



Policy Number:	25-06
Policy Name:	External Communications - Public Communications, Letterhead, Press Releases, and Media Campaign Policy
Authority:	County Social Media Policy; County Style Guide; Measure K Style and Usage Guidelines; County Branding; SMC Health Policy; and Departmental Policy
Original Policy Date:	October 2, 2025 Effective Date: 10/02/25
Supersedes:	96-04
Policy Last Revised:	N/A
Attachments:	A. BHRS Communications Policy Workflow B. County of San Mateo Photo/Video/Audio and Personal Narrative Consent and Release Form C. Public Notice of Photo/Video Release for Large Events

PURPOSE

To establish standards for developing external communications for clients and the public, including materials, promotion and advertising campaigns, press releases, and other external communications. Standards assure adherence to County and Health branding and style guidelines, ADA compliance, and limit liability and mitigate risk. Standards promote brand recognition, professionalism, and trust. BHRS communications should convey the agency's values, and contribute to the continuity, clarity, and strength of the BHRS communications strategy and messaging. This policy will improve efficiency by providing an approval process to assure appropriate use of funds and staff time.

DEFINITIONS

ADA Compliance means the responsibility the County has to ensure print, digital, and other forms of public facing media meet requirements to be accessible by all members of the community. Examples include font size, line spacing, and reading comprehension.

BHRS Communications Specialist means the person in BHRS assigned communications responsibilities. This position reports to the Assistant Director and works with the Director to support the BHRS Communications Plan and Strategy. This person supports all staff with development of BHRS messaging, and reviewing and approving various communications-related activities, such as media campaigns and promotions, handling the press and other media related inquiries, managing social media, newsletters, and the overall BHRS presence.



Communication Template means ready-to-go versions of commonly used documents that comply with the style guidelines, including PowerPoint, report, memo, and other templates where you add the content and have a document that meets the style guidelines.

Crowd Photo Notice or Photo/Video Notice means the method by which permission is granted to use a person's name, likeness, image, voice, appearance, and/or personal narrative for uses that include but are not limited to social media postings, announcements, news releases, websites, and promotional or informational materials in any medium in communicating County business for when it is unreasonable to collect such permission on individual forms. This includes large meetings, community events, and conferences, to name a few. The notice is printed on large placards that are posted in prominent locations, such as the registration desk or all entrances. Additionally, verbal announcements at the beginning and/or throughout the event should be made if there is a sound system and formal program.

Department Letterhead means official County stationary bearing the department logo and name with or without the County seal and/or logo that is used for formal written communications. The letterhead is professionally designed and provided to specific programs and work units, as well as generic letterhead for those programs or work units without specific letterhead organized by location so that only official letterhead is used in the course of business.

External Communications means the communication we have with our clients and the public. This includes brochures, flyers, posters, press releases, social media, our intranet presence, to name a few. It is important to respect style, branding, and grammar to assure the public and our members associate BHRS with trust, professionalism, and consistent messaging so that the public views all of SMC health as one system.

Photo/Video Release Form means the method by which the permission to use a person's name, likeness, image, voice, appearance, and/or personal narrative for uses that include but are not limited to social media postings, announcements, news releases, websites, and promotional or informational materials in any medium in communicating County business. BHRS operates in a confidential environment and must be sensitive to capturing images of clients or members of the public that may be used in media or other materials used for a broader audience and in public.

Style Guide means how County Health illustrates the use of our name, logo, colors, and typography can be incorporated within your everyday work. Every time we maintain a consistent message and unified look, we strengthen our visual identity. The style guide covers who we are, our visual identity, identity and messaging in practice, and visual media.

PROCEDURE/PROTOCOL

BHRS communication projects and related activities shall be completed under the guidance of the BHRS Communications Specialist. The BHRS Communication Specialist will determine the appropriate approval and guide the project through the approval process, which is as follows:

I. External Communication Approval Tiers

The BHRS Communications Specialist will manage approvals across all tiers, collect additional information needed, and communicate approvals and any additional conditions of approval. The



BHRS Communications Specialist shall be engaged prior to starting a contract request or project. External communication projects shall be subject to one of three approval tiers as described below:

1. Approval track 1: (BHRS Communication Specialist approval): internal messages to staff (e.g. All Staff emails), event flyers, informational cards or flyers, etc.
2. Approval track 2: (In addition to 1, Director approval will be required): strategic messaging development, new brochures, informational cards or flyers, swag etc.
3. Approval track 3 (In addition to 2, County Health Communications Officer approval is required: Website changes or new pages, press releases, social media posts, media campaigns, etc.

See Attachment A: Communication Approval Flow Chart for further information.

II. SMC Health Style Guide and Communication Templates

The Style Guide must be followed for all BHRS communication projects in order to incorporate our department's visual identity within the everyday work of BHRS. Staff shall work with the BHRS Communication Specialist in the application of the style guide to their communication project and activities. The style guide also includes signature line standards for staff email, which must be followed. Questions about the style guide or its use should be directed to the BHRS Communication Specialist. The SMC Health Style Guide can be found [here](#).

The SMC Health Style Guide has been used to develop specific templates for Health Communications that shall be utilized by staff when developing their projects or presentations. These include PowerPoint templates and templates for flyers, reports, posters, and letterhead. There are also logo files available for the appropriate use of the County and Health logos. Always review your use of logos with the BHRS Communications Specialist. Questions about the use of these templates can be directed to the BHRS Communications Specialist and the materials can be found [here](#).

III. Press and News Media

If a reporter contacts you, do not speak directly with them. You are required to forward the email or direct their call to the County Health Communications Officer via the Press Line at (650) 867-1661 or via email at press@smchealth.org.

If there is a need to write and distribute a press release, staff must contact the BHRS Communications Specialist before the release is written and no press release will be distributed that has not been reviewed and approved by either the BHRS Communications Specialist, the County Health Communications Officer, or the County Chief Communications Officer. Read more at [Press & Media Inquiries](#) on the BHRS Intranet.

IV. Social Media and Websites

Social media accounts and presence are managed at the department and County Executive Office level. No individual BHRS work unit shall have their own social media account or website without the prior approval of the County Health Communications Officer and the County Chief



Communications Officer. It is preferred that social media be pursued through the existing department and County accounts and sites. The County has approved a [Social Media Policy](#).

All San Mateo County Health Divisions shall use the SMCHHealth.org public facing website and postings to this website are subject to the submission and approval process. Individual websites established for programs, events or other activities is expressly prohibited. No website or social media application shall have the County Seal or Logo, or a department/division logo upon it without the expressed permission of the County Health Communications Officer and the County Chief Communications Officer. Any unauthorized social media accounts or websites will be required to be taken down immediately until such time that approval may be secured, if at all. Any projects that incorporate a social media or website presence separate and apart from the department and County presence require prior approval before the project secures a contract or planning begins. Failure to secure approval shall result in immediate contract cancellation and the website or social media account taken down.

Please contact the BHRS Communications Specialist with questions about social media and websites or the use of these communications channels prior to beginning any project. [Find more information at Social Media Policy, Handbook & Work Plan.](#)

V. Photographs and Video Clips

Whenever a client, staff, or public member's image, voice, or personal story is used in a communication, regardless of if they are a County employee or not, an executed [photo/video release form](#) must be secured (see [Attachment B](#)). For large events, such as meetings, social events, or festivals, the posting of a [Crowd Photo Notice](#) in large print, poster size sign shall be placed at a prominent location such as the entrances or registration table (see [Attachment C](#)). It is highly encouraged to verbally provide notice at the introduction of speakers and throughout the program.

VI. Department Letterhead

Any letterhead created for use within BHRS shall be subject to the review and approval of the BHRS Communications Specialist and County Health Communications Officer prior to submitting final proof to a printing company or being put into use by staff. Currently, approved letterhead authorized for use by BHRS staff in the course of their work and in carrying out their responsibilities can be found [here](#) under the template section "Letterhead & Envelopes." Any work unit or program that currently does not have an approved letterhead posted to this section, must use the generic BHRS letterhead listed by location that is also posted to this same section. No other letterhead may be used that has not been approved and posted to this section.

The use of BHRS letterhead in support of a program or individual that represents the author as a County employee or on behalf of the organization is allowed but must never be seen to unfairly bias competitive processes. Employees retain their personal rights to support programs or individuals but must separate this support from their public role.

All letters of support for programs or individuals that are written on BHRS letterhead, or that



identify the author as a County employee, must be cleared by their respective members of the BHRS Executive Team that is in their chain of command, such as your Deputy Director, Medical Director, Assistant Director, or the Director. In some instances, the Executive Team Member may need to seek the advice of the County Attorney. Questions about the use of letterheads can be directed to the Compliance Officer.

VII. NON-COMPLIANCE

For all staff categories, persistent failure to follow policies and procedures as outlined above and in related policies may result in progressive discipline up to and including loss of job or termination of contract.

SIGNATURES

Approved: _____ *Signature on File*
Dr. Jei Africa, PsyD, FACHE
BHRS Director

Approved: _____ *Signature on File*
Scott Gruendl, MPA, CPCO
BHRS Assistant Director
Compliance Officer

REVISION HISTORY

Date of Revision	Type of Revision	Revision Description