

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

POLICY NUMBER: CEMS-028

PURPOSE:

This policy establishes standards for how the City communicates with the public and ensures that City staff speak with one voice. The purpose of City communications is to keep residents well-informed while maintaining public trust.

POLICY:

Employees, volunteers, interns, contractors, and others acting on behalf of the City are expected to communicate professionally and consistently with the public. Official communications must comply with applicable laws and City policies.

In addition to reflecting the City's values, all City communications should be:

- Accurate
- Timely
- Consistent
- Accessible
- Relevant
- Coordinated

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

The City Manager is the official spokesperson unless that authority is delegated. Employees may speak on behalf of the City only when authorized. The Communications Department coordinates and publishes official communications, media relations, the City website, and official social media.

EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES:

Department Directors will notify the Communications Department of programs, projects, incidents, or issues that may receive public or media attention. Employees should immediately forward media inquiries and public records requests to their supervisor, Department Head, and Communications Department. Employees must not issue official statements unless authorized. Employees must communicate professionally and respectfully at all times.

CITY VALUES:

All City communications should reflect the City's values, brand, and support a consistent, positive message about the organization. The City is made up of dedicated employees who are committed to:

- Advancing a safe, fiscally responsible, full-service City government
- Improving the quality of life for residents
- Providing excellent customer service

MEDIA RELATIONS:

The City is committed to providing accurate and timely information. News releases and public statements must comply with all applicable federal and state laws, including confidentiality and the Virginia Freedom of Information Act. The Communications Department is the City's primary liaison to press organizations. All communication through the media must be approved by the City Manager or Communications Department.

SOCIAL MEDIA:

Official City social media accounts are established and managed as one-way communication resources for sharing City information, updates, notices, and other official messaging with the community. City social media accounts are not intended to serve as forums for public discussion or dialogue. Individual departments may establish departmental accounts only with approval from the Communications Department. When representing the City, employees are expected to reflect the City's values and expectations in their messaging to the community. Employees must not represent personal opinions while in an official capacity.

RECORDS RETENTION:

Official electronic communications, including social media content, must be retained in accordance with applicable records retention schedules and City policy.

WEBSITE:

The Communications Department manages the City's official website and will designate department users. Department users are responsible for ensuring that information they provide is accurate, current, and accessible. The website is considered the centralized source of information and data for the City.

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS:

Emergency communications will be coordinated through the City's Emergency Operations Plan, the Communications Department Director, and designated Public Information Officer.

LANGUAGE ACCESS:

The City will make reasonable efforts to provide accessible communications and language assistance consistent with applicable law and available resources.