



## **MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY**

### **GOAL:**

The City of Morgantown seeks to work cooperatively with the media to disseminate information of public interest and concern in an accurate, complete and timely manner.

### **POLICY:**

1. To achieve the city's goal, the Communications Director is designated as the City Public Information Officer or City PIO and shall be responsible for the implementation of this policy. When the City PIO is unavailable, he or she shall designate one of the authorized city spokespersons as the Acting City PIO.
2. Inquiries from the news media are given a high priority by the City of Morgantown and should be responded to as quickly and efficiently as possible. Every effort should be made to meet media deadlines and to ensure that all information released is accurate and complete.
3. The City PIO is responsible for the City's media relations, with the exception of most public safety issues (see Public Safety section).
4. All inquiries from the media will be directed to the City PIO to ensure efficient communications and timely responses. Any city employee who receives a media request will forward the request to the City PIO as soon as possible for response.
5. The City PIO may coordinate a response with city employees or ask one of the authorized spokespersons to assist with or give the city's response to a particular topic.
6. All press releases and news items from the City PIO will be approved by the City Manager or Assistant City Manager prior to release.

### **AUTHORIZED CITY SPOKESPERSONS:**

The City of Morgantown seeks to work cooperatively with the media to disseminate information of public interest and concern in an accurate, complete and timely manner.

- Mayor or City Council member
- City Manager or Assistant City Manager

- City Attorney
- Department Heads
- Police Department and Fire Department Public Information Officers
- City employees with expertise on a specific issue.

## **MEDIA INQUIRIES:**

Any media inquiries received by other City staff should be referred immediately to the Department Head/Assistant Department Head and the City PIO. An appropriate response to the media would be, "I'm sorry I don't have the full information regarding that issue. I will give your request to my PIO who will respond to you as soon as he/she is available." Please obtain the reporter's name, phone number, email, topic of story and deadline.

## **SENSITIVE OR CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES:**

All television, radio, newspaper or other media inquiries regarding sensitive or controversial issues should always be referred immediately to the City PIO. The City PIO will contact the City Manager's Office and coordinate a response, including designating a spokesperson after consultation with the City Manager's Office and the appropriate Department.

## **PRIVILEGED AND PRIVATE INFORMATION:**

1. The vast majority of the records and affairs of the City of Morgantown are public information which citizens, including the press, have the right to know. All public information should be provided to the press upon request without unnecessary delay.
2. Some matters, however, like ongoing investigations, information regarding litigation or the threat of litigation, personnel issues, real estate transactions, medical and mental health matters, private data regarding citizens, and documents in draft form, to name a few, are governed by privileges and laws intended to advance important public policy goals.
3. When a media request for an interview or for records appears to involve a subject matter that may be privileged or private, the City PIO, Police/Fire PIO or City Clerk should consult with the City Attorney. The City Attorney will review the request without delay and promptly provide counsel to staff.

## **PERSONAL POINTS OF VIEW:**

1. It is recognized that all employees have the right to their personal points of view regarding any issue. However, personal points of view may conflict with the City's official policy. Therefore, City employees who write letters to the editor of any newspaper may not use official City stationery. An employee may not identify him, or herself, as an employee of the City of Morgantown or by

reference to the position held or work performed with the City of Morgantown and must make clear that the views set forth in the letter do not represent the views of the City but are the employee's personally held opinion.

2. The same guidelines apply 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 has been designated by the City PIO as officially representing the City.
3. If an employee would still like to share his or her personal opinion and disclose their official title, they must receive permission from the City Manager or Assistant City Manager.

## **CITY-INITIATED INFORMATION:**

1. Most proactive media contact is initiated through the City PIO. This includes issuing press releases and media advisories, and personal contacts with reporters and editors for coverage.
2. Departments seeking publicity for events or activities or needing to collaborate with the media to communicate important information to the public, will coordinate with the City PIO.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES:**

1. Because the Police and Fire Departments operate 24/7 and their work generates a high volume of media calls, it shall designate an officer or officers as MPD/MFD Public Information Officers as media spokespersons and follow specific guidelines when releasing information. These departments will occasionally issue information (press releases, reports, etc.) regarding routine activity.
2. All requests for additional comment and all other media inquiries, including interview requests, should be directed to the City PIO.
3. When the City PIO is notified by a city staff member of a media call regarding a police investigation or general criminal activity, the City PIO will immediately work with the Morgantown Police Department and Fire Department PIO's for the appropriate response.
4. Information released to the media by the MPD and MFD PIO, such as road closures, traffic patterns, etc., should be reviewed by the City PIO prior to release.
5. Media inquiries concerning matters of police personnel, general police policies and procedures, or in any way reflecting upon the competency or integrity of police personnel or police administration will be routed to and handled directly by the City PIO as provided in this policy.
6. In law enforcement situations, on-scene requests for media interviews will be referred to the MPD PIO. The City PIO may write and distribute press releases based on information provided by the MPD PIO.

7. In fire and EMS situations, on-scene requests for media interviews will be referred to the Incident Commander. If the situation is within the Morgantown city limits, the Incident Commander will notify the City PIO if an interview was conducted. The City PIO may write and distribute press releases based on information provided by the on-scene Incident Commander.
8. In combined law enforcement/fire/EMS situations, only one person will speak on behalf of the city as determined by the Incident Commander.

## **CRISIS OR EMERGENCY ISSUES:**

During a crisis or major emergency (i.e. manmade or natural disasters, etc.), the procedure for handling the media is highlighted in the Monongalia County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management Emergency Operations Plan.