

MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY



Policy Title: Media Relations Policy

Effective Date: May 15, 2018

Policy Number: 5.19

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Authorization: Grand Forks County Commission

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POLICY STATEMENT

It is Grand Forks County's policy that open, productive and responsible media relations serve the best interest of the county and its residents. It is the intent to deliver complete, timely, accurate and balanced information regarding the policies and actions of the county.

The County's media policy will be to provide timely and transparent information about County operations in full compliance with North Dakota open meetings law. The business of Grand Forks County government conducted by and through the County Board of Commissioners is a matter of public interest, public record, and Grand Forks County provides full access to the news media for all regular and special County Board meetings and committee meetings. The exception would be when the Board meets in closed session pursuant to standards outlined in North Dakota open meetings law and any meeting in closed session shall be clearly noted on the record.

RATIONALE

The primary purpose of this policy is to ensure County communication with the media is accurate, effective and carried out consistently by the appropriate spokespersons.

APPLIES TO

All County employees, regardless of your employment. This policy is not applicable to the County's elected officials and appointed board members

DEFINITIONS

Employee: Any person receiving compensation from Grand Forks County, regardless of status with the County or the amount of hours scheduled/worked. Excludes elected official and appointed board members.

Elected Official: Grand Forks County Sheriff, State's Attorney and County Commissioners

Appointed Board Member: A person serving on a County board in good faith with the best interests of citizens in mind.

Public Information Officer (PIO): A communication coordinator or spokesperson for Grand Forks County, designated by the Grand Forks County Commission.

Spokesperson: A department head or their designee authorized by the County's PIO or their designee to make statements to the media on behalf of Grand Forks County.

Media: Any organization or group involved in informing the public with news and commentary through methods including but not limited to newsprints, radio, television and internet.

Social Media: An umbrella term for various forms of communication consisting of user-created text, audio, video or other content published in a shared online environment, such as over the Internet or through mobile networks.

GUIDELINES

PRESS AND MEDIA

The press/media should be treated as a customer of the County and all County employees or officials who engage with the press/media shall do so in a courteous, polite and professional manner. Inquiries from news media are given a high priority by Grand Forks County 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.

The vast majority of the records and affairs of Grand Forks County are public information, which citizens, including the press/media, have the right to know. All public information should be provided to the press/media upon request without unnecessary delay. When press/media requests for an interview or records appear to involve subject matter that may be privileged or private, the PIO or Department Head should consult with the States Attorney's Office.

Media requests for records will be handled in accordance with this policy; to the extent it is consistent in accordance with the North Dakota Open Records Law NDCC 44-04-18.

The County's PIO will be notified of all media records requests.

When contacted by the County's PIO for information needed to respond to a media inquiry, all Department Heads shall immediately provide the County's PIO the most accurate and complete information available for the response.

To provide the most complete information regarding special interest, or issues that affect more than a single department, coordination should take place between the County's PIO and Department Heads. This coordination must not impede the flow of information to the public; rather, it will allow the County to provide complete information from a centralized perspective.

Any press/media inquiries received by County employees will be referred immediately to their Department Head.

CRISIS OR EMERGENCY ISSUES

During a crises or major emergency (flooding, tornado, mass casualty incident, etc.) the procedure for communicating with the media is highlighted in the Grand Forks County Emergency Operations Plan. The plan designated the County Public Information Officer (PIO) as the main point of contact for the media.

PERSONAL POINT OF VIEW

All employees have the right to express their personal points of view regarding matters of general public concern; however, personal points of view may conflict with the County's official policy.

If an employee chooses to identify themselves as a County employee in a letter or email to the newspaper editor, they must state that the views set forth in the letter do not represent the County but are the employee's personal opinions.

The same or a similar disclaimer must be given if an employee addresses a public meeting, participates in a radio talk show, or is interviewed for radio or television, and/or on a social media platform unless the employee has been designated by the County's PIO as a spokesperson for the County.

County employees who write letters to the editor may not use official County stationery, or County logos or email.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Grand Forks County recognizes the importance and value of social media, including blogs and social networking to promote Grand Forks County. Only designated administrators will have account access and provided information regarding Grand Forks County on behalf of Grand Forks County.

Different forms of social media generally have the common characteristic of allowing personal participation and feedback in a fast and informal manner. Social media is also typically open to vast multitudes of people to observe, copy, and use, often with few, if any, access restrictions.

Employees' personal social media profiles and interactions may directly reflect on the organization and it is requested that employees be conscientious when mixing business and personal interactions. Personal opinions may not be represented as those of the organization. Use sound judgement and common sense, and adhere to all relevant Grand Forks County policies including those on harassment, conduct, and confidentiality when interacting personally or professionally on social media platforms.

ROLES

Employees must forward any media requests promptly to their Department Head.

Department Heads will be the designated representative to interact with the media concerning issues that deal directly with their respective departments/agency.

Public Information Officer (PIO) will communicate with the media on behalf of the County Commission or County Department Head if so designated/requested. In the event that the PIO is contacted by the media pertaining to a specific County Department/Agency, they shall refer the media to that specific Department Head.

This policy is intended as a guideline to assist in the consistent application of Grand Forks County policies and procedures for employees. The policy does not create a contract implied or expressed, with any Grand Forks County employees. Grand Forks County reserves the right to modify this policy in whole or in part, at any time, in its sole discretion. This policy will be reviewed no less than every three years, unless required by Federal, State, or Local law.

RESOURCES

Contact Human Resources if you have any questions or if you would like additional information about this policy.