


Policy #503	CITY OF FAYETTEVILLE Policy Manual		
	Media Relations / Public Information Request Policy		
	Effective Date: 06.16.2017	Revised Date: Not applicable	Number of Pages: 11

I. Policy statement

As an open and accountable organization, the City of Fayetteville values the role that media plays in communicating news and information about the City to the public and reporting on the public's views and opinions of the City of Fayetteville. The City is committed to developing and maintaining professional working relationships with the media to promote public awareness and understanding of Council decisions, City policies, issues facing the City, the City's programs and services, and new and emerging initiatives. The Corporate Communications department leads the City's media relations activities, but all City departments have a role in building cooperative and mutually beneficial relationships between the City and the media.

II. Purpose

- To provide appropriate and proactive media relations procedures and guidelines to all City departments that:
 - Outline who can interact with media in an official capacity on behalf of the City.
 - Set forth parameters for when and how to respond to queries from media outlets.
 - Enable an efficient, timely and comprehensive response to queries from media outlets in order to provide for the timely provision of City-related information, programs and services.
- To provide guidelines on fulfilling public records requests by the media and the public as it relates to the City of Fayetteville.

III. Scope

This policy applies to all departments across the City of Fayetteville. This policy does not apply to members of City Council, or to the City's agencies, boards, or commissions. Special exceptions are listed within this policy regarding the Police Department and Fire/Emergency Management Department.


IV. Objectives

The objectives of proactive media relations are to:

- Provide public information about City programs and services in a timely manner.
- Inform and educate the public, typically through the media, social media, and on FayTV, about emerging City-related issues of importance.
- Create awareness with the media and the public about Council decisions or changes in policies.
- Solicit input or engage the public in consultation on specific items that affect the City and its residents.
- Issue media advisories for invitation to important City events or activities.
- Provide information to correct errors reported by media.

V. Media relations

The Media Relations arm of the Corporate Communications Department has a wide range of responsibilities. Some responsibilities include arranging interviews with media, writing and distributing press releases and advisories, and coordinating and answering responses to media queries. In addition, the Corporate Communications Department supports and conducts press conferences, provides a daily news summary to City Council and City senior leaders, and facilitates public information requests from the media and residents.

Policy #503	CITY OF FAYETTEVILLE Policy Manual	
	Media Relations / Public Information Request Policy	
	Effective Date: 06.16.2017	Revised Date: Not applicable

The Police Department and Fire/Emergency Management Department are exempt from the requirements listed below regarding interviews, press releases, media advisories and media queries because their Public Information Officers (PIOs) perform these duties on a full-time basis and have been trained specifically to the needs of their departments. It is requested, however, that when an incident involves other City departments, the respective PIO notify the Corporate Communications Director for situational awareness.

VI. Interviews


The City of Fayetteville is a large organization and as such, it is challenging to maintain a direct hands-on approach to all interview requests across City departments. Department directors are asked to use their judgement as to whether the Corporate Communications Department needs to be directly involved in facilitating any interviews requested directly from the media to their departments. Authority is delegated to directors for responding personally to interview requests. Directors, should they be asked for an interview directly from the media, are asked to inform the Corporate Communications Director for informational purposes. Below the level of director, all others who are asked by media for interviews are expected to inform their respective director. The directors in turn inform the Corporate Communications Department. (The Police Department and Fire/Emergency Management Department are exempt from this requirement.) The Corporate Communications Department will then determine the next steps needed to fulfill the reporter's request. The Corporate Communications Department is always available to assist as needed with interview preparation and facilitation. The intent behind notification of interview requests that do not come directly or otherwise filter through the Corporate Communications Department is, first, to, keep situational awareness of the myriad media queries across the organization and second, to identify potential patterns or areas of interest from the media about which senior management needs to be aware of or involved.

VII. Press releases

The Corporate Communications Department writes and distributes press releases for all departments across the City, with the exception of the Police Department and Fire/Emergency Management Department. All other departments will inform Corporate Communications of their need for a press release and provide a suggested draft press release for review and editing at the Corporate Communications level. Corporate Communications will coordinate the final press release with the relevant department and disseminate to the media. On an as-needed basis, the press releases will be repurposed to provide information to residents via the City's website, primarily in the Around the City. The press releases will also be simultaneously posted on our website, as well as under the Corporate Communications' webpage for media to access on an archival basis, and will be disseminated on City social media platforms on an as-needed basis where appropriate.

Press releases are to be issued to the media when there is something newsworthy to announce, such as the institution of a major program change or the launch of a new City initiative. The message must have news value, must be written for journalists and should typically be tied to a communications plan. All media releases distributed by Corporate Communications will be on City of Fayetteville press release letterhead and include the appropriate Corporate Communications contact information. When sending a press release, Corporate Communications will send the text-only version of the formatted release in an email to media and will not send the PDF as those files can be delivered to junk mail, which prevents media from receiving the press release. The PDF will instead be posted on the Corporate Communications webpage under Press Releases.

As a guideline, departments must consider the following when considering if a release is appropriate or necessary:

Policy #503	CITY OF FAYETTEVILLE Policy Manual	
	Media Relations / Public Information Request Policy	
	Effective Date: 06.16.2017	Revised Date: Not applicable

- Whether the announcement is significant or unusual enough to attract an editor's attention.
- Whether the message has significant impact or not. In order to be newsworthy, a significant number of people must be affected by the message.
- If the press release is intended for a group of stakeholders or an audience that is too narrow or specific, then a general news release may not be appropriate and more targeted communications may be in order.

As press releases are drafted by the departments, and prior to sending that draft to Corporate Communications, quotes from relevant departmental directors or staff should be written and approved by those staff who are the subject matter experts. Corporate Communications will review the draft press release and quotes, making necessary edits to ensure the press release quotes are aligned with City goals and objectives. A representative from the department responsible for the press release should be available on the day the press release is sent, in the event media have questions.

The following actions will be taken to distribute the press release:

- Prior to sending a press release to media, Corporate Communications staff will send the release to Senior Management Team members and the Mayor and Council Members.
- Press releases will be posted by Corporate Communications to the City's website under the Corporate Communications page.
- Press releases will be sent by Corporate Communications staff to their media contact list.
- Occasionally press releases will be distributed via the City's social media platforms.


The Police Department and Fire/Emergency Management Department will ensure Corporate Communications is on the distribution list for their press releases and media advisories.

VIII. Media advisories

Media advisories are used for two purposes: (1) A media advisory is intended to alert members of the media to events or issues happening at the City that are straightforward, routine, or occur on a regular basis, yet are newsworthy. For example, issues of public health or safety such as heat alerts, street or facility closures, emergency alerts, or basic services disruptions may warrant a media advisory; (2) A media advisory is intended to alert members of the media about events happening at the City at a specific date, time, and place to which the media is invited. Examples include park openings, street unveilings or the launching of a program. Media advisories are also used to alert media to any other proactive media relations activity being initiated by the City such as a news conference or a media availability session.

IX. Media queries

Many media queries originate with the Media Relations arm of Corporate Communications, which then coordinates the responses with appropriate subject matter expert(s) and subsequently provides responses to the media. This maintains consistency in our messaging and allows Media Relations to be aware of the possibility of multiple queries on the same topic that may need input from other departments or areas of expertise besides the initial department queried. As such, it is important that when seemingly benign queries come directly into City departments and avoid the use of Media Relations as a conduit, that the departments provide a courtesy copy of their response to the media for Media Relations' awareness and possible involvement. Media queries should not be answered directly by anyone below director level. If appropriate to respond directly to the media, the director

Policy #503	CITY OF FAYETTEVILLE Policy Manual		
	Media Relations / Public Information Request Policy		
	Effective Date: 06.16.2017	Revised Date: Not applicable	Number of Pages:11

shall courtesy copy Media Relations on its final answer to the media so we are aware of the exchange and possible article resulting from the query. The Police Department and Fire/Emergency Management Department are exempt from this requirement.

All departments, including the Police Department and Fire/Emergency Management Department, are expected to inform the Corporate Communications Director of any queries that involve multiple City departments.

Any media inquiries received by other City personnel other than departmental PIO representatives should be referred immediately to their Department Director. An appropriate response to the media is "I'm sorry, I do not have the full information regarding the issue. I will give your request to my Department Director, who will respond to you as soon as possible."

Employees who do receive media inquiries should always obtain the reporter's name, phone number, topic of the article being researched, and the reporter's deadline for the requested information. Additionally, the employee should ask the reporter if they have reached out to other departments at the City. This information should then be shared with either the department director or Corporate Communications.

If at any time a department director or employee is uncomfortable handling media inquiries, Corporate Communications is available to provide counsel and guidance.

a) Public safety issues


Because the Police Department and Fire/Emergency Management Department operate 24 hours a day, seven days per week, and their work generates a high volume of media queries, those departments have designated employees who serve as their PIOs and follow their own internal standard operating procedures when releasing information. City staff who receive Police Department or Fire/Emergency Management Department media queries should refer those queries to the PIOs at the Police Department or Fire/Emergency Management Department.

b) Sensitive or controversial City-related issues

All media inquiries regarding known or potentially contentious issues that have been directed to employees must be immediately referred to the Department Director, who will then notify the Corporate Communications Director. The Corporate Communications Director will confer with the City Attorney to determine if the City Manager's Office and City Council should be notified. If needed, and in collaboration with the City Attorney, Corporate Communications will coordinate a plan and/or response on behalf of the City. The Corporate Communications Director and City Manager will determine and designate a single spokesperson.

The following are examples of potential sensitive issues, which should be reported immediately to the Corporate Communications Director:

- Controversial statements, accusations or debates occurring in meetings or advisory boards, committees, or commissions.
- Personnel issues such as misconduct, suspensions, employee work stoppages, or terminations that, due to the particulars of the case, may rise to the level of media scrutiny that requires Corporate Communications' awareness and ability to work with the City to implement an appropriate media response. These matters shall be decided on a case-by-case basis by the City Attorney and City

Policy #503	CITY OF FAYETTEVILLE Policy Manual	
	Media Relations / Public Information Request Policy	
	Effective Date: 06.16.2017	Revised Date: Not applicable

Manager; Corporate Communications shall coordinate with the City Attorney and City Manager prior to issuing any response. Accidents on City property resulting in injury or death to citizens, i.e. a fall in a City building, or drowning at a city park.

- Disruptions in City services such as transit system service delays, garbage collection, and road closures.
- Emergencies such as fires, explosions or accidents that result in damage to City or private property or injury or death to City personnel.
- Accidents involving injury or death to City employees or vendors doing business with the City.
- Threatened, pending or resolved litigation, or any other disputes of a legal nature.
- Allegations against City employees of a criminal nature.
- Police shootings.

c) Anonymous media requests

The City reserves the right to refuse anonymous media requests.

d) Non-media information requests

All employees are encouraged to answer general or routine inquiries, provided they pertain to their area of work, the employee is knowledgeable enough about the subject to answer, and the information is already in the public domain (e.g., published in public reports or on the City's website).


e) Litigation, personnel, and election issues:

Generally, business conducted by the City of Fayetteville is public and, therefore, is public information. However, the following should be considered when deciding that information is releasable:

- Inquiries regarding pending litigation, matters involving a significant exposure to litigation and certain personnel related information generally are not considered releasable.
- Inquiries regarding pending litigation or exposure to litigation will be coordinated by Corporate Communications with the City Attorney.
- Inquiries regarding personnel-related information will be coordinated by Corporate Communications with the Human Resources Department. The Police Department and Fire/Emergency Management Department PIOs typically handle the release of their own personnel information. The City Attorney will be consulted as deemed necessary by Corporate Communications and the Human Resources Department.
- Inquiries regarding election and campaign issues will be coordinated by Corporate Communications with the City Clerk. If it appears other City staff are likely to be interviewed as part of the same story, a post-interview briefing by the Corporate Communications Director may be required to allow other relevant staff members to know and understand the information provided in order to avoid conflicting statements.

f) National media queries

Corporate Communications staff will be notified when a department or agency is contacted by national media (e.g., The Washington Post, Associated Press, CNN, ABC). Corporate Communications, together with the department or agency director, will determine the best City spokesperson and will coordinate distribution of information, preferably through a single conduit. Corporate Communications will determine if it is appropriate

Policy #503	CITY OF FAYETTEVILLE Policy Manual	
	Media Relations / Public Information Request Policy	
Effective Date: 06.16.2017	Revised Date: Not applicable	Number of Pages:11

to notify the City Attorney's Office, the City Manager's Office and/or City Council. The Police Department is exempt from this requirement, as they frequently work with national media on items with which Corporate Communications need not be involved.

X. Press conferences

News conferences are limited to major announcements by the City of Fayetteville or when there is a great deal of information to present. News conferences are arranged on an as-needed basis for special events and circumstances that warrant hosting such an event. News conferences allow the City to communicate directly to several members of the media at the same time and allow media the opportunity to ask questions directly to authorized spokespersons. News conferences also are arranged when it is appropriate for the City's messages to be conveyed by multiple spokespeople, as is the case during a critical incident facing the city, a natural disaster or similar emergency situation with broad impact, a labor disruption, or a significant public health or safety issue.

Press conferences are typically held in the Council Chamber, but locations can vary according to the topic and situation at hand. The Police Department routinely hosts their own press events and Corporate Communications will assist as needed upon request. The Fire/Emergency Management Department does not routinely host press conferences, but Corporate Communications will assist as requested and needed to ensure that the press conference is held in accordance with City policy.

All requests for press conferences and associated support will be coordinated with the Corporate Communications Department as soon in advance as possible. Corporate Communications will determine if a press conference is warranted. Corporate Communications will provide the following support:


- Select, reserve, and set up the appropriate location.
- Promote the event using a media advisory, distributed to the City's media contacts list, normally sent 24-48 hours in advance of the event. Provide a multibox for media to obtain audio and video input.
- Film the event for possible use on FayTV Fayetteville in Focus or Fayetteville in 5 segments, replay on social media sites, playing in its entirety on FayTV, or for use as b-roll footage.
- Assist the subject matter experts in crafting talking points for the event.
- Facilitate the event, with support from the appropriate subject matter experts. The Corporate Communications Director or a representative from the department will normally perform this function.

XI. Media events/photo opportunities

On occasion it is worthwhile to invite the media to an event or opportunity that will allow them to see a City initiative, service, program, or facility in action. Such events allow the City to provide hands-on demonstrations or examples directly to media and give them the opportunity to communicate with authorized spokespeople.

Some common examples of media events and photo opportunities are as follows:

- Opening of city pools or splash pads, or other parks and recreation-related projects.
- All American Marathon / Mike-to-Mike Half Marathon.
- Capability demonstrations of City equipment, such as fleet vehicles and specialized tools.
- Ribbon-cutting or plaque-unveiling ceremonies to launch a new project or facility.
- Awards presentations.

Policy #503	CITY OF FAYETTEVILLE Policy Manual	
	Media Relations / Public Information Request Policy	
Effective Date: 06.16.2017	Revised Date: Not applicable	Number of Pages:11

- Opportunities for members of the media to participate in an event such as a bicycle or fleet rodeo.
- Participation in disaster preparedness exercises.

Generally, a media event is for members of the media and invited stakeholders only and is not for members of the public.

XII. Letters to the editor

Letters to the editor and guest editorials can be effective tools in clarifying the City's position or promoting a City program. On occasion, in response to a media story, the City will consider preparing and sending a letter to the editor of a specific media outlet as a way to more effectively communicate the City's position or explain a City policy. If an employee and their department director feel that a letter to the editor or guest editorial from the City is appropriate, they should contact the Corporate Communications Department. The Corporate Communications Department can contact the newspaper to ask for placement of a guest editorial or provide the department with the appropriate editor's name.

If the letter is edited prior to publication, it must be brief and balanced, and must be written such that the City's message(s) are not lost or misconstrued. Letters to the editor must be approved by the Corporate Communications Director and City Manager's Office.

XIII. Correcting factual errors with media outlets

Corporate Communications monitors the Fayetteville Observer and Up and Coming Weekly on a consistent basis, tracking the content and accuracy of their articles to the degree possible. Television news and radio news is not as closely monitored due to limited capability to do so.


Situations may arise where important facts have not been accurately reported. Depending on the seriousness of the error, corrective action can range from a call to the reporter to a formal request for a printed or broadcast correction. Factual inaccuracies must be corrected so they are not repeated by other reporters.

Each department is ultimately responsible for contacting the Corporate Communications Department when an article has been published or aired containing a factual error that significantly affects the City's reputation or the public's perception of an issue. The Corporate Communications Department will work with the department to determine if a correction is necessary and, if so, how it will be accomplished.

XIV. Authorized City spokesperson

Directors and members of the City Manager's Office may act as spokespersons, as well as the appropriate members of the Corporate Communications Department.

The Police Department and Fire/Emergency Management Department PIOs act as their own spokespersons in all instances, and will determine when it is appropriate to designate their officers to act as additional spokespersons.

Policy #503	CITY OF FAYETTEVILLE Policy Manual	
	Media Relations / Public Information Request Policy	
Effective Date: 06.16.2017	Revised Date: Not applicable	Number of Pages:11

Directors may address media inquiries on matters pertaining to their day-to-day operations without the involvement of Corporate Communications. Directors are asked to contact Corporate Communications for support and advice in preparation for media interviews at any time.

Directors may not delegate their spokesperson responsibilities when subject matter expertise/information is sought beyond what the director can provide, unless coordinated with the Corporate Communications Director. The Director, as the designated spokesperson, is expected to work with staff to gain the knowledge necessary to provide the information sought.

The City Clerk shall be the City spokesperson with regard to Council agendas and Council decisions of record.

Following media interviews of consequence, those who have acted as the spokesperson are required to notify the Corporate Communications Director, who will then determine if others (City Manager's Office, City Attorney, Elected Officials) need to be notified. When possible, the following information should be provided:

- Media outlet and reporter
- Interview topic and a brief summary of questions and responses
- Date and time when the article, online post or broadcast will be published or aired

Department directors shall be spokespeople on issues or programs for which they are considered to be the subject matter experts.


Other City staff, in consultation and coordination with the Corporate Communications Department, can serve as spokespersons on issues that they are acknowledged content experts subject to approval of their director. The scope of media involvement is limited to specific areas of expertise only.

XV. Non-spokespersons

City staff who are not designated spokespersons are not authorized to make statements to the media and/or in public discussion on behalf of the City. Those who are contacted by a news media representative shall:

- Treat the reporter as a customer: be courteous and professional.
- Explain that they are not a spokesperson for the City and respectfully decline the request for an interview or information. An appropriate response to the media would be, "I'm sorry, I don't have the full information regarding that issue. I will pass along your request to our director, who will respond to you as soon as possible."
- Help provide timely responses to the media by collecting the following information to be forwarded to the Department Director and Corporate Communications Department:
 - Journalist's name and media outlet
 - Contact number
 - Deadline
 - Topic of the interview
 - Advise the reporter that the request will be forwarded to the appropriate spokesperson

XVI. City council, boards and commissions

Policy #503	CITY OF FAYETTEVILLE Policy Manual	
	Media Relations / Public Information Request Policy	
Effective Date: 06.16.2017	Revised Date: Not applicable	Number of Pages:11

To ensure the City's elected officials have accurate, complete and timely information to fulfill their responsibilities to represent the public in City affairs, they shall be informed by email of the substance of significant media inquiries and of the City's official response. Council members shall be notified of all official City press releases. Council members will also be advised, when possible, of any articles of significance that will be published or aired, if Corporate Communications receives such information in advance of the subject being released. City Council members are usually available for interviews with the media, but this is entirely at their discretion. Unless otherwise notified, City Council members' home and work phone numbers can be given to the media. The City Council member should be notified that a reporter may be calling, if this is known.


Board and commission members are usually available to the media. City staff should relay any media requests to the appropriate board member or the City Clerk's office as soon as possible. Board and commission member telephone numbers are public information; however, an advance call to the board or commission member alerting them of the media inquiry is appropriate. Corporate Communications can assist with developing talking points if needed.

XVII. Employee personal points of view with media

It is recognized that all employees have the right to their personal point of view regarding any issue. However, personal points of view may conflict with official City policy.

The following is a list of guidelines that can shape how an employee should frame any public comment on a public topic of discussion:

- All employees have the right to express personal points of view and, at times, an employee's opinion may conflict with the City's official position.
- City employees are not prohibited from contacting or responding to the media as private citizens.
- Contact should not be made during working hours, nor should City equipment or supplies be used in preparing written correspondence.
- Employees should not use their title or suggest that their response represents the City's official position.
- Personal opinions must not be expressed using City letterhead, email addresses or online accounts.
- If an employee expresses his or her personal opinion during a public discussion, he or she must identify himself or herself as a City employee, and state that his or her views do not represent the views of the City, but rather, are the employee's personally held opinions. Employees should use a disclaimer when expressing personal opinions in public.
- During public discussions and media interviews, employees acting as City spokespeople are expected to convey the official position of the City of Fayetteville rather than personal points of view.
- City employees who write letters to the editor of any newspaper may not use official City stationery. If an employee chooses to identify himself or herself as a City employee in any personal letter or e-mail to the editor, he or she must include a statement that the views set forth in the letter do not represent the view of the City. The letter must clearly explain that it contains the employee's personally held opinion(s).
- Similar disclaimers must be given if an employee addresses a public meeting, participates in a radio talk show, or is interviewed for a radio or television program, unless the employee is officially representing the City under direction of the Department Director, Corporate Communications Director, or City Manager.
- Employees who are representing the City in any of the above formats must identify themselves as an official spokesperson for the City. No employee shall speak as an official representative of a different City department than their own without the prior approval of that Department Director.

Policy #503	CITY OF FAYETTEVILLE Policy Manual		
	Media Relations / Public Information Request Policy		
	Effective Date: 06.16.2017	Revised Date: Not applicable	Number of Pages:11

- Staff will not respond to media inquiries regarding litigation, personnel actions, or inquiries not directly related to their employment or job function.

XVIII. Publication of articles in professional journals

Departments are encouraged to submit articles promoting City services/programs to appropriate professional journals.

Before articles are submitted to professional journals for publication, departments are encouraged to forward the articles to the Corporate Communications Department, along with the name of the publication and tentative publication date, for a review of the article from a journalistic perspective.

XIX. Public record requests

Definition of Public Records – General Statute 132-4 establishes a very broad definition "including not only documents and other papers, but also maps, books, photographs, films, sound recordings, magnetic or other types, electronic data processing records and artifacts... regardless of physical form or characteristics." The statute goes on to state that public records consist of the listed items "made or received pursuant to law or ordinance in connection with the transaction of public business."

Requests for public records are generally facilitated through the Corporate Communications Department. For those record requests made directly to a department, the department receiving the request will inform the Public Information Specialist in Corporate Communications of such request. Department directors or their designees, as custodians of their department's records, may provide requested records or information to citizens. Directors should always use their judgment to determine if and when the Corporate Communications Department and/or the City Attorney's Office should be informed about citizen requests.

Records requested from the Police Department will be facilitated by the Police PIO. The Police Department is not required to notify Corporate Communications of any record requests, as they are handled at the Police Department level.

All public records requests should be presented in writing (hard copy or electronic) to the Corporate Communications Department or PIO Group email. The Corporate Communications Department or PIO Group should forward a copy to the stewards of the records.

Media may submit a request directly to the Public Information Specialist who oversees media relations, as well. Written requests help clarify what is being requested as well as facilitate gathering of information from the appropriate department(s).

Requests should include:

- Exactly what is being requested (e.g. report, copy of a proposal, letter, memo)
- Applicable date(s)
- Format requested.

