

City of Willow Park

COMMUNICATIONS BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES

The following guidelines are hereby established in order to ensure professional, accurate, and timely communication with the public and media. City of Willow Park departments, particularly those having frequent contact with citizens or members of the news media, should abide by the provisions set forth below in all public communication settings.

Specific policies are included for communications with news media, through the City's official website, and via social media outlets.

General:

1. Public communication refers to any communication, whether written or spoken, between an employee of the City of Willow Park and a resident or non-resident member of the public when such communication is made in the employee's capacity as an official of the City of Willow Park;
2. Examples of public communication may include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Phone calls;
 - b. E-mails;
 - c. In-person conversations;
 - d. Postings and articles on the City's website;
 - e. Postings on social media websites; and
 - f. Interviews with members of the news media.
3. City employees should ensure that all public communication is performed in a professional manner which reflects positively on the City of Willow Park, its employees, operations, and citizens;
4. When engaging in public communication on behalf of the City of Willow Park an employee shall refrain from the following forms of content:
 - a. Comments in support of or in opposition to political campaigns or ballot measures;
 - b. Profane language or content;
 - c. Content that promotes or fosters discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, national origin, physical or mental disability;
 - d. Sexual content or links to sexual content;
 - e. Solicitations of commerce;
 - f. Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity;
 - g. Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems; or

h. Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party

5. Where applicable, the employee is responsible for the retention of public communication as may be required by State or Federal law.

In addition to these general procedures, the following guidelines should be considered by all City employees engaging in the following methods of public communication:

Electronic Media: The City of Willow Park maintains a variety of electronic media tools for the purpose of distributing vital information to the public.

1. All content posted in electronic media format must adhere to the standards outlined in the General section of this policy;
2. Any content not meeting these standards may be removed;
3. Any content removed from an electronic media source shall be retained, including the time, date, and identity of the individual who posted such content, for the purposes of records retention.

City Website: The City of Willow Park maintains an internet website for the purpose of distributing vital information to the public, including but not limited to City ordinances, records of public meetings, public events, contact information, financial information, and more. **The City's official website shall be the primary source of information distributed via electronic media.** In all communication via the City's website, employees shall abide by the following code of conduct:

1. Information posted on the City website should be timely and accurate. Changes to any posted content should be updated as soon as practicable;
2. Each department head or their designee shall be responsible to communicate with the Communications and Marketing Department about any necessary changes to the web site. Certain departments will be allowed access to update their own pages and information;
3. Oversight for the City's website shall be conducted through the Communications and Marketing Department;
4. All postings to the City's website shall conform to the content requirements set forth in the General section of this policy.

City social media accounts: The City of Willow Park, as well as City departments, may maintain social media accounts as a secondary means of distributing information to the public. In all communication via social media, employees shall abide by the following code of conduct:

1. All social media pages shall conform to the requirements for branding and identification to ensure consistency with all official City accounts as outlined within the Style Guide Policy;
2. All postings to City of Willow Park social media tools shall conform to the content requirements set forth in the General section of this policy;
3. The best, most appropriate uses of social media tools may include:
 - a. As a channel for quickly disseminating time-sensitive information as quickly as possible (for example, emergency information);

- b. As marketing or promotional channels which increase the City's ability to broadcast its message to the widest possible audience.
4. Wherever possible, content posted to City of Willow Park social media tools will also be available on the City's official website;
 5. Wherever possible, content posted to City of Willow Park social media tools should contain links directing users back to the City's official website for more information, including documents, forms, or online services necessary to conduct business with the City of Willow Park;
 6. All content posted to a social media tool shall be topically related to the particular social medium article being commented upon;
 7. Each department is responsible for determining which employees shall have access to post information to City of Willow Park social media tools;
 8. The Communications and Marketing Department shall maintain a list of all approved accounts as well as administrator login and password information;
 10. Departmental social media administrators are responsible for informing the Communications and Marketing Department in the event that a login or password is changed as soon as practicable;
 11. All departmental social media administrators must designate the Communications and Marketing Director as an administrator for each social media page, along with one full-time staff member from the department in which the account was created.

Public Communications with News and Information Media: Communication and transparency are basic components to upholding the City of Willow Park's mission/vision. Transparency promotes accountability and provides information for citizens and stakeholders about the City of Willow Park activities, events and happenings. The City of Willow Park strives to ensure the public's trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation and collaboration. Timely, reliable and accurate communication is an integral part of achieving transparency.

It is essential to communicate information and news both internally and externally in a timely, reliable and accurate manner. In order to achieve communication consistency city staff must work together and keep each other informed of what is happening at all times. Information disseminated to the media and public must originate from the Communications and Marketing Department or designated departmental spokespersons.

Designation of City of Willow Park Spokesperson:

1. The Communications and Marketing Department is designated as the City of Willow Park's principal news and information media contact and spokesperson.
2. In the absence of the Communications and Marketing Director, the secondary spokesperson shall be the City Secretary or City Manager.
3. The Communications and Marketing Department will convey the City's official position on issues of significance or situations that are particularly controversial or sensitive in nature.

4. The Communications and Marketing Department will use its discretion on allowing individuals to speak directly to the news media to ensure a consistent message is presented when responding to the news media and public.

5. Communications' designated media spokesperson(s) shall adhere to the content guidelines identified in the General section of this policy.

Employees Contacted Directly by News and Information Media:

1. If a City employee is contacted by any form of the news or information media, employee is to refer all news media to the Communications and Marketing Department. Instead of employee stating that they are not allowed to talk to the media, employee should state, "It is the City policy that media inquiries be referred to the Communications and Marketing Department."

2. Employees may not speak in either an official or unofficial capacity on matters involving the City of Willow Park without specific approval from the Communications and Marketing Department.

3. Interviews of employees, either directly or indirectly, must be approved by the Communications and Marketing Department.

4. The City Manager and Communications and Marketing Director are the official spokespersons for all other city related issues. The City Manager may designate management staff to speak on his/her behalf.

Guidelines for Seeking News and Information Media Coverage:

1. The Communications and Marketing Department is the only office authorized to distribute news and information media releases.

2. When submitting news releases or information to the Communications and Marketing Department, please pay attention to news deadlines. Ideally all information should be submitted one week prior to release. Once distributed to news outlets, information is not guaranteed to be published.

3. Employees are not allowed to contact the news media or reporters directly without first consulting the Communications and Marketing Department.

The Police and Fire Departments are exempt to the designated spokesperson and media communications guidelines section of this policy as they have authorized Public Information Officers (PIO) who can speak to the media and provide news releases.