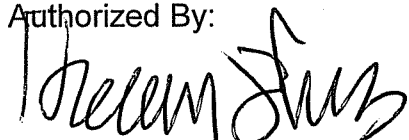


City of Lebanon ~ City Council Policy

## Media Relations Policy

Policy Number: **2012-01-C** Effective Date: **February 1, 2012**

Authorized By:



Greg Lewis, City Manager

Approved by City Council: January 18, 2012  
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**POLICY STATEMENT:** The news media can be an effective tool for disseminating accurate and timely information on City issues, programs and events. Responding to media inquiries in a timely and accurate manner is vital to maintaining good media relations and thereby communicating with our citizens. This media policy will define City of Lebanon goals with respect to media coverage and will provide guidelines for responding to media inquiries.

**PURPOSE:**

- 1) To ensure that all communication with the media is consistent, well-informed, accurate, timely and appropriate.
- 2) To clearly identify authorized spokespersons.
- 3) To maintain positive relations with the media by providing them with accurate, timely information.
- 4) To improve communication with internal and external stakeholders and enhance the City of Lebanon's public image.
- 5) To establish protocols and consistent methods of managing communications to the media, in order to

- ensure relevant, accurate and appropriate comments.
- 6) To limit the possibility of miscommunication and to maximize the effectiveness of City staff by ensuring that comments to the media are made only through authorized staff.
  - 7) To use the media as a resource, particularly in emergency, disaster or crisis situations.
  - 8) To establish guidelines for elected and appointed officials in representing the City of Lebanon.
  - 9) To clarify the difference between speaking officially on behalf of the City of Lebanon and expressing individual opinions about matters of interest to the community.

**GOAL:** To the best of its ability, the City of Lebanon will ensure the accurate and prompt exchange of information with the news media in accordance with this policy.

**DEFINITIONS:**

City staff is defined as City employees (including those appointed by the City Manager) and volunteers. City employees include regular, non-regular and contracted employees. Elected officials and those appointed by the City Council are excluded.

Appointed Officials is defined as individuals appointed by the City Council to serve on any of the City's boards, committees or commissions.

Guideline is a statement or other indication of policy or procedure to assist in determining a course of action.

Policy, as it typically refers to municipal government, is a plan or course of action intended to influence and determine decisions, actions and other matters.

**DESIGNATED SPOKESPERSONS:**

**Mayor or Assistant Mayor in the Mayor's absence (or their designees) -**  
Shall be the chief spokesperson representing the City Council for matters pertaining to the City Council as a whole.

**City Councilors -**  
Shall be a spokesperson on events or issues of personal interest to them. It is understood that comments and communications from a Councilor represent the views of the Councilor and not necessarily the formal position of the City of Lebanon, and individual Councilors are responsible to make this clear when

speaking or writing on any issue for which they are not the designated spokesperson for the Council.

**City Manager -**

Shall be the Chief staff spokesperson and speaks on behalf of the municipality regarding all administrative functions of the organization. City Manager can also be the designated spokesperson for the City Council on issues pertaining to the City as a whole.

**Department Heads -**

Shall be spokespersons concerning programs, operations and activities that fall within their area of responsibilities. Department Heads can authorize division directors or other staff within their department as spokespersons.

**Non-spokespersons -**

City staff who are not designated spokespersons, and 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 designated spokesperson for the City and respectfully decline the request for an interview or information
- Ask:
  - The journalist's name and who they work for
  - Their contact number
  - Their deadline
  - The topic of the interview
  - Advise that the request will be forwarded to the appropriate spokesperson
  - Provide details of all media calls/contacts to their supervisor and/or the City Manager in a timely manner so the most appropriate spokesperson may respond to the request.

**PROCEDURE:**

**A) Media Responses –**

News media inquiries, whether by phone, email, letter or in person, should be addressed by the designee promptly to accommodate publication, posting or broadcast deadlines, wherever possible. News media requests, particularly for interviews or technical information, should be directed to the designated spokesperson(s) to ensure accuracy and consistency of information.

**B) Proactive Media Communication –**

For general City media releases, news conferences and media advisories are issued and arranged by the City Manager and the appropriate Department Director. For Council related issues, the Mayor and City Manager will make arrangements.

**C) Editorial Responses -**

**1) *Editorial Responses from City Manager and Staff -***

The City Manager will monitor the editorial column of local newspapers and if deemed necessary by the City Manager, forward them to the appropriate staff or Council for response.

a) Editorial responses (Op Ed) by City Manager or staff shall be reviewed by the City Manager in advance. These may be shared in draft with the City Council. A copy of the final response shall be provided to the City Council prior to publication.

b) "Letters to the Editor" may be submitted to clarify the City's position, educate readers about a City service, or express the City's gratitude to the community.

**2) *Editorial Responses from City Council –***

a) Editorial responses (Op Ed) by City Council may be prepared in draft form by the City Manager or Council members. Final version should be authorized by the entire Council for submission.

b) "Letters to the Editor" submitted regarding a City Council policy decision or to clarify the City's position, educate readers about a City service, or express the City's gratitude to the community should be authorized on behalf of the entire Council in order to reflect a unified message.

**D) News Releases -**

Whenever a member of staff initiates a news release, for whatever purpose, a copy must be sent – before it is released – to the Department Director for review, approval and distribution to all appropriate media.

When initiating a news release on behalf of the City and quoting any City staff or elected official, the release must be approved in writing by the person being quoted in advance of its release.

The release must include contact number for the staff and/or official quoted in the media release.

The press release should also be provided to the Mayor and members of the City Council, City Manager and all City Department Heads.

News releases will also be posted to the City's web site.

**E) Guidelines for Council Appointed Officials -**

In cases when media directly contacts an appointed official, the following guidelines are suggested to assist appointed officials of boards, committees and commissions:

1. Media contacts should be reported to the lead staff support for the board, committee or commission.
2. Appointed officials should request any necessary background information prior to responding.
3. Appointed officials should only respond within the scope of duties assigned to the body they represent and not respond to inquiries about unrelated City policies or services.
4. Any inquiry regarding why an individual board, committee or commission member voted in a particular manner on a specific issue should be forwarded to the committee or board member in question.
5. Media responses from one committee, board or commission member should be shared with all members and appropriate staff.
6. If contacted, members should not agree to “go off the record” or give statements “not for attribution.”
7. Members of quasi-judicial boards should attend carefully to the laws and rules governing those boards, particularly regarding issues currently before the boards, or issues that might likely come before the boards in the future.
8. Appointed officials, when writing or speaking their own views, are responsible to make clear that they are expressing their own views, and not representing the position of the board or committee on which they serve.

**EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION:**

**Crisis and Emergency Communications -**

This policy does not apply to crisis communication during emergency situations. In such cases, the City of Lebanon’s Emergency Management Plan shall detail the protocol for emergency media relations.