

**Washington State Board of Health
Policy & Procedure**

Policy Number:	2005-002
Subject:	Media Guidelines: Guidance for news media relations and reporter contacts
Approved Date:	December 7, 2005 (Revised October 9, 2013)

Policy Statement

Public perception of the Washington State Board of Health will be influenced by the reports that people read, hear, and see in newspapers, on the Internet and in social media, and on radio and television news. The Board's goal in media and public relations is to be an open, professional, and responsive organization. A media policy predicated on access will help Washington residents understand the value of the Board's work.

This policy's purpose is to define who must be notified when the Board or its staff is contacted by the media and who should best respond on behalf of the Board.

Procedure

- 1) Media requests for information and interviews should receive high-priority attention. Reporters and editors usually work on deadlines, and timely responses should be the standard. If another priority prevents a prompt response, a courtesy call should be made to the reporter confirming what information is requested and advising when the requested information will be available.
- 2) The main point of contact for the media is the Communications Consultant, who is responsible for initiating contacts, developing news releases and other media outreach, tracking and responding to requests, providing information that is a matter of record, obtaining details about the reporters' deadlines and the nature of their stories, and ensuring that the appropriate person responds promptly to interview requests.
- 3) Often times media requests for information are made in response to a press release, or hot topic issue. To anticipate any potential media contact the Communications Consultant, with the Executive Director, and appropriate subject matter expert will meet no less than two weeks prior to a public hearing, or a public meeting with a potentially hot topic agenda item, to discuss potential issues. In situations when the Communications Consultant is unavailable the Executive Director may delegate the task to another staff member. For every hearing or hot topic item a set of media talking points should be discussed and finalized before the draft agenda is posted to the public to prepare for potential media contact.

- 4) The Board member who is most knowledgeable on a particular issue is generally the best person to respond to an interview request. This is usually the chair of the appropriate policy committee, the sponsor of a particular rule, or the Board Chair. A Board member may recommend that a staff member respond instead. The Communications Consultant is available to offer advice, to counsel those being interviewed, and, if circumstances permit, to sit in on interviews.
- 5) The Executive Director is the main media spokesperson for the staff and will usually respond to an interview request at the suggestion of a Board member or when no Board member is readily available. The Executive Director may delegate this responsibility to the most knowledgeable staff person.
- 6) Staff members may exercise their judgment about granting interviews and providing information on behalf of the agency when they are approached by a reporter and it is not practical to involve a Board member or the Executive Director; however, no employee is required to consent to an interview. Any employee who speaks on behalf of the agency is responsible for what is said. Employees are encouraged to ask the reporters questions about their news stories, and to take time to prepare before answering. It is often advisable to get their numbers and to call back after preparing.
- 7) Staff members must notify the Executive Director and the Communications Consultant after participating in a media interview. A short summary of the kind of questions and the answers provided, sent by e-mail, is the easiest and most effective method of reporting a media contact.
- 8) No staff members are prohibited from talking about their work while clearly representing themselves as individuals. Employees should understand, however, that their comments on public issues are likely to be interpreted as the State Board of Health's point of view.
- 9) Staff members who comment as private citizens about issues related or unrelated to their work should recognize that their remarks may reflect on the Board. Employees with questions should consult with the Executive Director.
- 10) In the event that a Board member responds to a direct reporter request about Board business, she or he should provide a summary of the interview by e-mail to the Communications Consultant.
- 11) At times, interview requests may deal with topics that concern both the State Board of Health and the Department of Health. Although it isn't necessary to gain permission from the Department of Health before doing an interview, it often may be helpful to consult with the department's communications office and/or program employees. In part, this is a courtesy. In part, it may be useful in developing and delivering strong, consistent public health messages.
- 12) It's important to make sure reporters understand the Board's role, making clear that the State Board of Health and the Department of Health are not one and the

same. Taking a few moments to clarify can help avoid confusion and erroneous information about the Board appearing in news stories. If an interview request deals with subject matter outside the Board's areas of responsibility, the best course of action may be to refer the reporter to the Department of Health.