

# **City of Powell, Ohio**

## **Communications Policy**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines that are to be used when communicating in any form with residents of the City of Powell, members of the media and, when applicable, other departments within the City administration. These guidelines will allow information regarding City business to be conveyed in a timely and professional manner.

### **Policy Goals**

This policy is designed to promote and foster a strong, positive relationship with the media as well as residents of the City of Powell. The City strives to increase public awareness of and interest in its issues, programs and activities, and City staff, through the use of this policy, will ensure the accurate, timely exchange of information to residents, media, City Council, City employees and anyone else who may be interested in the day-to-day operations of the City.

### **Scope**

This policy shall apply to all City staff members (full-time, part-time and contract employees of the City of Powell, along with City volunteers) as well as the City's elected and appointed officials. The Public Information Officer will oversee the implementation and administration of this policy, with guidance from the City Manager.

### **General Public Communications**

Public Information Requests – City staff will make every effort to respond professionally to public inquiries while adhering to federal, state and local laws regarding public information/records requests. In the case of detailed inquiries, City staff may ask to have the request in writing. In the case of requests that require extensive research or information gathering, City staff will make every effort to respond within a reasonable amount of time and,

if needed, communicate the status of the information request with the customer. All public records requests will be forwarded to the City Clerk immediately upon receipt.

Staff Letters to Residents – Letters that are to be distributed to more than five residents or business owners will be prepared by the Public Information Officer, who will work in tandem with the department from which the subject of the letter originates. Before distribution, the letter will have the approval of both the PIO and the respective department head.

City Web site – The PIO is responsible for all content posted on the City Web site. Changes not pertaining specifically to content (design, page additions, etc.) will be coordinated between the PIO and the City's IT specialists. The PIO will work with department heads to provide the most up-to-date content on the Web site. Department heads are encouraged to report news and content updates to the PIO where applicable.

Quarterly Newsletter – The PIO will oversee the production of a four-page newsletter printed quarterly and distributed to all residents. Department heads will work with the PIO to provide seasonal content appropriate for the newsletter. The PIO will provide department heads with ample lead time to brainstorm story ideas; department heads, in return, will be respectful of production deadlines and provide article information in a timely fashion.

E-Newsletter – The PIO will oversee the creation and distribution of a weekly e-Newsletter that will be sent via e-mail to those residents who request it. The e-Newsletter features more up-to-date, timely news pertaining to the current and upcoming week. Department heads are encouraged to coordinate content with the PIO should there be information deemed appropriate for inclusion in the e-Newsletter.

## **Media Relations**

The PIO will serve as the official spokesperson for the City, and the first point of contact for City information and for all media inquiries. Should the PIO receive a media inquiry that can be best answered by another City staff member, the PIO will facilitate access to the proper source with the correct information.

The media will be instructed to direct all inquiries to the PIO first. However, in the event that the media contacts another staff member directly, that staff member should forward the call or e-mail to the PIO. In cases where City staff members talk directly to the media, staff will make

every effort to have the PIO present to evaluate the effectiveness of the staff in their interaction with the media, and provide assistance when needed. If the PIO cannot be present, staff members should inform the PIO of their interview with the media within 24 hours. Similarly, the PIO will advise the appropriate staff of conversations had with the media relating to City activities, services and/or programs.

Appointed and elected officials may respond to media inquiries at their own discretion, being aware that the media is contacting them as a community representative. Officials should state if their response is on behalf of the entire Council, Committee or Commission, or if they are speaking as an individual. Whenever possible, officials are encouraged to notify the PIO when they have been approached by the media. The PIO is available to assist in responding to media inquiries.

Do not speak “off the record,” and never say “No comment.” If information cannot be shared, state why in a matter-of-fact way.

### **Public Protection and Safety**

In matters involving the Powell Police Department, media and public information functions will follow the aforementioned guidelines with the following exceptions:

- 1) Information pertaining to police department activities must not unduly interfere with departmental operations, infringe upon individual rights or violate the law.
- 2) In the event of a major incident, refer to the Crisis Communication Plan.

Should the Police Chief, Deputy Police Chief or designated officer choose to act as spokesperson for the City in police matters, that decision must be communicated to the PIO, and the PIO must be made aware of all information provided to the public and the media.

### **Special Events**

The PIO will plan the communications aspect of all special events that will involve the media to maintain the continuity of media relations for the City.

## **Social Media**

This section is designed to give direction to City of Powell employees, elected officials, volunteers/interns and others who access Social Media Web sites using City-provided computers/devices.

In this case, Social Media shall be defined as any form of online discussion or information sharing, including but not limited to social networks, chat rooms, blogs, video/photo uploads, podcasts, wikis, forums and message boards. Examples of these social media applications include but are not limited to Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia and Google/Yahoo forums or groups. One or more of these applications will be used only when such use is deemed beneficial to the City by the City Manager or department head, and only when such use is coordinated through the Public Information Officer.

### **I. Responsibility**

It is the responsibility of the Public Information Officer (PIO) to act as the City's official spokesperson and maintain the City's official online presence via the City's Web site and any Social Media outlets.

It is the responsibility of all City departments (Parks and Rec, Development, Police, etc.) and employees wanting to engage on behalf of their department in Social Media to coordinate this activity with the PIO. Those employees engaging in Social Media activity in an official capacity are expected to stay up-to-date on City policies regarding this activity.

### **II. Procedures**

City staff, officials or volunteers using a City account to access a Social Media outlet should use that account only for official City business. Unauthorized use will result in loss of access and/or other appropriate disciplinary action.

City staff, officials or volunteers making personal use of such Social Media sites as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, etc. (with a personal account rather than a City account) may not attribute personal statements, beliefs or opinions to the City of Powell. Disclosing confidential or private City information through a personal blog or post is prohibited. Employees may not post any material that would be construed as harassment, libel, slander or hate speech, or anything that would be considered harmful to the City or other City employees. Any posted material that may be

deemed disruptive to the day-to-day operation of the City is subject to immediate removal, and the user is subject to disciplinary action.

Use of any Social Media sites for official City business must be coordinated with the Public Information Officer and authorized by the head of the department or City Manager.

Users of any Social Media site must be aware that their posts and communications are public record, and, as such, should not be edited or deleted.