



EL PASO COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT

Communications Division Policies, Procedures and Guidelines

Adopted Date: September 18, 2023

The Communications Division is responsible for communications support of County departments reporting to the Chief Administrator, and on Countywide initiatives approved by the Commissioners Court. This policy outlines the various ways the Communications Division can provide support as described above, procedures for staff to follow, and suggested guidelines to assist in decision-making. The Communications Division does not provide support on individual projects that are not supported by a majority of the Commissioners Court.

Countywide Initiatives

For the purpose of these policies, Countywide initiatives include those which are brought to a regular or special meeting of the Commissioners Court agenda in which action or direction is sought, and in which the majority of the Commissioners Court votes to support. Countywide Initiatives do not include resolutions or declarations. While the coverage during an actual Commissioners Court meeting may be communicated, any further event associated with that resolution or declaration will not be supported by the Communications Division, unless specifically authorized by the Commissioners Court.

Media Relations & News Events¹ Policy

- a) The Communications Division creates and coordinates news releases and media advisories regarding Commissioners Court initiatives, projects and information that impacts the community.² The Communications Division suggests two weeks' notice for such requests, when possible. For joint news releases, the Communications Division will coordinate with the external agency and will approve news releases for content and proper branding.
- b) The following guidelines will be used by the Communications Division when preparing for a news event/conference:
 - i) When news events are organized by the Communications Division directly, all local media stations, Commissioners Court, and the Chief Administrator will be invited. Department Heads will be notified as a matter of information. Depending on the project/initiative, Department Heads, special interest groups and other members of the community or elected officials may also be invited.

¹ For news events such as groundbreaking and grand openings under the Public Works Department, please refer to the Public Works' Groundbreaking & Grand Opening Ceremony Policy.

² Grant awards approved by the Commissioners Court in the amount of \$50,000 or above may be communicated via a news release as necessary, unless otherwise indicated as a requirement to receive the award.

- ii) For items in which the Commissioners Court has provided prior direction and there is consensus to support the item, news events may be held on the same day as when the item is approved by the Commissioners Court. For items in which the Commissioners Court has **not** provided prior direction, news events may be scheduled as soon as reasonably possible; however, not on the same day unless extenuating circumstances exist.
- iii) For news events that will be scheduled in the future on matters that involve the full Commissioners Court, the County Communications Division will coordinate with Commissioners Court staff on the most ideal date to ensure as much participation as possible. Otherwise, those available are encouraged to attend.
- iv) When scheduling news events specific to County initiatives in a particular precinct(s), the Communications Division will provide preference to the member(s) of the Commissioners Court in which the project/initiative is located.
- v) During a news event, the Communications Division will facilitate the order by which each member of the Commissioners Court shall speak based on the following sequence when present: 1) The County Judge; followed by 2) Member(s) of the Commissioners Court who oversees the precinct where the project/initiative is occurring; followed by 3) Remaining members of the Commissioners Court based on seniority with those who are most tenured speaking first.
- vi) Elected Officials may choose to send their own news releases and coordinate their own news events without the support of the Communications Division; however the Communications Division may assist where able and where such news releases or news events pertain to County business and not political advertising or campaigning. Branding guidelines can be found at <http://intranet/communications> to use as necessary.
- vii) For joint news events, the Communications Division will connect with the hosting agency and assist, as necessary, using the same protocol mentioned above unless specific requests are made. The County logo should be present and prominent on any joint news release. The Communications Division shall edit and approve any news releases associated with the event before dissemination.
- viii) For County employee accolades, the Communications Division will send individual news releases for state, regional, or national recognitions. Local recognition of employees will be sent internally as a group every 1st and 3rd week of the month when content is available.

Requests for Interviews

- a) The Communications Division oversees all media requests for interviews involving covered departments within this policy. Members of the Commissioners Court, and Elected Officials, may be contacted directly by the media and may respond directly should they choose to do so. However, other Department Heads and County employees should refer all media requests to the Communications Division.
- b) Interview requests specific to a precinct or project will initially be referred to the corresponding member of Commissioners Court. Interview requests impacting a general Countywide initiative shall be rotated among the various members of the Commissioners Court. To ensure the Commissioners Court member has

sufficient information for the interview, the Communications Division shall work with the appropriate department(s) to create talking points prior to the interview.

- c) In some cases, the Communications Division will coordinate a media interview directly with the County Administrator, Department Head, or their designee; however, County departments may not engage in interviews on items in which the Commissioners Court has not yet discussed and acted upon.
- c) The Communications Division will not provide statements on any pending or ongoing legal matters other than to note it is a pending or ongoing legal matter.
- d) The Communications Division will not provide statements on active procurement still in progress. All inquiries should be directed to the Purchasing Department.
- e) A Communications Division staff member shall be on call 24/7 to assist the media as necessary, to include breaking news and emergencies. Staff may be reached at 915-283-9645 or by email at CommDept@epcountytx.gov.

County Branding

El Paso County has official branding guidelines which can be found at <http://intranet/communications>. Branding County services with a consistent identifier increases public awareness of what we do, builds confidence in County government and, ultimately, increases support for County services and programs. The use of a uniform Countywide brand helps to increase the public's awareness of the wide variety of services offered by El Paso County. Words, seals, and logos normally associated with El Paso County may not be used for private purposes without the written consent of the Communications Division.

Social Media

- a) The Communications Division uses social media to promote county business; however, the Division may occasionally consider sharing information created by other community partners within the El Paso County on matters of justice and public safety, community and economic development, veteran and military affairs, transportation, health and human services, revenue and taxation, government administration, efficiency and transparency, elections, El Paso tourism, and other items which provide information and assistance to the greater El Paso community and align with County interests.
- b) Official County department or program pages are created by the Communications Division for departments covered within this policy and added to the El Paso County Social Media Directory.³ Thereafter, the Communications Division will continue to support social media administrators for individual departments. Social Media Administrators are responsible for creating posts and entries to their sites as necessary to ensure information is current and complies with applicable federal and state laws, and County regulations and policies. Social Media Administrators should remember that information posted to a social media site, including public comments and direct messages, may be considered a public record subject to the Texas Public Information Act.

³ The Communications Division may assist Elected Officials as they create their own departmental social media pages; however, Elected Officials retain the authority to create and maintain their own social media pages.

- c) For branding purposes, Social Media Administrators should tag El Paso County (@epcounty) within each post. This allows the Communications Division to review and monitor content in an efficient manner. Should an outside source tag the County on their social media, El Paso County reserves the right to untag the post.

Social Media Guidelines - County employees are encouraged to send content such as information, photographs, and videos to the Communications Division for consideration to be used on the county's main social media sites to CommDept@epcountytexas.gov.

a) **Facebook**

The El Paso County community has a strong Facebook presence with several departmental pages currently listed on the County's Social Media Directory. The Communications Division manages the Facebook page that provides information to internal and external audiences and monitors individual department Facebook pages. Go to: <https://www.facebook.com/EPCounty/>.

b) **YouTube**

The El Paso County YouTube channel offers videos that feature news stories about County initiatives. Videos related to articles posted on the El Paso County homepage are uploaded onto YouTube for a larger public audience at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzL-O72SWSiksk4Tx-Phthg?app=desktop>. The public may also watch El Paso County Commissioners Court and other public meetings at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-2RxYOS6Y6VkDlp5eM0OLA>.

c) **Twitter**

The El Paso County Twitter account offers news regarding activities hosted by various departments and information beneficial to the community. Go to: <https://twitter.com/EIPasoCounty>.

d) **Instagram**

The County's Instagram page offers a collection of images from infographics to images of County events. Go to: <https://www.instagram.com/elpasocountytexas/>.

e) **Blogs**

Blogs are considered a type of social media. All County blogs must adhere to these communications guidelines and should be registered with the Communications Division. The establishment of a County blog must have prior authorization by the Communications Division.

Communications Division Service Offerings

The Communications Division provides a variety of services that covered departments can use as they work on projects and programs to be communicated internally and externally. Assistance with any of the following services may be supported by contacting any member of the Communications Division, or by email at CommDept@epcountytexas.gov.

All department communications to be distributed externally such as inserts, brochures, publications, video, advertisements, etc. should be forwarded to the Communications Division for assistance and proofing before going

to print or project finalization. The Communications Division may assist departments to ensure consistent messaging and branding.

- a) **Photography** - The Communications Division aids with photography for Countywide events, official El Paso County headshots, and other El Paso County-related activities. The Communications Division reserves the right to use photos taken by the Communications Division photographer for promotional efforts that include publications, the El Paso County website and other County marketing materials.
- b) **Video** - The Communications Division promotes Countywide initiatives (or those approved by Commissioners Court) through video when resources are available. Most video production requires planning meetings to discuss content, messaging, and promotion. The Communications Division requests 30 days advance notice of a video shoot, when possible. The Communications Division reserves the right to use videos taken by the Communications Division videographer for promotional efforts that include El Paso County social media, the El Paso County website and other County marketing materials.
- c) **Audio/Visual Recording of Meetings** - The Communications Division provides support for all Commissioners Court proceedings, Special Sessions, and other County public meetings. When requested, the Communications Division may provide live streaming and videotaping of other County meetings that conduct official County business when resources are available. Permission to record any meeting will be sought by the requesting department in advance by the Communications Division.
- d) **Creative Services** - The Communications Division is a resource for the County's communications needs from creative strategies and brainstorming to copywriting, editing, proofreading, art directing, printing, and digital communications. Whether it's a postcard or brochure, evite, poster or banner, staff will work with the requesting department to create a quality product, on-time, within budget and adheres to the 2023 Brand Guidelines. Brand guidelines can be found at: <http://intranet/communications>.
- e) **County Sponsored Event Coordination** - The Communications Division can assist with event coordination and publicity for County-sponsored events approved by the County Department Head or Commissioners Court. Along with the County Events Coordinator, the Communications Division should always be included in the planning of a public event. The Communications Division does not provide event coordination support to outside organizations unless specifically authorized by the Commissioners Court, or when such event is being held within a County facility which benefits County employees directly. Communications support may also include marketing on County platforms, news releases, and event set-up.

Emergency Communications

The County Communications Division, in collaboration with the County Information Technology Department (ITD) and the 911 District, and other designees will utilize the Everbridge Emergency Mass Notification System when necessary to communicate emergency/important information to County employees and members of the public.

Collaborations

The Communications Division may work with other County public information officers (PIOs) within County elected offices to streamline communication and collaborate on key County projects.

Promotions – No outside businesses or outside agencies can advertise on County Communications platforms (i.e., County Parks & Recreation marquee or County website) unless specifically contracted via an agreement with the County or approved by the Chief Administrator.

Email Communications – The Communications Division may distribute Countywide information on behalf of a department if the information is official County Business or supports a Countywide initiative.

Elected Officials are encouraged to distribute pertinent information from their official office email. Departments with access to send County-Wide emails do not need permission to distribute from the Communications Division. In either case, the Communications Division can review and assist before any messaging is released.