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Chapter 23: Public Relations

Section 23.000 Creating Exceptional Public Relations

This section describes how to create an excellent public image.

Contents

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Laws | RCW 26.23.120 confidentiality and public disclosure RCW 42.04.060 business hours for state agencies RCW 42.56.520 prompt responses required RCW 74.20.010 conduct of SEOs WAC 388-14A-2105 through -2150 confidentiality and public disclosure |
| Policy | <p>Consider communication with the public as an integral part of your job.</p> <p>Resolve complaints yourself whenever possible.</p> <p>Route correspondence addressed to the Director to CRU.</p> <p>Treat callers and visitors with respect and courtesy.</p> <p>Coordinate responses to Congress, legislative bodies, or the media with CRU.</p> <p>Record all contacts concerning customers on the case record.</p> |
| Procedure | |
| Visual Aids | |
| Automated Actions | |
| SEMS Screens | CC |
| Forms Used | |
| Hearing and Conference Board Rights | |
| See Also | DSHS Administrative Policy 1.01 communication with state legislators and members of their staff DCS Admin Policy 6.00 public information policy DSHS Administrative Policy 8.11 complaint resolution and response standards ESA Administrative Policy 4.15 complaint response |

Procedures

1. How should I conduct business with DCS customers?

1. Consider communication with the public is an integral part of your job assignment.
2. Conduct your support enforcement duties with fairness, courtesy, and the highest professional standards. See [RCW 74.20.010](#).
3. Treat all internal and external customers with respect and courtesy.
4. Listen to and note all of the individual's concerns. Address each concern and provide the person with known, available options.
5. Explain things at a level that the person can understand. Use an interpreter when necessary.
6. Take action to resolve the person's concerns whenever possible. This may include:
 1. Sending a DCS form or WSCSS packet.
 2. Putting the person in contact with the party who can resolve the person's concerns.
 3. Acting on information provided by the person.
 4. Providing a DCS brochure explaining a process.
 5. Referring the individual to the DCS Child Support Resource Center web site for information about DCS. The web site address is: <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/dcs/index.shtml>
7. If a person does not speak English or has a communication disability, see *Section* [23.020](#).

2. How quickly must I respond to communications?

1. Acknowledge all public inquiries promptly, whether by return mail or by telephone.
 - You must return all phone calls as soon as reasonably possible, but always within one working day. See *Section* [23.005](#).
2. Accept urgent calls put through by the telephone receptionist.
3. Consider communications from the Community Relations Unit as urgent and requiring priority.
4. If you receive a request for public disclosure, you must respond within five business days. See *Section* [22.020](#).

3. Do I have to try to resolve problems, or should I let someone else handle them?

1. Resolve complaints yourself whenever possible.
2. If you receive a communication from legislators or legislative staff about policy or legislative issues, refer them to the DCS Legislative Coordinator.

4. What do I do if someone says they are going to sue DCS and/or DCS owes them money?

1. Contact the concerned party and, if possible, rectify the situation or reach a resolution.
2. If a resolution cannot be reached, refer the concerned party to CRU. See *Section* [23.015](#).

September 21, 2006

Chapter 23: Public Relations

Section 23.005 Providing Exceptional Service on the Telephone

This section describes how to provide exceptional telephone service.

Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| Laws | RCW 26.23.120 confidentiality RCW 42.56.210 staff personal information not subject to public disclosure |
| Policy | <p>Return calls promptly, but always within one working day.</p> <p>Accept urgent calls put directly through by telephone receptionists.</p> <p>If someone asks, give the caller your name and the name of any other DSHS employee pursuant to local procedure.</p> <p>Keep telephone messages current.</p> |
| Procedure | Follow local procedures to respond to telephone calls. |
| Visual Aids | |
| Automated Actions | |
| SEMS Screens | |
| Forms Used | |
| Hearing and Conference Board Rights | |
| Personal Notes [Add a note] | You have not added any notes to this handbook section. |
| See Also | DSHS Administrative Policy 1.01 communication with state legislators and members of their staff DCS Admin Policy 6.00 public information policy DSHS Administrative Policy 8.11 Complaint Resolution and Response Standards ESA Administrative Policy 4.15 DSHS Admin Policy 14.18 voice mail standards Chapter 22 - Public Disclosure |

Procedures

1. How should DCS staff manage telephone calls?

1. For incoming calls, each DCS office has the responsibility to ensure that staff respond timely to telephone communications and keep telephone voice-mail messages up to date. Supervisors ultimately assume the responsibility for all of the following:
 1. Ensuring that staff return calls according to DCS policy and procedures.
 2. Accepting urgent calls or making expedited call-backs.
 3. Determining when it is appropriate to require staff to accept direct calls.
 4. Ensuring that staff keep telephone messages current.
2. Each field office has the responsibility to ensure that telephone reception staff:
 1. Answer incoming calls promptly.
 2. Provide no non-disclosable case-specific information to callers.
 3. Route urgent calls immediately. Consider incoming calls from the Community Relations Unit (CRU) as urgent.
 4. Determine if a call needs to go directly to the RSEO.
 - Transfer calls to the back-up person, if necessary.
 5. Encourage the caller to accept a call-back unless the call is urgent.
 6. Take the caller's detailed message.
 7. Make a telephone appointment if the caller cannot receive a call-back, if appropriate.
 8. Promptly relay any messages to the appropriate person.
3. SEOs and other case-managing staff must:
 1. Return calls as soon as reasonably possible, but always during the same or following business day.
 1. Attempt to return the call at least twice when there is a reasonable expectation of reaching the caller.
Suggestion: Return the call as soon as possible and again the next day about the same time as the original call.
 2. Document the content of every telephone call (TC) and call-back attempt on the CC screen. Use CC Code 40 for most calls. You may use specific codes if you want to track communications related to a specific action. See [Section 17.020](#).
 2. Accept urgent calls transferred by telephone reception staff.
 3. Keep dates on voice mail up to date for those calling DCS who receive voice mail messages.
 4. Review phone messaging throughout the day.
 5. Be mindful of confidentiality requirements when discussing cases.
 6. Make every effort to resolve callers' concerns themselves whenever possible.
 7. Accept direct calls from out-of-state CPs on responding interstate cases. If the CP provides

information affecting the IJ's case, encourage the CP to contact the IJ in the future, and notify the IJ of the new information.

Revised September 21, 2006

Chapter 23: Public Relations

Section 23.010 Ensuring Clear Written Communications

This section gives guidelines and tips for writing clearly.

Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| Laws | |
| Policy | Respond promptly to written communications. |
| Procedure | Answer all of the writer's points and include a clear answer for each issue in your response. |
| Visual Aids | |
| Automated Actions | |
| SEMS Screens | CC |
| Forms Used | |
| Hearing and Conference Board Rights | |
| Personal Notes [Add a note] | You have not added any notes to this handbook section. |
| See Also | Chapter 22 - Public Disclosure |

Procedures

1. How do I write clear, understandable letters?

1. Write all correspondence in a clear, easy-to-understand manner. Write straightforward, simply worded letters and memos. If you would like help with this or have questions, please contact the [Policy Unit](#) in DCS Headquarters. You also may contact the [Community Relations Unit \(CRU\)](#) for assistance.
2. Include the following in your reply:
 1. Show the case number on the communication.
 2. Identify all of the writer's points and make sure you address each issue in your response.
 3. Use the writer's own words or a simple paraphrase.
 4. Organize your response to allow the reader to find the answer easily.
 5. Outline all the reader's options.
 6. Explain all acronyms.
 7. Follow public disclosure guidelines. See [Chapter 22](#) - Public Disclosure.
3. Style and Tone:
 1. Use a conversational tone.
 2. Use positive words whenever possible.
 3. Use the active voice. This defines the doer of the action. Passive voice tends to leave the reader confused about who is responsible for the action.
Example: Passive Voice: The bone was eaten.
Active Voice: The dog ate the bone.
4. Document on the [CC](#) screen when you received the correspondence, when you replied, and include a brief description of the content.

2. Are there any writing resources available?

- o Grammar and Usage References:
 1. *The Gregg Reference Manual*, by William A. Sabin.
 2. The [Elements of Style](#), by William Strunk, Jr., and E.B. White.
 3. Washington State correspondence [guidelines](#).
 4. [Bartelby.com](#) on-line references.
 5. Most word processing programs have spell check and grammar check tools available.
 6. [CRU staff](#).
 7. [Policy Unit staff](#).

3. How do I write a letter for someone else's signature?

- o When you prepare a draft response for another's signature, consider each of the following audiences:

1. The person with the question.
2. The person who forwarded the request such as a legislator.
3. The person appointed to sign the response such as a deputy secretary or legislator.

Revised April 2, 2004

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Chapter 23: Public Relations

Section 23.015 Community Relations Unit Functions

This section explains the functions of the Community Relations Unit (CRU) in DCS Headquarters.

Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| Laws | RCW 26.23.120 confidentiality |
| Policy | <p>CRU responds to letters and telephone calls routed to DCS Headquarters.</p> <p>Do not consider members of legislative bodies or their aides as exempt from public disclosure requirements.</p> <p>Procure a written signed public disclosure release before disclosing any confidential information on a case.</p> <p>CRU manages DCS's public information program.</p> |
| Procedure | |
| Visual Aids | |
| Automated Actions | |
| SEMS Screens | CC |
| Forms Used | |
| Hearing and Conference Board Rights | |
| Personal Notes [Add a note] | You have not added any notes to this handbook section. |
| See Also | <p>Chapter 22 - Public Disclosure</p> <p>DSHS Administrative Policy 1.01 Communication with the state legislators and members of their staff</p> <p>DSHS Administrative Policy 1.04 Congress, federal agencies, and other state Governors</p> <p>DSHS Administrative Policy 2.08 Media contacts</p> <p>DCS Administrative Policy 6.00 Public information</p> <p>DSHS Administrative Policy 7.02 Individuals with disabilities</p> |

Procedures

1. What do the Community Relations Unit (CRU) staff do?

1. Respond to letters, telephone calls, and e-mails routed to DCS Headquarters. CRU staff can be contacted by calling 1-800-457-6202 toll free, or by e-mailing CRU staff at dcs-cru@dshs.wa.gov.
 - These include communications to the Governor, legislators, the Attorney General, DSHS Secretary, Division Directors, and the Program Administrator in charge of DCS Policy. CRU staff also handle inquiries from congressional representatives, other elected officials, and representatives of other IV-D agencies.
2. Serve as the central coordinating point for legislative and media contacts.

Note: This does not prevent field offices from dealing with local legislators, news reporters, etc. It simply ensures coordination of the information through DCS or DSHS Headquarters.

 - Inquiries from lawmakers and their staff about policy and legislative issues go through the DCS [Legislative Coordinator](#).
3. Receive calls from DCS customers about specific case actions, laws, and procedures. CRU staff:
 1. Review the case on SEMS.
 2. Contact field office staff to research the facts and develop a resolution, if required.
 3. Post all communications to the [CC](#) screen using comment code 45.
 4. Route a copy of the original letter and the response to the field office.
 5. May refer calls directly to the RSEO for response.
4. Handle complaints from people saying they want to bring a legal claim against DCS or that they have incurred monetary damages as a result of DCS actions. CRU may:
 1. Attempt to settle the issue. If DCS took an action by mistake or wrongfully, CRU may help resolve any issues immediately. If there are other remedies, such as a conference board or an administrative hearing right, they may offer those alternatives.
 2. If the issue cannot be resolved, CRU may send a Tort Claim Form, SF210 along with copies of [Chapter 4.92 RCW](#) to the person complaining. If CRU sends a Tort Claim Form, CRU:
 1. Notifies the supervisor of the field office unit where the complaint originated.
 2. Posts an entry on the [CC](#) screen.
 3. Notifies the DCS Litigation Legal Advisor in DCS Headquarters.
5. Develop and manage DCS's comprehensive public information programs through:
 1. Press releases and press packets.
 2. Public service announcements to radio and television stations.
 3. Annual Child Support Awareness Month promotion in August of every year.
 4. Curricula for seventh through twelfth grade outreach programs on paternity rights and establishment.
6. Represent the agency at various outreach events to answer questions or provide information about DCS.

Revised January 18, 2005

Chapter 23: Public Relations

Section 23.020 Accommodating Customers with Communication Barriers

This section explains what actions to take if a customer does not speak English as a primary language or has a disability affecting communication.

Contents

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|--|--|
| Laws | GR (Washington Court General Rule) 11.2 telephonic interpretation RCW 74.04.025 bilingual services for non-English speaking customers. WAC 388-02-0120 interpreter at hearing WAC 388-02-0130 requirements for notices WAC 388-02-0135 requirements to use interpreters LEP Laws Document |
| Policy | <p>Ensure that the primary language for all customers who need and request interpretation/translation services is identified and interpretation/translation is provided.</p> <p>Provide aids and services when necessary to help a person understand DCS correspondence or communications.</p> <p>Remain aware of the needs of individuals who require special assistance in applying for or receiving DCS services.</p> |
| Procedure | Document all communications with LEP customers by a CC comment code 47. |
| Visual Aids | Table - Primary Language Codes DCS LEP Coordinator List |
| Automated Actions | Entry of a language code other than 13 (English) flags the individual's name on the CC in a different background color. FG generates a colored separator page that indicates the individual's primary language. |
| SEMS Screens | BI , CC , WB |
| Forms Used | 02-531 |
| Hearing and Conference Board Rights | Conference board to request LEP services |
| Personal Notes [Add a note] | You have not added any notes to this handbook section. |
| See Also | Office of Administrator of Courts - Directory of Interpreters Used in Washington State DSHS Administrative Policy 7.02 Individuals with disabilities Working with an Interpreter |

Procedures

1. What if a customer does not speak English?

1. Review the referral or application for any sign that the CP or NCP wishes to communicate with DCS in a language other than English.
2. Use the **Native Language Identifier**, [DSHS 02-531](#) to determine an individual's language needs.
 1. Send a 02-531 to the NCP and CP with the Introduction to the Registry Letters.
 2. Do not send a 02-531 to a recipient of public assistance as the ACES interface provides this information.
3. If the individual's primary language is not English, enter the language code in the Language Code field on the **BI** screen. (See [Primary Language Codes](#).)
 - Use a **CC** code 47 to document entering the language code.
4. Document on the CC screen any special communications needs not included in the primary language codes. Use **CC** code 47 and the White Board (**WB**).
5. Serve notices as appropriate in both English and in the primary language. See [Section 6.165](#) to determine when you need to re-serve a notice because of LEP considerations, or if you want to negotiate a settlement on a notice.
6. Send the NCP's copy of withholding action in the NCP's native language. See [Section 10.010](#).
7. Send out all written material in the language of the recipient.
8. Field office staff should try to resolve verbal language barriers by using local resources.
9. For actual negotiations, you must use a DSHS-certified interpreter.
 - Follow local office procedures for getting the interpreter. See [Working with an Interpreter](#).
10. If you cannot communicate with the customer, call (800) 820-2363 to access the bilingual receptionist for assistance in communicating with the customer and in setting an appointment with an interpreter present.

2. How can I assist individuals with disabilities who want to communicate with DCS?

1. Follow Field Office procedures to get written material translated.
 1. Go to the DCS intranet to determine if the material is already translated.
 2. If you cannot access a translation that is listed for the material, contact DCS Publications.
2. DCS must provide alternative media for forms and/or publications such as:
 1. A Braille copy of a DCS form or notice when the person is visually impaired and can read Braille.

Note: You may contact the Washington State School for the Blind. The Braille access center's number is (360) 696-6321.
 2. An audio recording of a legal notice when the person has a reading disability.
3. For an administrative hearing or conference board, provide an interpreter certified in American Sign Language when the person is hearing-impaired.

3. When do I need to get an interpreter and when do I need to get a translator?

1. Get an interpreter when you need to verbally communicate with a customer who does not speak English or who requires American Sign Language.

Note: If the customer brings an interpreter, get a DSHS certified-interpreter if the situation involves explaining the person's legal rights such as a request for hearing, conference board, or modification, etc.

2. Get a DSHS translator when you need written material translated. Not all forms require translation, but those having a legal significance do.
 1. If DCS does not publish the document in the party's language, ask for a translation of the text for mailing.
 2. Ask for an expedited translation (approximately three days) of all received hearing and conference board requests to allow resolution at the first opportunity.
 3. Document the content on the **CC** screen.
 4. If a party returns a non-legal completed form or sends miscellaneous correspondence to DCS, you may ask an interpreter to tell you what it says. Get a translation if you need one for legal purposes.
3. If you have questions about whether you need a DSHS-certified interpreter or a translator, contact your [LEP Coordinator](#).

