



# COMMUNICATIONS PROCEDURE

## DISTRICT SUPPORT OPERATIONS

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May 2018



ALAMO  
COLLEGES  
DISTRICT

# PURPOSE & INTENTION

## PURPOSE

To establish policy, procedures and guidelines for public communication between Alamo Colleges District Support Operations officials, employees, news media representatives and others requiring information concerning ACD issues, programs, projects, services and activities.



## INTENTION

It is the intention of the Alamo Colleges District, through this procedure, to encourage positive communication and to ensure the exchange of accurate, timely information among trustees, Alamo Colleges District employees, students and administrators, citizens, media representatives and others interested in policies, operations and services.

The Associate Vice Chancellor for Communications and Engagement and the District Support Operations Communications (DSO) team is responsible for developing, directing and implementing the overall ACD DSO community and media relations function. The AVC for Communications and Engagement will assist in the planning of key programs and projects to ensure that community and media relations concerns are fully considered.

The DSO Communications Office will act as a consultant to DSO departments to design communications strategies for services and programs, develop guidelines for publications, and coordinate a consistent graphic identity for the Alamo Colleges District.

# BRAND MANAGEMENT

ACD departments and their staffs, in cooperation with the DSO Communications Office, have a joint responsibility to initiate and develop community relations material, whether printed, displayed or produced through audio/visual media.

- The departments will consult with the DSO Communications Office to ensure the presentation of a consistent, positive, and professional image for the Alamo Colleges District.
- Non-routine materials shall be routed through the District Communications Office at an early stage for review and for approval at the final draft stage.
- Departments must follow all ACD brand standard.
  - Logos, other than the Alamo Colleges District approved logos, must not be used except for major initiatives.
  - Major initiative logos must be created in cooperation with the DSO Communications Office and approved by the PVC.

# GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

The Alamo Colleges District DSO Communications Office manages intergovernmental relations on behalf of the Alamo Colleges District.



- Communication with regional, state and federal officials should be coordinated through the DSO Communications Office.
- This includes, but is not limited to, correspondence, invitations and initiatives coordinated with state, local or regional officials.
- The DSO Communications Office manages, in collaboration with the Board of Trustees and the Chancellor's Office, the legislative agenda for the Alamo Colleges District.

# NEWS MEDIA & STUDENT MEDIA

When questions arise from the news media or student media, a reasonable effort should be made to answer or address them in a timely manner - generally within the business day and according to the following levels of responsibility:

- **Board Members and the Chancellor** will provide information on policy issues.
- **Vice Chancellors and the Associate Vice Chancellors** will provide information on the planning, direction, effect, and status of policies and programs or events within their areas of responsibilities.
- **Project or Initiative Leads** will provide information concerning the individual projects and services within their areas of responsibility, as designated by a Vice Chancellor.



## CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA AND STUDENT MEDIA

- Employees must also direct all media requests to the DSO Communications Office.
- In most situations, ACD should respond to media inquiries as quickly as possible with either the requested information or a timeframe for acquiring that information. This will ensure the media is given the best and most complete information in a timely manner.
- All employees who handle media requests must have passed the State of Texas Open Records Act online course and must participate in media relations courses offered by the DSO Communications Office.
- When an employee is going to be interviewed by a reporter they must notify the Communications Office in advance. This will allow the DSO Communications Office to contact the reporter to find out if additional information or interviews are needed.
- The DSO Communication Office is available to assist with media coaching and development of key messages for media interviews.

- The DSO Communications Office will notify the appropriate departments about the story being developed. This will ensure the necessary individuals are prepared if they are also contacted by the reporter. It will also prevent them from being surprised by the story when it airs or is printed.

## PRESS RELEASES

All news releases issued on behalf of the Alamo Colleges District DSO shall be channeled through the DSO Communications Office. This allows all releases to follow a consistent format and makes it possible for a central file for all releases. This also keeps the DSO Communications Office better informed of newsworthy activities in all departments.

Press releases promoting routine events and activities must be written or outlined by the individual departments and e-mailed to the DSO Communications Office for consideration and distribution, and requests should also be submitted via footprints at least two weeks in advance of the event or initiative when possible. These may include:

- Announcements for scheduled exhibits, programs, initiatives and activities.
- Annual events
- Awards or special recognition given to a department or employee
- Construction or repair projects
- Departments should contact the DSO Communications Office for assistance in writing (non-routine) press releases.

Departments planning joint events or initiatives with external organizations must notify DSO Communications Office in the early stages of the planning to ensure a smooth and cohesive joint communication and marketing initiative.

The DSO Communications Office will ensure all local media outlets are treated fairly and provided with the same information. The Communications Office will also forward news releases to the PVC so they will stay informed about Alamo Colleges District news.

## CONTROVERSIAL/CATASTROPHIC EVENTS

All administrators will keep the DSO Communication Office informed of events and activities that are likely to make the news. Types of stories to be reported are those with a potential for controversy, those that might be considered negative or embarrassing, those that threaten public health and safety, and those that might produce follow-up questions from the media.

Administrators should report in person or by telephone as soon as possible when:

- Controversial statements, accusations or debates occur in meetings of advisory boards or commissions
- When there are closures or services are disrupted
- Personnel problems occur, such as suspensions or resignation of key individuals
- Fire, explosion, accident or other emergencies result in damage of property or cause injury or death
- An industrial accident that causes injury or death to employees of contractors or vendors doing business with the ACD
- Accident on ACD property results in injury or death to citizens, this might include a fall in a building
- Litigation filed or decisions rendered
- Any other events that might threaten the safety or welfare of the community, students or employees

All information must be coordinated through the DSO Communications Office. The AVC for Communications and Engagement or another spokesperson will be identified to respond to all media inquiries about the event

Having a single spokesperson will prevent conflicting, incomplete and inaccurate information from being released.

Steps must be taken to assure that no information is released by employees who are not designated to speak with the media.

In the event of a natural disaster or other catastrophic event of the DSO, the Chancellor, a College President or Vice Chancellor, AVC of Communications and Engagement, Emergency Management Coordinator or Police Chief will serve as the official spokesperson and will call a press conference to ensure that information is disseminated swiftly and accurately to all media sources. The AVC of Communications and Engagement is the primary public information contact when the Emergency Operations Center is activated.

Every effort will be made to respond quickly and provide correct and realistic facts about the controversial or catastrophic event. By cooperating with the media, we can minimize confusion, speculation and rumors. We can also minimize the consequences of unfortunate incidents and prevent stories from being dragged out over an extended period of time with corrections and additions.

## **CORRECTING INACCURATE INFORMATION**

The ACD must clarify or correct any information released by the media that contains inaccuracies that **significantly** impact public perception of an ACD-related issue.

- **Factual Discrepancies** - Employees must immediately contact the DSO Communications Office when a story has been published or aired containing a factual error that significantly impacts the public's perception of the issue being discussed. Depending on the nature of the error, the request for correction will be made by written letter or an informal telephone call.
  - AVC for Communications and Engagement will decide if an official rebuttal or response is needed.
- **Letters to the Editor** - When appropriately presented, letters to the editors of newspapers and electronic media can be effective tools in clarifying a misconception of policy or programs or correcting inaccurate information that has been widely reported by the press.
  - Those administrators who believe, as public officials, that a rebuttal is warranted shall discuss their concerns with the AVC for Communications and Engagement.

- The Chancellor and AVC will determine if a response is appropriate as well as who should prepare and sign the letter.
- The AVC for Communications will review all letters sent to the editor, which identify the author as ACD employee/official acting in an official capacity on behalf of the ACD.
- **Responding to Media Stories as Private Citizens** - The ACD respects employees First Amendment right to respond to the media as a private citizen. However, the following guidelines shall be followed for those employees who choose to contact, initiate or respond to ACD-related news stories or items as private citizens.
  - Letters or posts may not be prepared on ACD time, distributed on ACD letterhead or mailed at ACD expense.
  - Telephone contact may not be made on ACD time using ACD telephones.
  - Use of ACD facilities or supplies is prohibited.
  - Responses, including print, digital or verbal, shall not include the employee's official title or status or state that the response is on behalf of the Alamo Colleges District.

## PROFESSIONAL PUBLICATIONS

The DSO Communications Office is available to assist in preparation, review and editing of articles scheduled for publication in professional journals. Please make all requests for assistance in a reasonable time frame and through footprints.

- **Professional Articles** - DSO Employees are encouraged to submit articles promoting initiatives/programs to the appropriate professional journals.
  - Copies of all articles identifying the author in their official capacity or prepared on-duty shall be forwarded to the DSO Communication Office. The name of the publication and the tentative publication date shall be noted.





# COMMUNITY REQUESTS – NON-MEDIA

When information is requested by a non-media customer, each official and employee shall respond in a professional, concise and timely manner - generally within the business day - within his or her area of responsibility and knowledge.

Each employee shall notify his/her supervisor when a potential communication problem or misunderstanding may develop and what action might mitigate the situation before it becomes a serious problem.

## PUBLIC INFORMATION ACT REQUESTS

Public information requests (sometimes referred to as Freedom of Information Act, PIAs or PIRs) are processed by the Alamo Colleges District legal department. Requestors shall be referred directly to that legal office or the PIA email group at [dst-pia@alamo.edu](mailto:dst-pia@alamo.edu).

## EXCEPTIONS

In the event of a natural or technological disaster or emergency, the Emergency Management Plan and procedures shall take precedence.

## RELATED DOCUMENTS

[Alamo Colleges District Brand Standards](#)

[Alamo Colleges District Emergency Management Plan](#)

**EFFECTIVE DATE: May 14, 2018**



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Chancellor