



Cobb County Communications Department Cobb County Communications Policy

As approved by Board of Commissioners September 25, 2018

Effective Date: September 2018

Owner	Cobb County Communications Department
Reviewer(s)	Communications Director
Approver(s)	Communications Director and BOC
Related Policies	N/A
Related Standards	N/A
Storage Location	iCobb
Last Review Date	September 2018
Next Review Date	September 2020
Review Cycle	Every two years

1. PURPOSE

To provide guidelines on how Cobb County employees should deal with inquiries from the media and the public.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to Cobb County Employees. If you have questions regarding this policy, please contact the Cobb County Communications Director.

3. WHAT WE BELIEVE

Cobb County strives to run an open and transparent government, making information easily and quickly available to its citizens and the media. We recognize the media as an important part of an informed community and a watchdog over the government. Cobb County should provide timely, accurate and consistent information to effectively serve its residents.

4. WHEN AN INQUIRY COMES IN

To ensure the above goals are met, the appropriate people must be brought into the process of answering questions.

If a county employee receives questions from the media or residents that fall outside of normal departmental business (e.g., requests for comments, documents, information, policies, access to facilities, etc.), the following should take place:

- The inquiry or request should be immediately forwarded to the Communications Director¹ and the employee's Department Head.
- If the employee has pertinent information that could help answer the inquiry, she/he should forward that information along as well. While the employee should not reply directly, in many cases they may be eventually asked to respond to the question.
- If the inquiry is related to an incident that involves Public Safety, any request for access and/or comment should be directed to the appropriate Police or Fire Public Information Officer.
- Employees should not directly contact the media without guidance from the Communications Department.

5. WHAT WE'LL DO WITH IT

The Communications Director, in collaboration with the appropriate individuals, will determine the nature of the inquiry and the best response. If the Communications Director is not immediately available, he/she



Cobb County Communications Department

Cobb County Communications Policy

As approved by Board of Commissioners September 25, 2018

will appoint another Communications Department representative to handle these issues so there is no delay.

- The Communications Department will consult with the County Manager or Deputy County Manager, appropriate Department Head, and others to coordinate a response.
- The Communications Department will handle or facilitate making interviews available to the media.
- The Communications Department will coordinate any news conferences necessary.
- If there is a topic that warrants a general news release, the Communications Department will help make that happen.
- The Communications Director will inform the County Manager, Deputy County Manager and Board of Commissioners of any potential news stories and/or posts that could influence county business.

6. CAUTION IN A CHANGING MEDIA WORLD

The way our residents consume information has changed dramatically in recent years. The rise in social media, blogs, podcasts, and hyper-local websites has increased the availability of information, but has also given rise to the distribution of distorted or inaccurate narratives. Consequently, County employees need to apply the same guidelines to routine inquiries as to those coming from members of the “traditional media.”

7. OPEN RECORDS REQUESTS

Many residents and media members may consider a request to file an Open Records Request a punitive measure. However, Cobb County has revamped its Open Records Center. Using the Center generally produces information much quicker and with better customer service than relying on individual departments to find and provide documents. Information can be distributed electronically.

Anyone requesting a county document should be encouraged to use our Open Records Center so the county can appropriately follow state guidelines on the redaction of personal information, determine whether the document should be disclosed, and keep a record of costs involved in the gathering of the information. Under certain situations, our Open Records Center may charge a fee in accordance with Georgia’s Open Records Act.²

8. GENERAL GUIDELINES

Going along with our desire for an open and transparent government, please adhere to these guidelines:

- The media has the right to access any part of Cobb County Government property that is traditionally or by designation a forum for public communication. The access permitted includes photographing and making video recordings in these areas.
- Media access can be restricted from any area not normally accessible to the public.
- If the media creates a disruption, does not comply with reasonable requests, or interferes with operations, immediately report the situation to the Communications Director.
- A Department Head or the Communications Director can authorize media access to certain “non-public” areas of Cobb County Government if it helps facilitate the flow of information.
- The Commission Chairman, County Commissioners, and Constitutional Officers are elected by the people to represent them and are free to speak to the media on any topic. The Communications Department can help facilitate interviews or prepare items to help them communicate with their constituents.



Cobb County Communications Department Cobb County Communications Policy

As approved by Board of Commissioners September 25, 2018

Revision History

Version ID	Revision Date	Author	Reason for Revision
v.1.0-2018	September, 2018	Communications	Adoption
v.1.0-2020	December, 2020		Reformat

¹ Communications contact information; ross.cavitt@cobbcounty.org and/or govpio@cobbcommunications.org

² https://law.georgia.gov/sites/law.ga.gov/files/AG-%23872100-v1-OPENGOV__Open_Records_Act_March_2016.pdf