[Water System Name]

# COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

[Water System Name] water district recognizes the importance of an open and responsive communications policy and strives to communicate in a professional manner, in accordance with Oklahoma laws regarding public information and data practices. This policy provides guidance for internal and external communication from the water district.

[Water System Name] water district also understands that system management and employees may comment on issues outside of their official role as water district employees. This policy provides guidance for employees when communicating as private citizens in matters pertaining to water district business.

# Internal Communications

All internal communications must comply with the Oklahoma Open Meeting Act (25 O.S. §301-314) and Oklahoma Open Records Act (51 O.S. §24A.1-24A.29). This means that no discussion of water district business may take place outside of official Board meetings. Internal communications must therefore be mainly informational.

Examples of internal communications include:

* Scheduling meetings or work sessions,
* Future agendas,
* Questions and materials to be discussed at future meetings,
* Information for general edification purposes.

Other internal communications, usually among water district management, project engineers, and board chairperson, are routine occurrences during water system operations. It is the board chair’s responsibility to inform all board members of pertinent developments in a timely fashion.

Examples of these developments may include:

* Questions, requests or complaints from water system customers,
* Notification and resolution of water system issues requiring immediate attention,
* Alerts about upcoming events or issues, which will require board discussion.

When invited, system operators will attend board meetings.

# External Communications

All information requests and notifications from other governmental entities, adjacent water systems, customers, and the general public will be routed through the water district board and/or manager. [Water System Name] water district will respond to these documents in writing within 30 business days, as appropriate.

### Regulatory Communications

All information requests, notifications, inspection forms, and enforcement actions from regulatory agencies received by [Water System Name] water district will be routed through the water district board and manager. [Water System Name] water district will respond to these documents in writing within the appropriate time period specified by the document.

### Notifications of Planned Outages

Prior to any planned outages or maintenance, customers must be provided advanced notice. This ensures that customers are able to adequately plan for this pause in service. Notice will be provided \_\_[time period]\_\_ prior to system shutoff.

### Media Communications

All requests for information from the media are to be routed through the water district board and/or manager. Media requests include anything intended to be published or viewable to others via television, radio, newspapers, newsletters, web sites, or other forms. When responding to media inquiries, water district staff should follow these steps:

* If you are certain that the information is already in the public record, provide the information and notify the board chairperson of the request.
* If you are uncertain if the information has been made public, or if the request is regarding information about district personnel, board members, potential litigation, or controversial issues, forward the request to the board chairperson, along with the media representative’s name, questions, deadline, and contact information. Advise the media requestor that the board chairperson will reply as soon as possible.

All [Water System Name] water district staff are responsible for communicating basic and routine information to the public, related to their specific job duties. Requests for information outside the scope of an individual’s job duties should be routed to the appropriate individuals or to the water district board chairperson.

All water district staff have a responsibility to help communicate accurate and timely information to the public in a professional manner. Any mistakes in reporting should be brought to the attention of the board chairperson or system manager.

# Additional Guidelines for Official and Non-Official Communications

It is important for members of the [Water System Name] water district board and staff to remember that personal communications may reflect on the water district, particularly if the individual is commenting on water district business. The following guidelines apply to personal communications including email, social media, letters to the editors, and personal endorsements:

* Remember that what you write is public and will be so for a long time. It may also be spread to large audiences. Use common sense when using email, web blogs or social media sites. Do not send or post controversial information that you would not want your superior or other employees to read, or that you might someday regret having seen in the newspaper.
* [Water System Name] Water District expects its representatives, employees, and contractors to be truthful, courteous, and respectful towards other board members, co-workers, vendors, employees, regulators, citizens, customers, and other stakeholders associated with the water district.
* If you communicate something related to [Water System Name] water district business in an unofficial capacity, identify yourself and use a disclaimer such as “I am a [Water System Name] water district member/employee/contractor/etc. However, these are my own opinions and do not represent those of [Water System Name] water district.”
* Do not tie social media account names or email addresses to [Water System Name] water district.

Questions related to this policy should be directed to [Water System Name] water district board chair.