

STATE OF TEXAS

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COUNTY OF ATASCOSA

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**COMMISSIONERS' COURT ATASCOSA COUNTY
PUBLIC INFORMATION AND OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

Adopted: October 26, 2026

Effective Date: October 26, 2026

Article 1 — Purpose and Scope

- I. **Purpose.** This Public Information and Official Communications Policy establishes a coordinated process for preparing, approving, and distributing information officially released by Atascosa County. The purposes of this Policy are to promote accuracy, consistency, transparency, operational security, and prompt communication with the public and news media.
- II. **Scope.** This Policy applies to Atascosa County departments, offices, employees, appointed officials, volunteers, contractors acting as representatives of the County, and other persons authorized to communicate on behalf of the County, to the extent permitted by law.
- III. **Construction.** This Policy does not limit the independent legal authority or duties of an elected county official, restrict lawful personal expression, or authorize the disclosure of confidential or protected information. County elected officials and their personnel are expected to coordinate official communications concerning countywide matters, emergencies, and matters affecting multiple County offices.

Article 2 — Definitions

- I. **County.** "County" means Atascosa County, Texas.
- II. **County Judge.** "County Judge" means the duly elected County Judge of Atascosa County or a person lawfully acting in that capacity.
- III. **Emergency Management Coordinator.** "Emergency Management Coordinator" means the person appointed or designated to coordinate emergency management activities for Atascosa County.
- IV. **Official County Release.** "Official County Release" means any statement, announcement, news release, advisory, briefing, social-media post, public notice, interview, or other communication represented as an official communication of Atascosa County reviewed by the County Attorney's Office and released by the County Judge's Office. The term does not include:
 - A. Routine communications made by County personnel in the ordinary performance of assigned duties;
 - B. Statements made by an elected official solely on behalf of that official or the official's office, unless presented as a countywide statement;

- C. Testimony or information provided as required by law, court order, subpoena, or official governmental proceeding; or
- D. Personal communications that do not purport to represent the County.
- V. **Public Information Officer.** "Public Information Officer" or "PIO," as used in this Policy, means the County official responsible for coordinating and distributing Official County Releases. The term does not displace or modify any responsibility assigned by law for receiving, processing, or responding to requests for government records.

Article 3 — Public Information Officer

- I. **Designation.** The County Judge is designated as the Public Information Officer and the principal official source for the distribution of all information officially released by Atascosa County, except as otherwise provided in this Policy.
- II. **Designee.** The County Judge may designate one or more persons to perform any PIO function. A designation may be continuing, temporary, or limited to a particular subject, event, or period.
- III. **Responsibilities.** The County Judge or designee shall:
 - A. Coordinate the preparation, review, approval, and distribution of Official County Releases;
 - B. Serve as the County's principal contact for general media inquiries and countywide public communications;
 - C. Coordinate communications involving more than one County department or office;
 - D. Confirm, to the extent reasonably practicable, the accuracy and appropriate scope of information before its release;
 - E. Select appropriate methods and timing for distributing Official County Releases;
 - F. Maintain coordination with the Sheriff and Emergency Management Coordinator when an incident falls within their respective responsibilities under this Policy; and
 - G. Correct materially inaccurate information contained in an Official County Release when a correction is warranted.
- IV. **General Contact Information.** Communications intended for the PIO shall be directed to:
 - A. **Office:** Atascosa County Judge's Office;
 - B. **Contact or Designee:** County Judge or Chief of Staff;
 - C. **Telephone:** 830-769-3093;
 - D. **Email:** countyjudge@co.atascosa.tx.us; and
 - E. **Physical or Mailing Address:** #1 Courthouse Circle Drive, Suite 101, Jourdanton, Texas 78026.

Article 4 — Authorized Official Communications

- I. **General Rule.** Except as provided in Articles 5 and 6, an Official County Release shall be issued or expressly authorized by the County Judge or the County Judge's designee.
- II. **Departmental Preparation.** A department or office having subject-matter responsibility may prepare proposed information for public release. Before distribution as an Official County Release, the proposed communication shall be submitted to the County Judge or designee for coordination and approval, and reviewed by the County Attorney, unless the communication is:
 - A. A routine communication made within the department's established authority;
 - B. Required by law or binding legal process;
 - C. Authorized under an approved emergency communications plan; or
 - D. Issued by an independently elected official solely on behalf of that official's office and not as a countywide statement.
- III. **Media Inquiries.** County personnel receiving a media inquiry seeking an official County position shall refer the inquiry to the County Judge or designee unless the inquiry concerns an incident governed by Article 5 or Article 6.
- IV. **Accuracy and Authorization.** No person may knowingly distribute false or materially misleading information as an Official County Release or represent that the person is speaking on behalf of Atascosa County without authority to do so.
- V. **Routine Public Service Information.** This Policy does not prevent County departments and offices from distributing routine notices and information within their responsibilities, including office hours, meeting notices, service interruptions, schedules, filing information, program information, road closures, and similar operational communications. Countywide, sensitive, or potentially controversial matters should be coordinated with the County Judge or designee before release when circumstances permit.

Article 5 — Public Safety-Related Incident or Emergencies

- I. **Sheriff as Point of Contact.** During a public safety incident or crisis, the Atascosa County Sheriff shall serve as the primary point of contact and incident-specific spokesperson for official communications concerning law-enforcement operations, public-safety conditions, protective measures, and related matters within the Sheriff's authority.
- II. **Sheriff's Designee.** The Sheriff may designate an authorized representative to perform the communications responsibilities assigned by this Article.
- III. **Coordination.** The Sheriff or designee shall coordinate with the County Judge or PIO designee when an incident:
 - A. Requires a countywide announcement;
 - B. Involves multiple County departments or governmental entities;
 - C. May substantially affect County operations or public confidence;

- D. Requires the activation of emergency management functions; or
 - E. Involves health-related or weather-related conditions governed by Article 6.
- IV. Operational and Investigative Information.** Information shall not be released if its disclosure would compromise an investigation, tactical operation, emergency response, individual safety, legally protected information, or the County's ability to respond effectively.
- V. Public Safety Contact Information.** Public-safety media and incident inquiries shall be directed to:
- A. **Office:** Atascosa County Sheriff's Office;
 - B. **Contact or Designee:** Sheriff or Sheriff's Office PIO;
 - C. **Telephone:** 830-769-3434 (Dispatch);
 - D. **Email:** reports@acso-tx.org
 - E. **After-Hours Contact:** 830-769-3434 (Dispatch).

Article 6 — Health-Related, Fire-Related, and Weather-Related Emergencies

- I. Emergency Management Coordinator as Point of Contact.** During a health-related, Fire-Related, or weather-related emergency, the Emergency Management Coordinator shall serve as the primary point of contact and incident-specific spokesperson for official communications concerning emergency conditions, preparedness, protective actions, response coordination, sheltering, evacuation, recovery information, and related emergency management matters.
- II. Designee.** The Emergency Management Coordinator may designate an authorized representative to perform the communications responsibilities assigned by this Article.
- III. Coordination.** The Emergency Management Coordinator or designee shall coordinate emergency communications with:
- A. The County Judge or PIO designee;
 - B. The Sheriff when public safety or law-enforcement operations are involved;
 - C. Appropriate public-health authorities when the emergency concerns public health;
 - D. Participating municipalities, fire departments, emergency medical services, school districts, hospitals, utilities, and other response partners, as appropriate; and
 - E. Any joint information system or unified command established for the emergency.
- IV. Emergency Instructions.** Official emergency communications should identify, when applicable:
- A. The nature and geographic scope of the emergency;
 - B. Protective actions recommended or ordered;
 - C. Evacuation routes, shelter locations, road closures, or service disruptions;
 - D. The effective time and anticipated duration of an instruction or warning;

- E. The governmental authority issuing the information; and
 - F. The source from which the public may obtain verified updates.
- V. Emergency Management Contact Information.** Health-related and weather-related emergency inquiries shall be directed to:
- A. **Office:** Atascosa County Emergency Management;
 - B. **Contact or Designee:** Emergency Management Coordinator;
 - C. **Telephone:** 830-769-2029;
 - D. **Email:** [EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT CONTACT EMAIL]; and
 - E. **After-Hours Contact:** 830-769-3434 (Dispatch).

Article 7 — Incidents Involving Multiple Subject Areas

- I. Unified Communications.** When an incident involves public safety, public health, weather conditions, emergency management, and countywide governmental operations, the County Judge, Sheriff, and Emergency Management Coordinator shall coordinate public communications through a unified process.
- II. Lead Spokesperson.** Unless a unified command or applicable emergency plan provides otherwise:
 - A. The Sheriff shall lead communications concerning law-enforcement operations and immediate public-safety matters;
 - B. The Emergency Management Coordinator shall lead communications concerning health-related or weather-related emergency management matters; and
 - C. The County Judge or designee shall lead communications concerning countywide policy, continuity of County government, declarations, resource commitments, and matters not assigned to another incident-specific spokesperson.
- III. Joint Information Center/Emergency Operations Center.** The County Judge, Sheriff, or Emergency Management Coordinator may recommend activation of a joint information center or emergency operations coordinated communications function. Upon activation, County personnel shall route incident-related communications through that function in accordance with the applicable incident command structure.
- IV. Conflicting Information.** County personnel who become aware of conflicting public statements or material inaccuracies shall promptly notify the appropriate incident spokesperson and the County Judge or PIO designee. Any correction shall be coordinated and issued through the same or a comparably effective channel.

Article 8 — Communication Standards

- I. Content Standards.** Official County Releases shall, to the extent appropriate under the circumstances:
 - A. Be accurate, factual, and stated in a professional manner;
 - B. Clearly identify Atascosa County or the issuing County office;

- C. Distinguish confirmed information from preliminary or developing information;
 - D. Avoid speculation, personal opinion, partisan advocacy, and unverified allegations;
 - E. Protect confidential, privileged, security-sensitive, and legally restricted information;
 - F. Respect the privacy and dignity of affected persons; and
 - G. Provide reasonable instructions for obtaining additional verified information.
- II. Distribution Methods.** Official County Releases may be distributed through news releases, press briefings, official social-media accounts, emergency notification systems, public meetings, printed notices, direct communications with news organizations, or other channels approved by the authorized spokesperson.
- III. Official Accounts.** County-controlled websites, social-media accounts, emergency notification systems, and similar communications channels shall be used only by authorized personnel and in accordance with applicable County policies.
- IV. Accessibility and Language Needs.** When reasonably practicable, emergency and public-safety communications should be provided in formats accessible to persons with disabilities and in languages appropriate to affected communities.
- V. Correction and Retraction.** If an Official County Release contains a material error, the authorized spokesperson shall issue a correction, clarification, or retraction through appropriate channels as promptly as circumstances reasonably permit.

Article 9 — Conduct of County Personnel

- I. Referral of Inquiries.** County personnel who are not authorized spokespersons shall refer requests for an official County statement to the appropriate point of contact designated by this Policy.
- II. No Unauthorized Representation.** County personnel shall not state or imply that personal views constitute the official position of Atascosa County.
- III. Personal Communications.** Nothing in this Policy prohibits lawful personal communications, provided that the individual does not disclose protected information, misuse County resources, interfere with official duties, or represent that the communication is made on behalf of the County without authorization.
- IV. Preservation of Information.** Communications created, received, or maintained in connection with County business shall be preserved and managed in accordance with applicable County records-management requirements.
- V. Internal Reporting.** County personnel shall promptly report significant incidents, emerging public concerns, or material misinformation concerning

County operations to their department head and the appropriate spokesperson under this Policy.

Article 10 — Public Information Requests

- I. Separate Process.** A request to inspect or obtain copies of County records shall be handled through the County's established public-information-request procedures. This Policy governs official public communications and does not alter the duties of any officer, department, or records custodian responsible for responding to such a request.
- II. Routing.** A person receiving a request for County records shall promptly forward it to the County office or official responsible for processing the request. A media inquiry that also requests records shall be treated as a records request to the extent it seeks access to identifiable County information.
- III. No Unauthorized Disclosure.** No person may disclose information that is confidential, privileged, security-sensitive, or otherwise protected merely because the information has been requested by a member of the public or news media.
- IV. Public Information Request Contact.** Requests for County records may be directed to:
 - A. Office:** Atascosa County Attorney's Office;
 - B. Contact:** County Attorney
 - C. Telephone:** 830-769-3573;
 - D. Email:** PIA@co.atascosa.tx.us; and
 - E. Mailing or Physical Address:** 1405 Campbell Ave Suite 103, Jourdanton, Texas 78026.

Article 11 — Administration

- I. Implementation.** The County Judge, Sheriff, Emergency Management Coordinator, department heads, and elected officials shall implement this Policy within their respective areas of responsibility.
- II. Training.** The County may provide communications, media-relations, emergency-information, records-management, or related training to personnel whose duties include public communications.
- III. Department Procedures.** A County department or office may adopt supplemental communications procedures consistent with this Policy and within its lawful authority. Any supplemental procedure governing countywide communications should be coordinated with the County Judge or PIO designee.
- IV. Optional Additional Approval.** Any Official County Release requiring additional review under a separate County policy shall be submitted to Atascosa County Attorney's Office before distribution, unless an immediate release is necessary to protect life or safety.

- V. **Review.** This Policy shall be reviewed periodically by the County Judge, in consultation with the Sheriff, Emergency Management Coordinator, and other appropriate County officials, and may be revised by the Commissioners Court.

Article 12 — Effective Date and Superseding Effect

- I. **Effective Date.** This Policy takes effect on October 26, 2026.
- II. **Superseding Effect.** This Policy supersedes prior County administrative practices concerning the authorization and coordination of Official County Releases to the extent those practices are inconsistent with this Policy.
- III. **Severability.** If any provision of this Policy is determined to be invalid or unenforceable, the remaining provisions shall continue in effect to the fullest extent permitted.
- IV. **No Expansion of Authority.** This Policy allocates communications responsibilities and does not enlarge, diminish, or transfer the legal authority of the Commissioners Court, County Judge, Sheriff, Emergency Management Coordinator, or any other elected or appointed official.

Adoption

ADOPTED by the Commissioners Court of Atascosa County, Texas, on October 26, 2026, by Court Order effective October 26, 2026.

ATASCOSA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT



Weldon P. Cude
Atascosa County Judge

ATTEST:



Theresa Carrasco
Atascosa County Clerk

