departments shall promote departmental interests, initiatives and services, working in partnership with other departments, CAO, the Board of Commissioners, and other organizations; provide departmental content for public dissemination; and serve as a point-of-contact for traditional and social media interest in each Department or office.

C. Public Information Officers

Departments may designate Public Information Officers (PIOs) to oversee the coordination of traditional and social media relations within departments. PIOs shall be authorized to speak on their Department's behalf. The director or manager of each Department shall be responsible for the PIO function when no other staff is so designated. With respect to the Department of Support Services, staff within the County Administrative Office shall serve as PIOs.

VI. Procedures

Generally, the County shall be responsive to traditional and social media inquiries in a timely manner and within the bounds of appropriate resources.

A. Routine

Routine traditional or social media inquiries may be responded to by any County employee if the response is of a factual, incidental or inconsequential nature. Examples would include verifying locations and times for public meetings, confirming operational hours, and so forth. Employees shall notify PIOs or managers of these routine traditional or social media inquiries as soon as practicable.

B. Non-routine

Non-routine traditional or social media inquiries should be forwarded to the PIO or the department director or manager prior to response. These may include responses that require the interpretation of policy, employee information and emergency situations. In many cases, the PIO may involve other County employees to provide news organizations with subject matter expertise.

C. Sensitive or Controversial Issues

Sensitive and controversial inquiries pertaining to County services, policies or internal matters should be immediately forwarded to the appropriate PIO or the department director or manager in order to prepare for or respond to traditional or social media inquiries. In some instances, departmental PIOs or the department director or manager should refer the inquiry to the CAO for response. In other cases, the PIO or the department director or manager should manage the response in coordination with the CAO. In general, Washington County does not respond to traditional or social media inquiries about legal matters where the County is named or is likely to be named in litigation.

D. Emergency

In the event of a disaster or emergency, traditional and social media relations and other aspects of emergency public information operations shall be handled in accord with Washington County's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP), Emergency Public Information

Annex. Under most scenarios, pre-designated Departments and associated PIOs will lead the emergency information operations.

E. Opinion and Editorial Responses

All opinion articles (op-eds), letters to the editor and other expressions presenting the County's official view or position on various matters shall be coordinated through the County Administrative Office.

VII. Training

Managers, PIOs and other appropriate staff shall pursue Public Information Officer training as appropriate. This training shall progress along a continuum identified by the County's emergency management program.

VIII. Disciplinary Action

Violations of this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

IX. References

All County employees shall comply with all appropriate County policies and standards, including but not limited to:

- A. Washington County Public Records Request Policy and Procedure
- B. Washington County Revised Personnel Rules and Regulations
- C. Washington County Emergency Operations Plan, Emergency Public Information Annex
- D. Washington County Technology Acceptable Use Policy
- E. Washington County Social Media Policy

*Approved by the Washington County Board of Commissioners
May 7, 2013*