

Houston Public Library Policies and Guidelines related to Media

The Heat Index in Houston has risen high enough that cooling centers may be activated. Even if they're not, we're expected to reach 106 on Saturday. One of the effects of high-heat days is the presence of media in our libraries. As a rule, we expect that all major media outlets will make their way to our libraries to "get the story" of people trying to stay cool. They seldom contact us in advance. They usually want to obtain video of people in the library and see if there are any customers willing to give them an interview.

In preparation, here's a reminder on library guidelines and what to do when they show up.

Houston Public Library Policies and Guidelines related to Media

HPL policy states that the Public Relations Office (PRO) "must be the exclusive channel for communicating with any citywide print media and all electronic media (who should request access and cooperation in advance, except when covering breaking news)." What this means is that Media Relations inquiries are handled through the PRO.

If a member of the media contacts you for a story about the Library or in which the Library will be featured, please refer the media representative to the Public Relations Office and/or check with us - even if he/she claims that PRO has already been contacted and OK'd. We do our best to give you a warning if we think that media is heading your way. This is especially important if a reporter/photographer/camera crew shows up in person. This includes the city's cable channel, HTV.

It is important to note that for cooling centers stories, historically, media do not contact us in advance and we are rarely in the position to be at the location to coordinate the media event. In those instances, the manager in charge or library staff will have to be our "boots on the ground."

When the media shows up

Here are some basic Dos and Don'ts on what to do when the media shows up at your location:

- Do go up to the reporter/cameraman and introduce yourself. Example, "Hi, I'm Sandra. What can we help you with today?" At this point, most reporters will tell you who they are and what they're doing at the library. At Central Library this normally happens from security or the welcome desk when the camera is attempting to enter

the building.

- Do ask who they are and what they're doing, if they haven't volunteered it already. "I notice you have a camera with you today, is there something specific you're here for today?"
- Do ask if they've already checked in with the Public Relations Office.
 - Regardless of whether they answer yes or no, confirm with us. Example, "It's great that you've already spoken with the Public Relations Office. I still need to call them to confirm." Then call us to confirm, before they are allowed to get started.
 - Ask them to accompany you to a phone so you can put them on with one of us to discuss what the story is and guidelines about cameras in the library.
- Do be aware of the basic guidelines we cover with them. Our main consideration is the safety and comfort of our customers, so we normally permit reporters to do stories within our buildings if the story is about the library, doesn't disrupt our ability to provide adequate services to our customers, preserves our customers' privacy, and media agree to follow these guidelines.
 - **Library will staff will make an announcement on who they are and what they're doing, to let customers know what's going on.** Example, "Hello everyone. My name is Sandra, and I work with the Library. With us today are members of the news staff at XX station and they want to take video of people using the library. If you'd rather not be in the video, let them know and they'll work around you."
 - **Do not take photos/footage of children without parental consent.** We tell this to the media and stop them if we think they are circumventing this rule; i.e., if they are recording a group of children who are clearly unaccompanied by an adult who can give consent. And, as a reminder, parental consent literally means the consent of a parent or guardian.
 - **If any customer asks to be excluded from photos/footage, please honor the request.**
 - **If any customer declines a request for an interview, please move on to another customer.**
 - **Interviews are coordinate by PRO staff.** Although Library staff may be asked to give a brief comment on the air, if needed, we may not be able to comply with the request. This will be coordinated by PRO.

PRO staff makes every effort to facilitate all requests for media coverage, including photos/video. However, the safety and comfort of library customers are their primary consideration.

Reference

Members of the media are welcome to use our programs and services just like any other customer - PRO does not need to OK that. Though, as stated in the policy, PRO is the exclusive channel for communicating with media, please answer any questions that are "reference" - members of the media have access to the same information and services you would give out to any other customer. If you're unclear on whether you need to contact PRO or refer something to us, feel free to contact us and ask.

Contacts

If you need to contact someone from the Public Relations Office, start with office numbers, proceed to cell phone numbers, and, if during off-hours or weekends, try home numbers or personal cell phones (which are included in the Emergency Info Cards, and all branch managers should have a copy).

If this is a time-sensitive issue (something happened at your branch in off-hours which may result in media coverage, a member of the media showed up and wants to interview your staff, you have a nice program on the weekend and a photojournalist walked in and wants to take photos of the people in attendance, etc.) keep trying until you speak to someone, and please leave messages.

If you are unable to contact PRO staff (there are only two of us for the entire library system) check with your supervisor and:

- use good judgment,
- follow policy, and
- make decisions based upon the best interests of the library and our customers.

Public Relations Office contacts are:

Sandra Fernandez
832-393-1381
713-435-9448 cell phone

Blanca Quezada
832-393-1382
713-435-9596 cell phone

If you see the Library mentioned in the press, let us know. We don't have a service

checking for media clips, so we rely on your watchful eyes to help us keep track of what is being said about HPL. We are especially grateful for copies of newspaper articles, particularly the neighborhood weeklies and biweeklies - please send us copies via interoffice mail.