

 <p style="text-align: center;">DEPARTMENTAL POLICY State of Tennessee Department of Transportation</p>	<p>Policy Number: 160-01</p>
	<p>Effective Date: October 1, 2025</p>
<p>Approved By: </p>	<p>Supersedes: March 18, 2013</p>
<p>SUBJECT: Media & Communications Policy</p>	

RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: Communications and Legislative Affairs

AUTHORITY: T.C.A. §4-3-2303 and §4-5-102. If any portion of this policy conflicts with applicable state or federal laws or regulations, that portion shall be considered void. The remainder of this policy shall not be affected thereby and shall remain in full force and effect.

RELATED POLICIES: DOHR Policy 12-058: Personal Use of Social Media; State of Tennessee Acceptable Use Policy; State of Tennessee Code of Conduct.

PURPOSE: To use brand-building activities to reinforce the image of the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT), and increase awareness about the department and its operations among existing and new employees, clients, collaboration partners, and society in general. The objectives are:

- **Consistency:** A unified brand message across all platforms strengthens market position and customer recognition.
- **Quality Control:** Every piece of content released is a representation of the department. Approval ensures generated collateral meets our standards of excellence.
- **Efficiency:** With clear guidelines and a streamlined approval process, last-minute completion and rework can be avoided, saving time and resources, and giving ample time to ensure quality standards are met.
- **Risk Management:** By vetting all communications-related content, the risks of miscommunication or reputational damage are minimized, protecting TDOT's integrity.
- **Empowerment:** With a structured approach, individuals will clearly understand expectations and can make decisions confidently within the brand's framework.

APPLICATION: This policy applies to all TDOT employees and all contractors or partners who create communications for the public, other agencies, or the media on behalf of the department.

DEFINITIONS:

1. Collateral: Any digital or printed material used to promote TDOT's brand, products, or services, including brochures, websites, social media posts, and more, all aimed at supporting the department's goals and initiatives.
2. Regional Communications Officer (RCO): TDOT employee at the regional level responsible for communication with local and regional media outlets.
3. External messaging: All communication efforts TDOT uses to connect with and inform individuals or groups outside the department, such as public customers, clients, and the media.
4. Internal messaging: All actions, processes, and means used to disseminate information to TDOT employees.
5. News media: Broadcast, print as well as web-based and mobile outlets providing information for local, regional, and/or national distribution.
6. Non-public information: All information that has not been made publicly available through media channels but has been disclosed internally to all TDOT employees.
7. Social media: Online platforms where users can share information and connect with virtual communities through text, video, photos, and other content.

MEDIA RELATIONS: The Communications Division coordinates all media relations activities. Unless otherwise authorized, the chief spokespersons for TDOT are the Bureau Chief of Communications and Legislative Affairs, Communications Director, and Regional Communications Officers. Those listed above are authorized to speak with media on behalf of TDOT-related decisions, outcomes of TDOT projects, and policy matters or matters affecting the administration of TDOT projects for the state.

In addition to those listed above, designated employees pre-approved by the Bureau Chief, Communications Director, or Regional Communications Officer may be called upon to speak to the media regarding specific areas of responsibility or subject matter. Employees who are not authorized to act as spokespersons will not respond on behalf of TDOT to any inquiry or initiate communication with the media.

Media releases must be approved by the Communications Director before being released. They are distributed by email and published on the TDOT website. Inaccurate media coverage should be brought to the attention of the Communications Director or the Regional Communications Officer.

Media Inquiry Process: All media inquiries must be referred to the Communications Division in a timely manner, preferably within 24 hours, for official response and follow-up. Media releases communicate official departmental activities, decisions, projects, or services or serve as official statements during Emergency Operations.

An employee should immediately contact and consult with the Headquarters Communications Division Director or Regional Communications Officer before providing any information, response, or opinion to the news media. On rare occasions when advance notice is not possible, an employee should inform their Regional Communications Officer or the Communications Director as soon as possible that contact with the news media has occurred. Communication with the news media on behalf of the state should be limited to the employee's area of expertise.

SOCIAL MEDIA: TDOT establishes that the Communications team is solely responsible for managing and overseeing the department's social media presence. Only members of the TDOT Communications Division are authorized to create and disseminate content across all @myTDOT's platforms and channels. The [TDOT Social Media Policy](#) ensures consistency, accuracy, and alignment with the department's messaging and strategic objectives.

Personal Use: Social media creates opportunities to champion TDOT and for personal expression, but it also creates risks and responsibilities. Employees should assume that anything they do on social media, whether on a business or personal account, could be viewed by a colleague, supervisor, partner, supplier, or customer. Personal activity on social media reflects on TDOT and can impact the work environment, and, subject to applicable law, will not be exempt from the rules provided in DOHR Policy 12-058: Personal Use of Social Media because it occurred on a personal account.

The procedure to submit content for social media is outlined under the Submission Guidelines section below.

BRANDING AND BRAND ELEMENTS: TDOT establishes policies, provides services, and maintains various facilities throughout the state. For its role and responsibilities to be clearly recognized, it must have a single and invariable visual identity. Consistent branding across all communications is essential for building trust and maintaining market relevance.

All requests must follow the [TN State Government branding standards](#) and receive final approval from the Communications team; this includes any content designed or created by a consultant.

Per state branding guidelines, here are key types of collateral that should align with the department's brand identity. This list includes, but is not limited to:

- Business Cards
- Newsletters
- Letterhead and Stationery
- Brochures and Flyers
- Presentation Templates
- Website
- Email Signatures
- Product Packaging
- Signage

- Social Media Posts
- Promotional Items
- Annual Reports
- Press Releases
- Event Materials
- Videos and Multimedia
- Merchandise

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES: Each piece of collateral serves its functional purpose and acts as an ambassador of the brand, reinforcing identity and values in the marketplace. Consistency across these items helps in building a strong, recognizable brand. Employees should reference the following guidelines when submitting collateral or requesting content:

1. **Internal/External Projects:** To submit content for TDOT TV, social media, The Road Ahead, and The Mile Marker and to request support for video, graphics, and photography projects – use this form: [Communication Project Request Form](#). Additional resources can be found on TeamTN.gov through the following link: [Communication Resources](#).
2. **New Initiatives and Communication Plans:** Contact the Bureau Chief of Communications and Legislative Affairs and the Communications Director.
3. **External Messaging:** Before developing content for any external messaging, please consult the Communications team to ensure continued collaboration across all TDOT divisions and regions to communicate a unified message to all audiences. To streamline the workflow, collateral that can be provided to you may already exist.
4. **Internal Messaging:** Before developing content for any internal messaging, please consult the Internal Communications Officer.
5. **Region-Specific Communications:** Region-specific communications should always start with and include your RCO.
6. **Special Web Requests:** Any special web requests outside the standard operating procedure for your division’s assigned web editor(s) will start with the TDOT Digital Media Officer.
7. **Design Requests:** Any design requests will go to the TDOT Graphic Designer. Please note that all requests must follow TDOT and [TN State Government branding standards](#) and receive final approval from the Communications team.
8. **Consultant Collateral:** Consultants must receive pre-approval from the Communications Division before creating content, which must follow the TN State Government branding standards and receive final approval before distribution. This includes video, graphics, web content, handouts, billboards, etc.
9. **Merchandise:** Before ordering any merchandise, contact the Communications team's Graphic Designer for assistance with designing the artwork to ensure brand standards.

10. **New Project and Program Logos:** Senior leadership must approve new project and program logos before creation. Contact the Graphic Designer for development. The Governor's Communications team must approve the final version. Please note that all logos must be copyrighted and registered with the Attorney General's Office per state regulations. The Communications team will assist you.

MANAGEMENT OF CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION: Employees shall respect and protect confidential information and abide by all laws governing the possession and use of such information. Confidential information should only be released when it is legally permitted or required. Employees shall not use confidential work information for personal gain. The State of Tennessee Code of Conduct provisions shall apply in matters relating to confidential information.

Communication of Non-Public Information: Communication of non-public collateral shall always be treated with extreme care. This is because any leak of non-public information to the public may expose TDOT to reputational risk. The following rules shall apply to the communication of non-public information:

- All non-public information shall be communicated by senior leadership or with their permission.
- When in doubt about what constitutes non-public information, please check with the Communications Division.
- Employees shall not provide non-public information to any source unless:
 - The employee is authorized by senior leadership to do so; and
 - The employee is sure the information is accurate and authorized for release.

DISCIPLINARY ACTION: Appropriate disciplinary action that is commensurate with the offending violations, up to and including dismissal, will be taken for those employees not in compliance with this policy and other relevant policies deemed applicable. The department retains the sole discretion to determine whether a violation of this policy has occurred and to determine what level, if any, of disciplinary action is warranted.