



MEDIA GUIDELINES

I. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of the Media Guidelines is to provide a procedure for Hanover Township to keep the media and public fully, fairly and accurately informed of programs, services, events and issues in a timely and forthright manner.

Efficient and effective communications with the media is critical to Hanover Township's ability to carry out its mission. Coordination, uniformity, accuracy, and timeliness are the cornerstones of strong and productive media relations.

II. GOALS OF MEDIA GUIDELINES

Effective media relations best serves the Township through:

- Providing accountability to the public and transparency of government.
- Ensuring timely and accurate information is conveyed to the public regarding incidents or issues of a sensitive or controversial nature.
- Establishing and maintaining an accurate public perception of the Township.
- Increasing the visibility of Hanover Township on local and statewide levels.
- Promoting the Township's achievements, activities and significant events.

III. GUIDELINES

The Community Relations Coordinator serves as the primary spokesperson for Hanover Township and conveys the official Township position on routine media inquiries, issues of Township wide significance, and situations that are sensitive or controversial in nature.

When a director or designee participates in a media interview or inquiry, please inform the Community Relations Coordinator via e-mail for purposes of tracking topics and information in order to maintain consistency in responses. Inquiries of a controversial nature that have a Township wide impact should be directed to the Community Relations Coordinator for comment.

In cases of community-wide significance, defined as a significant operational event that is likely to disrupt or alarm members of the community, the Community Relations Coordinator will work with other Township leaders to develop a written statement to detail the known facts of the situation and summarize the Township's position. Please see Section V for the communication plan dealing with community-wide issues.

Depending on the situation, the Township Administrator may designate an additional Township leader to serve as the spokesperson. In such a situation, initial media calls will originate in Community Relations. A single initial media contact ensures uniformity and consistency in coordinating a focused and targeted Township message. Several uncoordinated responses increase the risk of contradictory information being disseminated, which will leave the public confused and ultimately mistrusting of the Township.

IV. GENERAL PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

Routine inquiries on topics specific to a project or department may be handled by the appropriate staff person within the department. The Community Relations Coordinator should be notified of a response to a topic which has the potential to present the Township in an unfavorable light. Such notifications can be particularly important if follow-up inquiries are made with other Township staff to ensure a coordinated consistent Township response.

Media inquiries should be referred to Community Relations if they involve issues with Township wide significance and /or are of a controversial or sensitive nature. This enables Community Relations to track pertinent issues and to anticipate problems or concerns in the proactive development of the Township's message.

The Community Relations Coordinator promotes the Township through press releases and other avenues regarding special accomplishments, events activities, programs and plans. All releases intended for external audiences should be routed through Community Relations.

Since positive media solicitation is an integral element of the Township's communications strategy, any ideas for articles or media pieces that would positively portray the Township, its work or its community, should also be directed to Community Relations.

In a similar manner Community Relations should be notified about negative occurrences that are likely to rise to the level of a new story.

Guidelines for communication with the media when the issue is non-controversial and limited to the staff members' area of expertise:

When fielding a media inquiry, it is not necessary to respond immediately. It is acceptable to gather notes and thoughts and call the reporter back. Be cognizant that the reporter is on a deadline. If necessary, you may obtain in writing via e-mail: the name of the person calling, the media organization, the deadline, and the anticipated time of the release of information in print or broadcast and their questions. Additional questions to ask are the content of the story and the other sources the reporter will be utilizing.

Guidelines for dealing with the TV and radio interviews:

When you receive a request for an on-air interview, please contact Community Relations and provide the reporter's name and affiliate. Community Relations will handle scheduling the interview and will be available for consultation before the interview.

The best approach with the media is to be prompt, helpful and honest. All contacts from the media should be returned as soon as possible, in deference to reporters' deadlines. At the most, a call should be returned within a half-day. If that is not possible, an alternate employee (if appropriate) or the Community Relations Coordinator should be asked to handle the call.

Issues that should not be discussed with reporters are:

- 1) Legal issues, including liability issues and pending litigation
- 2) Personnel issues, including those surrounding existing and former employees
- 3) Questions involving Township integrity, such as ethics, or
- 4) A community-wide situation or emergency

Refer all such inquiries to the Community Relations Coordinator or Township Administrator.

V. COMMUNICATIONS PLAN FOR COMMUNITY-WIDE ISSUES

A community-wide situation can have a lasting impact on the Township's reputation and public support. How well the Township conveys its message to the public is largely dependent on what the media reports. This is especially true in a community-wide situation, as the media will be our primary means of communicating with our stakeholders. These situations are generally accompanied by a high level of emotion which can further shape public perception of Hanover Township.

In the event the Township becomes embroiled in a high-profile or sensitive media situation, the Township's first priority is to quickly assess the situation and resolve it through a coordinated, uniform, factual and timely response to the media. If handled improperly, such an event can lead to long-term damage to the Township's reputation and loss of public confidence.

The goal in such a situation is to allow clear and accurate communication to the media, the public, residents, community partners and other stakeholders which will instill confidence in and continuity of Township governance. A well-managed crisis can not only preserve the Township's reputation and credibility but can also enhance it.

The first 24 hours are critical to gaining control and managing a situation. Within the first 24 hours, the following steps should have already occurred:

1. Emergency meeting with Township Administrator, Township Supervisor, Community Relations Coordinator, and other departments involved. This entails a briefing on the situation and gathering and coordination of facts to create a clear, accurate, timely and uniform statement or position on the situation. The meeting will identify key messages and anticipate questions that may be asked by the media.
2. Appoint a single spokesman for the situation. The Township Administrator may designate the Supervisor, Community Relations Coordinator or another person as the single media contact during the situation.
3. In the event of a long term situation that requires multiple media briefings and responses over an extended period of time, a team of designated public information officers will be assembled and kept up to date on all developments.

GENERAL GUIDELINES IN A COMMUNITY-WIDE SITUATION

- Immediately respond to press inquiries with whatever information is available. Even in negative situations, it is pertinent to get the Township's message out there. Let the public know the Township is dealing with the situation. After an initial press briefing, a press conference should be established.
- Gather information as quickly as possible – basic who, what, when and where. The how and why may be revealed later. Discuss with the Township Attorney and the relevant Township department(s) and officials what information can be released and what information should be withheld.
- Instill confidence and credibility with the public by involving top Township leadership in press briefings. The Supervisor, Township Administrator or other appropriate spokesman will calm and assure the public that the situation is being handled and under control.
- Inform internal audiences at the same time media is informed. If the sole source of staff information is the press, employee morale can be damaged. Keeping a clear message with internal audiences assures a uniform message is being disseminated and reduces the risk of internal speculation and press leaks. This can be accomplished via e-mail, Hanover Horizons, and special departmental meetings.
- Maintain a calm and gracious presence. Show confidence and be helpful to the media. Offer reassurance to the public; be clear on actions being taken and resources being provided. Openness and responsiveness increases credibility and respect with the media.
- Handle practical details to make an on-site media briefing as smooth as possible; i.e.: parking, chairs, electrical needs, etc.
- Keep a log of reporters that have called and their questions, deadlines and the Township's response.
- Include Community Relations in strategy and decision making – each decision has a public ramification.
- Update information frequently and regularly. Post press releases, position, and statements on the web site and social media.
- Monitor media reports and correct errors and misconceptions immediately.
- After the crisis has been resolved, evaluate the effectiveness of the crisis communication plan and update accordingly.