

City of Merced Police Department

COMMUNICATION PLAN



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MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS

Mission

In order to accomplish our vision, we will:

- Provide professional services through honest, ethical, fair and consistent practices
- Develop quality employees through appropriate education and training
- Enhance the provision of life and property protection, utilizing advanced technology
- Encourage and participate in open communication with the communities we serve.

Vision

To be a trusted, professional organization renowned for exceptional, ethical service committed to the communities within Merced.

Introduction

The Merced Police Department is dedicated to being open and accountable to communities within Merced. Merced Police Department is committed to engaging the public in cooperative and productive dialogue as we maintain active communication links to keep the public well informed. Open and frequent communication from the police department will help foster public support, trust and cooperation.

Moreover, the police department is committed to developing and maintaining communications with all members of this department, which is vital to our success in serving each other and employee morale.

This plan addresses both the external and internal communication duties of the Merced Police Department. By establishing a communication plan at both levels, our department will continue to serve communities in a progressive and proactive manner.

Outline

This plan focuses on the following sections:

- Goals
- Internal Communication tools and stakeholders
- External communication tools and stakeholders
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Future communication possibilities

GOALS

The overall purpose of this plan is to encourage and facilitate communication with internal and external stakeholders and to provide, maintain and support the communication tools used to do so. This plan outlines the following communication goals:

- Proactive communication – As opposed to a reactive approach, the idea is to plan and carry out a communications program that creates the channels of communication and the tools necessary to achieve goals.
- Two-way communication – The Merced Police Department must not only speak to its stakeholders but must also listen to their feedback, both internally and externally. This creates an organization that is open-minded, responsive and concerned about the well-being of those it serves.
- Openness – All information should be treated as public unless there is a good reason for it not to be. Openness lets stakeholders hold the organization accountable and fosters trust.
- Positive messages – This plan will create methods to give the Merced Police Department a positive reputation and respected standing within all communities.
- Negative messages – The police department will develop and implement ways of effective communication that responds to incidents that are not complimentary of the ideals of the police department.
- Inaccurate information – Misinformation will be immediately corrected so as to minimize public concern.
- Evaluation – The police Department will frequently evaluate the tools used by the department to maintain effective levels of communication. The tools being used and the type of feedback received from the public will help increase effective means of communications.
- Surveys

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Merced Police Department utilizes a variety of internal communications methods to provide information to both non-sworn and sworn personnel. The primary purpose of our internal communications system is to provide department members with accurate and timely information. This system helps to prevent the spread of negative and unfounded rumors and ambiguity.

Internal Stakeholders

- Merced Police Department Members
- Merced Police Department Families and Friends
- Merced Police Department Administrative Staff

Methods of Communication

Internally currently include:

- **E-mail:** Most commonly used in organizations, e-mail is an effective means of communication that the Merced Police Department uses. Department-wide e-mails provide the sender the capability of alerting others of critical incidents in a timely and efficient manner.
- **Daily Watch Reports:** These reports are completed by various Divisions/Units (GVSU, DART, etc.) and are used daily to notify and inform administrative, supervisory and other sworn/non-sworn personnel of significant incidents that have occurred throughout the City of Merced. These reports provide additional information about personnel issues and details worked to target quality of life issues in Merced.
- **The Chief's Blog:** The Chief's Blog allows the Chief to address important department issues using the internet or e-mail system. Monthly updates are provided by the Chief to department members who may have questions about important departmental matters.
- **Intranet:** The Merced Police Department Intranet provides current information and links to publications and vital department information. The Intranet contains links to a variety of data utilized by department members on a daily basis, such as links to policies and procedures, department pay scales, etc.
- **SharePoint Application:** This internet application provides department members with updated information about crime analysis, AB109 releases, Watch Reports, Officer Productivity, etc.
- **Press Releases:** Press releases keep the public and department members aware of department-related and newsworthy critical events. All press releases are posted on the police department's webpage.
- **Department Memorandums:** Department memorandums keep all department members informed of changing policies and procedures. They are distributed verbally during meetings and briefings, by e-mail, and delivered via Inter-Department mail, sent in large official envelopes.
- **Crime Bulletins (BOL or BOLO):** BOL/BOLOs keep department members apprised of crime patterns, trends and known criminals throughout the City of Merced.

- **Critical Reach:** This program gives law enforcement personnel an immediate awareness of real and potential threats within our jurisdiction and in nearby jurisdictions. When there is a potential threat to officer safety, images are far more valuable than text or verbal descriptions. Today, cameras, video cameras, and surveillance cameras seem to be almost everywhere. Critical Reach gives our officers and officers of nearby agencies an awareness of activities and threats that impact the public and communities.
- **Daily Training Bulletins (DTBs):** These bulletins are provided to all members and it is their responsibility to ensure that the information is reviewed and acknowledged electronically. The policy and procedures information is electronically implemented as a paperless method of disseminating refresher training on current policies and procedures.
- **Text Messaging or Texting:** Text messaging or texting is another way that members communicate short or abbreviated messages quickly to save time that would otherwise require longer ways to impart or compose important or meaningful information. Text messaging or texting, is an electronic way of sending and receiving messages, typically consisting of alphabetic and numeric characters, between two or more users of mobile devices, desktop and laptop computers.
- **One-on-One Communication:** One-on-one communication occurs on a daily basis with all members of the police department and is an excellent way of communicating.
- **Intranet Phone Roster:** The intranet phone roster provides department members with access to direct phone numbers for all department members, thus bypassing department phone trees. Updates are made as it becomes necessary.
- **Awards:** Policy 1014 Commendations and Awards
- **Annual Reports:** Annual reports are created and distributed throughout our department and other police departments throughout the county as well as to city department heads. It is an important reference tool that contains yearend statistics and department highlights.
- **Surveys:** Another internal communication method employed by the department is the use of anonymous surveys /Survey Monkeys sent department wide through the email system. These surveys provide the requestor(s) a means to gather important and useful information about a variety of topics of concern to the department.
- **PredPol:** This is predictive policing by using a machine-learning algorithm to calculate predictions. Predict where and when specific crimes are most likely to occur, which allows proactive patrol to help reduce crime rates and victimization.
- **Cordico:** Officer Wellness application- provides 24/7: Confidential Support for the Merced Police Department employees.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Merced Police Department continues to develop relationships within the City of Merced. We annually review the various channels of communication and seek new and progressive platforms to ensure our messages are received. This is an ongoing process and is paramount as our audience continues to advance forward in areas of technology. Whether the Merced Police Department broadcasts information citywide or to a specific group, we tailor or adjust our means of communication to our audience. In some instances, the information that the Merced Police Department (MPD) has available will be limited because of the sensitive nature of the information. The Chief of Police has made a commitment to keep all avenues of communication open, and this commitment is true with all members of MPD as we serve our citizens.

External Stakeholders

- Residents
- Area business owners and employees
- Social service organizations
- Neighborhood groups and associations
- Media outlets
- Government officials
- Justice system personnel
- Nonprofit organizations
- Faith-based communities
- Educational institutions
- Entire metropolitan community

The MPD is committed to advance forward in the race to keep up with advancements in technology, which is an essential step in effective communications. In recent years, the MPD has implemented ways or channels of communication with our citizens and media outlets. These communication links include:

- A website: www.cityofmerced.org/police
- News/Press Releases
- Community Forums (distribution of quality of life brochures, etc.)
- www.crimemapping.com
- Customer Satisfaction Survey
- Facebook page
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Videos on YouTube
- Citizen Academy

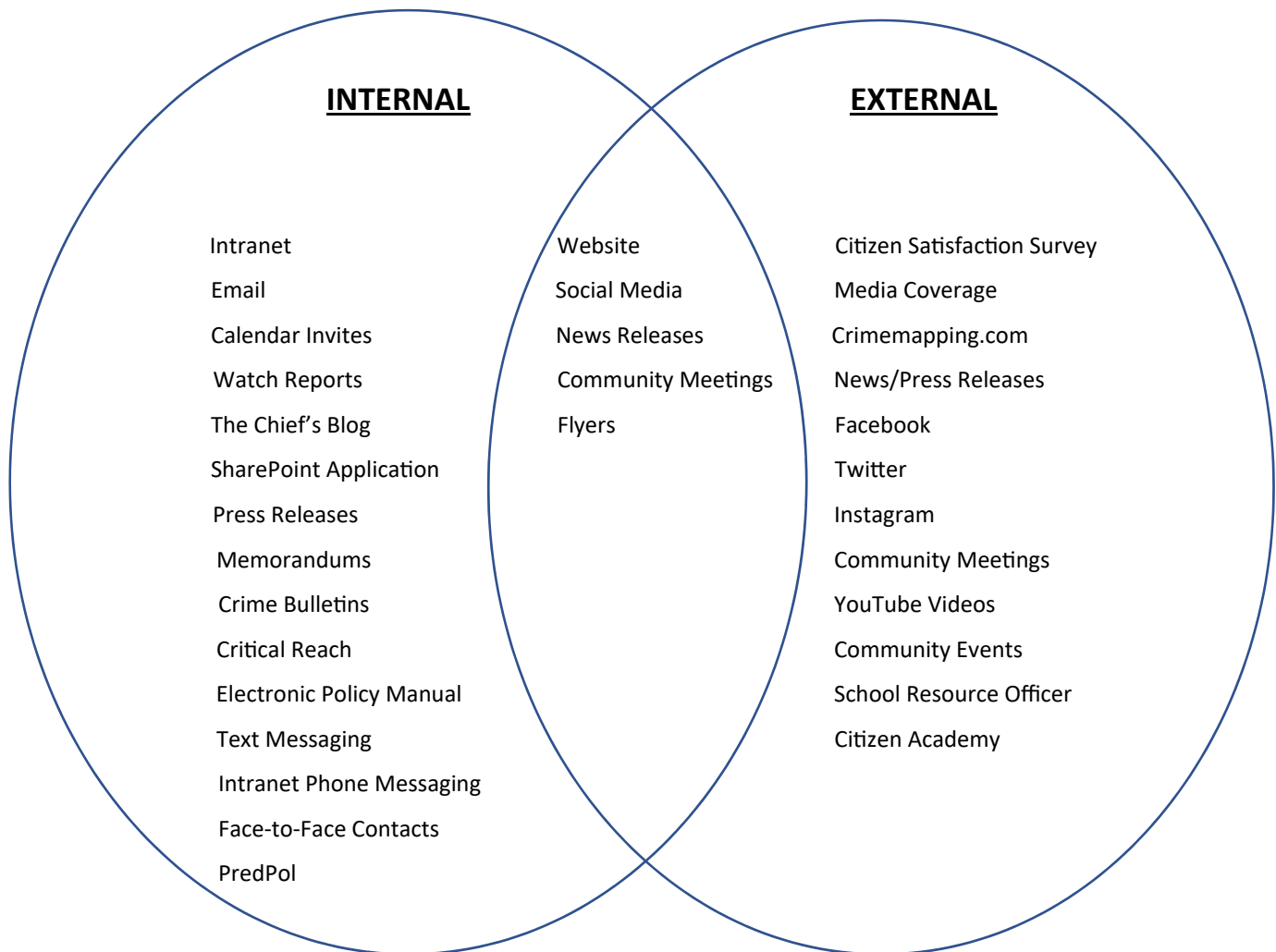
Although the MPD will strive to be progressive in the ways that it provides communication links with the community, it will welcome opportunities to serve the communities face-to-face in a traditional manner. The police department has dedicated its management staff to serve as information officers to disseminate updated information regarding public safety issues and

current crime-fighting information. The police department has one member who is solely dedicated as a community liaison to assist with our communication programs and projects.

The Police Department has a Social Media team which consists of members from different units within the department, both sworn and non-sworn. One sergeant is responsible for collecting information from the other members and posting them on the social media platforms to keep the public informed.

Depending on the message or information the Department is distributing, a stakeholder may receive messages frequently or infrequently. An example of this is notifications to educational institutions. They may only receive information when it is determined a threat directly affects their daily operations. The frequency of information distributed externally depends largely on the stakeholder.

Communication Connections



CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

Definition of Crisis

The Merced Police Department focuses on crisis responses and crisis intervention incidents. The police department's crisis response team is comprised of three specialized teams: Special Weapons and Tactics Team (SWAT), the Hostage Negotiations Team (HNT), and the Bomb Squad. Each crisis team is designed to function independently or conjointly to accomplish the department's goal or mission. As the teams work together during a crisis response, communications between teams is most critical to protect lives and achieve recovery.

The deployment of team members to incidents can be defined as a response to any situation that threatens the integrity, reputation, or standing of the department in the community, usually brought on by adverse or negative media attention.

The actions that the Merced Police Department takes in these crises, and how it interacts with the media during these periods of intense public scrutiny, can critically shape the way the department is perceived, which in turn can affect the degree of support it receives.

Critical Incidents

Crisis communications rely on timely and accurate information to be successful. The department's mission and vision statements help guide crisis communications as the needs of department members and the general public are our primary focus.

Purpose

The purposes of internal crisis communications are for the quick assignment and deployment of department resources to contain, control or investigate an event. The purposes of external crisis communications are to inform the public of specific dangers due to criminal activity, exposure to hazardous situations, i.e. natural gas leak, or natural disaster, or to request information pertaining to a specific crime.

Incident Commander/Spokesperson

During an internal crisis communication, a designated member of the department's supervisory staff must assume command of the incident and ensure that consistent messages are sent to all internal stakeholders. Similarly, a spokesperson must be appointed for all external communication with media and the public. So as not to detract from the incident commander's duties, the spokesperson should be a separate designated member of the department. It is the duty of the spokesperson to keep the incident commander updated on the situation and ensure that external stakeholders receive consistent and verifiable information.

On Call Watch Command

The On Call Watch Commander shall be available after hours to the on-duty sergeants to answer questions, receive notifications and handle critical incidents. The On Call Watch Commander shall be responsible for coordinating all aspects of an incident. The On Call

Watch Commander is responsible for making the appropriate notifications and shall make reasonable attempts to obtain as much information on the incident as possible before notification. The On Call Watch Commander shall attempt to make the notifications as soon as practicable.

Notifications

- Receive first initial phone call
- Send out Admin text
 - Respond for press or send out press release (if the event falls on WC time then he/she is responsible)
 - Incident Commander if Critical Incident
- Flows (option to assign others to positions)
- Confirm that needed resources have been called out

Critical Incidents

- Officer Involved Shootings
- Use of Force with great bodily injury
- Homicide
- Fatal
- Political
- Sensitive
- Call chief

Methods

Normally, crisis communications are conducted face-to-face, via department radios, cell phones and landline telephones. Follow-up information and notifications about significant crises are usually handled via phone, e-mail or written documentation.

Plain Language

Communication in times of a critical incident should be succinct and stated plainly with as little police jargon as possible. It also should be timely, relevant, accurate, important, and provide as much information as possible to internal and external stakeholders.

Evaluation

No crisis communication plan is complete without a built-in evaluation component as a way to check accountability and make improvements over time. Major evaluation activities might include analyzing media content and monitoring developments, such as shifts in public opinion, policy changes and organizational participation.

Crisis communication occurs during short-term and long-term events. Examples of short-term events include, but are not limited to, shootings, homicides or fatal accidents. Long-term events include, but are not limited to, natural disasters, extended searches for wanted persons, etc.

At the end of a short-term crisis, all personnel should be gathered for a short de-briefing. This provides an opportunity for personnel to identify any communication issues that

could be improved upon. At the end of a long-term crisis, an after-action report should be written based on input from all affected elements. The after-action report should be disseminated to all affected elements to promote awareness of communication successes and problems.

AB 748

AB 748 mandates the disclosure of video and audio recordings of “*critical incidents*” involving police agencies. AB 748 further provides that an agency may provide greater public access to video or audio authority than the minimum standards set forth in this bill. This will also provide an opportunity to build public trust through increased transparency.

- Critical Incident
 - o OIS
 - o Use of Force with GBI
 - o 45 Days to release video/audio
- Critical Incident Briefing YouTube video
 - o Write script
 - o Collect audio, video, etc.
 - o Redact sensitive/confidential information
 - o Film
 - Public awareness
 - Event
 - Video/audio
 - Information
 - Dispatch/pictures
 - Other
 - Closing
 - Post on PD website

PUBLIC RELATIONS CRISIS

The most effective way to mitigate a public relations crisis is prevention. An organizational culture that embraces openness and accountability will go a long way toward fostering trust with the community, which the Police Department is tasked with serving. Proactively building positive and open relationships with community members and the media also can help prevent a potential reputational crisis. MPD should have the reputation of “having nothing to hide.”

Should something negative take place that could bring negative attention to the Department, a crisis communication plan must be in place to address the situation and resolve it as quickly as possible. The following guiding principles should guide all communication decisions:

- Ensure we are addressing potential officer safety issues.
- Inform department members as soon as possible.
- Keep the public interest a priority in decision making.
- Take responsibility for correcting the situation. Seldom, if ever, should we have a response of “no comment.”
- Be as open as possible.
- Keep confidential information confidential.
- Be accurate.
- Be responsive. Answer phones and e-mails. Respond to all media inquiries, even if the answer is “I don’t know.” Tell the reporter you will try to get the answer and get back to him/her.

Public relations crises arise in one of two fashions: smoldering until reaching a boiling point, or all of a sudden. The PIO should be informed of any potentially sensitive issues so that they can address the problem as quickly as possible, either by working with the news media or having impacted department elements reach out directly to those who are upset.

Public relations crises will be addressed in the following manner:

- Unless there is a compelling reason to act otherwise, all communication about the issue should go out from one designated Public Information Officer (PIO). All department elements should be ready and willing to provide information about the situation to the PIO.
- The PIO will gather and verify information about the crisis, assess the severity of the crisis, and develop strategies concerning how information is to be released, who should speak for the organization and who is to be notified.
- The designated PIO will work out logistical details of releasing information, and distribute verified information as quickly as possible to internal and external audiences, using the tools outlined in the Internal and External Communications sections of this document and/or periodic press briefings.
- In the event that the crisis has the potential to be an ongoing source of negative attention for the department, a crisis communication team should be formed. It should include the PIO spokesperson, a public relations liaison, the Captain/Lieutenant of the affected element, and if necessary, the Chief of Police or his designee(s).

- The PIO spokesperson will be charged with managing the accuracy and consistency of messages coming from the department.
- The public relations specialist will develop effective strategies for disseminating information internally and externally. He/she also will monitor media coverage and correct any inaccuracies that might arise.
- Captains/Lieutenants of the affected element will inform the PIO of the situation and keep him/her apprised of updated information.
- The Chief and/or his designee(s) will make managerial decisions, inform the PIO of those decisions and have final approval over all messages put out by the department.

Evaluation

The PIO will document the news coverage surrounding a crisis, including newspaper articles, radio, television broadcasts and information published on the internet. When the crisis has passed, the PIO will supply the crisis team with a summary of news coverage.

Members of the team will review this report and determine the following:

- Overall success or failure of the crisis communication effort
- Lessons learned
- Appropriate follow-up measures

Evaluation and Monitoring

Evaluation should be aimed at assessing the effectiveness of our communication efforts, continuously monitoring our progress, and making changes to the plan as needed. The only way the MPD will become efficient is by learning from experience.

To do this, we must ask: What did we accomplish? What are our strengths? Where can our communications be improved? How should we change our communication strategies to ensure continued effectiveness?

To answer these questions, the MPD must gather feedback. Methods of collecting feedback include:

- Online surveys
- E-mail surveys
- Telephone surveys
- City's Citizen Satisfaction Survey
- Blogs (Chief's Blog)
- Media coverage analysis
- Suggestions are encouraged by department members by email to the PIO for forwarding to the executive command staff.
- Goal/Results comparisons

The purpose of the monitoring and evaluation process is to learn which methods of communicating are most effective and most efficient for achieving our goals. Once the best methods are determined, we can tailor our communication process for future application.

Future Communication Opportunities

Ever-evolving technology will constantly change the ways in which the MPD communicates internally and externally. Below are projects upon which the Department could embark to enhance our communication efforts:

- Intranet – Enhancements are planned for the department’s intranet site that will allow department elements greater internal information-sharing capabilities.
- Apps – Applications on smart phones and tablets can give the public immediate and convenient access to the most pertinent information about the department.
- Instagram – This photo-sharing social media platform would allow the department to interact with members of the public visually, and also could aid in criminal investigations.

Conclusion

This plan will undergo a major review annually, for revisions and updates. Revisions also should be included as new technological opportunities become available.