

General Procedures For Dealing With The Media

Members of the Library staff are free to respond to requests from the media regarding their program, research, or professional expertise. In such cases, the communications and marketing coordinator should be notified as soon as possible to inform her of the contact. Such notification can be particularly important if follow-up inquiries are made with other MSL personnel to ensure a coordinated, consistent Montana State Library response. Media inquiries should be referred to the communications and marketing coordinator if they involve issues with Library-wide significance and/or are of a controversial or sensitive nature.

Since positive media solicitation is an integral element of the Library's communications program, any ideas for articles or pieces that would positively portray the Library, its work or its users should also be directed to the communications and marketing coordinator. In a similar manner, the communications and marketing coordinator should be notified about negative occurrences that are likely to rise to the level of a news story.

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

- Obtain the name of the person calling, the media organization and, if available, the anticipated time of release of information in print or broadcast. This information should be included when the notification is made to the communications and marketing specialist.
- 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 communications and marketing coordinator should be asked to handle the call.
- Make sure you understand each question from the media before answering. If you cannot answer the question, or are uncomfortable providing a response, take the reporter's number and advise him/her that someone who can provide the information will contact him/her as soon as possible. Then follow-up by contacting the communications and marketing coordinator.
- Do not offer speculations or gossip. Do not answer a reporter's question with "no comment." Do not be condescending or underestimate the reporter's intelligence, but make sure the reporter understands your responses. Provide your phone number and/or e-mail address for follow-up questions.
- Remember that in responding to the media, you can be seen as representing and speaking for the Library. Personal opinions should be clearly and carefully identified as such.
- Issues that should not be discussed with reporters are 1) legal issues, 2) personnel issues, 3) questions that involve Library integrity, such as ethics or issues that may result in harm to others, or 4) a Library crisis or emergency. Refer all such inquiries to the communications and marketing coordinator.
- Any media inquiries regarding Library staff should be referred to the central services office at the State Library. Only public information may be provided without the employee's written approval. Public information is the following: verification of employment, name of job title/position, full or part-time status, name of department, department address and phone number, employment starting date, salary/grade, rank.

Library Emergency / Crisis

Crisis communications have a lasting impact on institutional reputation and public support. How well we convey our message to the public greatly depends on what is reported to the news media. This is especially true in a crisis, during which the news media is the primary means of communication to our constituencies. Because of the emotions that usually accompany crises, images formed from crisis reporting are especially important in shaping long-lasting public impressions of the institution.

In the event of a major crisis at the Library, it is essential that an effective communications plan be put into effect to disseminate timely, accurate information and to ensure that inquiries are routed to the appropriate sources.

The communications and marketing coordinator is responsible for the development and dissemination of all Library communications in the event of a Library emergency. This includes internal communications with staff and the State Library Commission, as well as communications with the media. The priority will be on maintaining timely and open communications with the media, providing complete and accurate information that has been confirmed about the emergency situation and the Library's response to the crisis at hand. Communications with the media will be frequent throughout the duration of the emergency situation. The MSL Web site will be utilized as a key medium for updating our various users and the public on the details of the emergency situation and actions we are taking to address all related issues.

Submitting Media Report

In order to make the sharing of media information more convenient, the communications and marketing coordinator has created two self-guiding pages where staff may submit media reports. The first is a Media Contact Report. This form allows the user to share the details about any media contact that has already occurred. Submit the report via e-mail directly to Sara Groves at sgroves@mt.gov.

The second page is a News Advisory Report. This form allows the user to share the details of upcoming events or positive, newsworthy stories with the communications and marketing coordinator. Submit the report via e-mail directly to Sara Groves at sgroves@mt.gov.

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