C.4.1 (Policy) Communications
Responsible Department: Vice Chancellor of Economic and Workforce Development
Board Adoption: 8-21-18
Last Board Action
PURPOSE & POLICY

PURPOSE

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

POLICY

It is the Policy of the Alamo Colleges District, through this procedure, to encourage communication and to ensure the exchange of accurate, timely information among trustees, Alamo Colleges District employees, including employees of the colleges of the Alamo Colleges, 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) Office is responsible for developing, directing and implementing the overall ACD DSO community and media relations function and coordinating communications throughout the district. The office will assist in the planning of key programs and projects to ensure that community and media relations concerns are fully considered. The ACD DSO Communications Office is a communication, marketing, public relations and engagement resource to the departments of the DSO and provide coordination and support services to the colleges of the Alamo Colleges District.

Likewise, the PR Directors and the PR offices of each college are responsible for developing, directing and implementing community and media relations for each of their colleges. They will assist in the planning of key college programs and projects to ensure media relations concerns are fully considered.

The DSO Communications Office will act as a consultant to DSO departments, and the PR Directors will act as consultants to their respective college departments, to design communications strategies for services and programs, develop guidelines for publications,
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and coordinate a consistent graphic identity for the Alamo Colleges District or the college they serve.

**Brand management**

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

- DSO departments will consult with the DSO Communications Office, and college departments will consult college PR teams 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 or the college PR offices at an early stage for review and for approval at the final draft stage.
- Departments must follow all ACD brand standards.
  - 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.
The DSO Communications Office will work jointly with the PR offices for each of the colleges to ensure cohesive government relations messaging and ensure each college’s needs are represented.

**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 or their college PR 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. Requests for records, as distinguished from
questions, must immediately be directed to the District PIA Coordinator at dst-pia@alamo.edu.

- When an employee is going to be interviewed by a reporter they must notify the DSO Communications Office or the college PR office in advance. This will allow the Communications Office or college PR office to contact the reporter to find out if additional information or interviews are needed.
- The DSO Communication Office and college PR offices are available to assist with media coaching and development of key messages for media interviews.
- The DSO Communications Office or college PR offices 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. All press releases issued on behalf of a college shall be channeled through the college’s PR 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 communications and PR offices 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 or college PR 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 or their college PR office for assistance in writing (non-routine) press releases.
Departments planning joint events or initiatives with external organizations must notify the communication or PR office in the early stages of the planning to ensure a smooth and cohesive joint communication and marketing initiative.

The DSO Communications Office and the college PR offices will ensure all local media outlets are treated fairly and provided with the same information. The DSO Communications Office will 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 Communications Office or college PR 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. The college PR offices and the DSO Communications Office will coordinate on all controversial or catastrophic events.

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

- Controversial statements, accusations or debates occurring in meetings of advisory boards or commissions
- When there are closures or services are disrupted
- Personnel problems occur, such as suspension 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 occurs causes injury or death to employees of contractors or vendors doing business with the ACD
- An accident on ACD property results in injury or death to citizens, this might include a fall in a building
- Non-routine litigation is filed or a trial decision rendered
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- Any other events that might threaten the safety or welfare of the community, students or employees

All information must be coordinated through the college PR office or the DSO Communications Office. The AVC for Communications and Engagement, PR Director 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.

Information should not be released by employees who are not designated to speak with the media.

In the event of a natural disaster or other catastrophic event, the Chancellor, a College President or Vice Chancellor, AVC of Communications and Engagement, PR Director, 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 or designee is the primary public information contact when the Emergency Operations Center is activated at DSO. The College PR Directors or designee is the primary public information contact when the Emergency Operations Center is activated at a college.

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.
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- **Factual Discrepancies** - Employees must immediately contact the DSO Communications Office or college PR 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 and the college PR director will collaborate to 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 or their college PR Director.
  
  - The Chancellor and AVC or President and PR Director will determine if a response is appropriate as well as who should prepare and sign the letter.
  
  - The AVC for Communications and the PR Directors 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 or imply that the response is on behalf of the Alamo Colleges District or any of its colleges.
PROFESSIONAL PUBLICATIONS

The communications and PR offices are 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** - 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 and college PR office, if applicable. 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) shall be referred directly to the PIA Coordinator at 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