



**St Vincent de Paul Society**  
NSW  
*good works*

## **Media Policy and Procedures**

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### **Version Control**

<b>Contact names</b>	<b>Role / position</b>	<b>Version number</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Review date</b>
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# Contents

Policy Statement.....	3
Introduction .....	3
Related Policy .....	3
1. POLICY.....	4
1.1 Philosophy and Aims.....	4
1.2 The Need for a Media Policy .....	4
1.3 Promoting Social Justice .....	5
1.4 Non-Party-Political.....	6
1.5 Promoting Community Awareness .....	6
1.6 Responding to Crises .....	6
2. PROCEDURES.....	7
2.1 Spokespeople.....	7
2.2 Clients and the Media.....	8
2.3 Media Relations.....	9
2.4 Fundraising and Communications.....	9
2.5 Government Relations.....	10
2.6 Advice and assistance.....	11
3. Effectiveness and review .....	11

# Policy Statement

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The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW:

- Engages with the media in a way that promotes the best interests of the Society without exposing the Society to unreasonable risk of unfavorable publicity arising from a misunderstanding of its position;
- Advocates on behalf of the most disadvantaged in our community especially on issues of social justice;
- Acknowledges the support of benefactors and encourages further donations , particularly in relation to specific appeals;
- Communicates with and informs the Catholic community of the works of the Society and the need for assistance with resources, both human and financial; and
- Follows strict informed consent and confidentiality protocols when putting Society members, volunteers or clients forward to the media. All client interviews are vetted by the Communications Manager and signed off by the General Manager of Fundraising and Communications in conjunction with State Council representatives.

## Introduction

This *Media Policies and Procedures* document consists of two parts. The first part deals with the policy, and the reasons why it is necessary to have one. The second part consists of the procedures that give effect to the policy.

## Related Policy

- Privacy and Confidentiality Policy 2010 (now under review)

## **1. POLICY**

### **1.1 Philosophy and Aims**

As a key player in service delivery and the policy debate, the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW (Society), has a responsibility to engage with the media. This is to ensure that its work is understood by the broader Australian society in which it operates.

The spiritual philosophy of the Society stresses the humility of its clients and members and, as such, could choose not to engage with the media. But the very public nature of much of the Society's work and its professional operation as a service provider means that such a closed approach to the media is not realistic and could in fact be harmful to the Society's reputation. A free media is the cornerstone of any democracy, and the Society needs to engage the opportunities that the media provides. Pierre Chouard writes that:

*Excessive modesty risks masking the extent of the responsibilities of a Society which has become providentially universal in so many countries of the world ... Therefore the Society of St Vincent de Paul as a whole and its members individually, feel themselves more clearly concerned with the new dimensions of humanity's world solidarity. The obstacles to social justice, the wickedness of hunger, the sufferings of under-development, interest all Vincentians.*

### **1.2 The Need for a Media Policy**

A large, high profile organisation operating in the modern world cannot be shy of the media. The media is a necessary component of the modern world and can be a powerful ally, or a powerful adversary, in the Society attaining its goals of bringing compassion and justice to the disadvantaged in our community.

In this, the communications age, the face of media is changing rapidly. Any notion that it can be 'controlled' by inaction is outdated and naïve. The Society must use the communications channels the media provides to inform and inspire the public about its mission and work.

A media policy is necessary to ensure that the Society uses the media in a consistent, timely and advantageous way.

The unique and complex structure of the Society is not necessarily understood by the media and the public. Unlike a private company, authority in the Society is not invested in a single figurehead. For this reason it is important that all representations to the media reflect a unified voice on the issues on which the Society chooses to comment. The Society must provide consistent and credible messages to the public via the media.

All media requests that pertain to anything other than straight-forward and non-contentious operational matters, that is, that involve an issue that could potentially impact on the Society's reputation, should be referred to the Communications Manager or the General Manager, Fundraising and Communications .

This *Media Policy and Procedures* sets guidelines about who is authorised to speak to the media and in what circumstances they should do so. Those representatives must be well acquainted with the Society's policies and position across a range of issues.

The policy also enables the Society's members, staff and volunteers to understand how the Society chooses to relate to the media and provides guidelines for dealing with the media.

### **1.3 Promoting Social Justice**

*The Rule*, Part 2, Article 33, on charity and justice says:

*“Justice consists of all people having what is their due, their right ... in all our charitable actions we should search for justice, and we are encouraged by the Church to do this, to play our part in creating a more equitable social order.”*

And the *Commentary* says:

*“Where we find injustice is due to social or economic conditions, the Society should, through its national and state councils, draw the conditions to the attention of the appropriate authorities, and try to alleviate them. We should be prepared to work with other agencies to do this, when it can be done without compromising the spirit of the Society.”*

*The Rule*, Part 1, p.19, 1(4) says:

*“... The Society is concerned with not only relieving need but with redressing situations that cause it ...”*

The Society is committed to working to change the conditions that cause suffering in our society. Its founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, was an outspoken agent of social change.

The Society acknowledges the importance and influence of the media in promoting social justice goals and drawing the attention of the public and policy makers to those areas where the Society sees a need for action for social justice.

### **1.4 Non-Party-Political**

The Society's role as a social justice advocate means that the Society will, at times, make comment in the media concerning issues of a political nature. Because the St Vincent de Paul Society is strictly non-party-political, such comments must focus on the issues and not party politics.

The Society has services that operate with the assistance of government at both state and federal levels, and it must stand outside the changing world of politics.

The Society can, and does, engage with governments to promote the needs of the people we assist. This may involve talking with the media to enable awareness or promotion of the Society's position on a particular issue, and it might be in a pro-active or reactive way. Only those authorised to do so can speak to the media on issues of a political nature.

### **1.5 Promoting Community Awareness**

For the Society to continue its many activities in helping disadvantaged members of the community, it relies largely on the generosity of donors and volunteers. For people to want to contribute, they must be aware of the work of the Society and have confidence in its competent and compassionate approach to those it assists.

Therefore the Society works via the media to promote the Society's services and goals in order to:

- recruit potential members and volunteers;
- foster trust and confidence in the Society;
- alert potential clients to the services it provides;
- influence policy makers; and
- raise awareness of its work to donors and potential donors.

### **1.6 Responding to Crises**

It is possible that the Society, by the nature of its work, could be affected by a crisis that will attract media attention. The Society must be able to respond in such situations. In the event of a crisis, please contact the General Manager, Fundraising and Communications or the Communications Manager as soon as possible.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. PROCEDURES**

This part of the *Media Policy and Procedures* provides procedures and guidelines for the application of the Society's media policy.

Determining who should speak to the media on a particular issue will be the responsibility of the Communications Manager in consultation with the General Manager, Fundraising and Communications and, as relevant, the State President, State Council Executive team, Diocesan Presidents, Diocesan Executive Officers, Regional Presidents, Centres Presidents and/or Service Managers. The decision will be made after considering the nature of the media request, the context of the request, and any sensitivities or risks associated with the request.

The Communications Manager will draw on their expertise to consider how this particular request sits in the current media, political and social landscape.

All media requests that pertain to more than straightforward operational matters, that is, that involve an issue that could potentially impact on the Society's reputation, should be referred to the Communications Manager or the General Manager, Fundraising and Communications at State Council.

## **2.1 Spokespeople**

### **State Council**

Either the State President, the CEO or a duly appointed representative will act as spokesperson to speak on any issue with significant public relations implications or where the Society has to defend itself against public criticism. Matters of national or state-wide importance should always be handled at State Council level. All matters of this nature will be referred, via the Communications Manager or General Manager, Fundraising and Communications to the State Council spokesperson in the first instance.

A State Council spokesperson will be the normal point of reference for any media communications relating to the Society in NSW, but where a matter is of purely local interest responsibility will be delegated to a local spokesperson.

### **Diocesan Council**

A Diocesan Council spokesperson, determined by the Diocesan President, will address non-contentious issues within the diocese.

### **Regional Council**

A Regional Council spokesperson will speak on non-contentious issues within the region, with the consent of the Regional President. If comment is sought on activities of local government, this should be referred to the State Council Communications Manager or General Manager, Fundraising and Communications.

## **Conference**

The Conference President should speak on local or parish matters only.

## **Special Works**

The appropriate spokesperson for a Special Work will be the State President, CEO, relevant Diocesan President, Diocesan Executive Officer or Service Manager, depending on the nature of the media request.

## **Vinnies Centres**

The Diocesan President, Diocesan Centres President or Executive Officer should speak on issues relating to Vinnies Centres. In certain cases when appointed by the President, the area manager can act as spokesperson.

## **2.2 Clients and the Media**

In certain circumstances it will be appropriate for Society clients to speak to the media. In order to protect the privacy of our clients, this is not to be considered routine. The Society will only agree to a request for a client to speak to the media if it is confident that the issue will be best served by the presentation of a 'human face' and only if strict consent protocols are followed.

### **Client Consent protocols:**

- Following a request from the media to interview a client on a particular issue, the Communications Manager or General Manager, Fundraising and Communications should be contacted immediately. They will then liaise with the relevant Diocesan President, Executive Officer or Service Manager.
- If agreed to, they will identify a suitable client known to them and personally ask them whether they would be willing to speak to the media.
- If the client says no, that refusal will be taken as absolute. If they agree, the Communications Manager will meet them, preferably in the presence of their Case Worker or Service Manager, to brief them fully about the implications of a media interview. This briefing will include informing them of the risks (including privacy and family concerns) and the possibility of 'false hope' that their story might not end up being used.
- The Communication Manager will assess whether the client is 'suitable talent', that is, whether they will be able to tell their story in a useful way that is likely to be used by the media.
- A synopsis of the client's background, story and an overview of the client consent interview highlighting any issues will be sent to the State President, CEO and the Diocesan President for approval.

- If appropriate, the Communications Manager or Service Manager will be present during any media interview with a client. The Communications Manager will debrief immediately with the client about the interview, and if they have any concerns will raise them with the journalist directly.
- At all times the Communications Manager will draw on their media expertise to assess whether it is in the Society's, and the individual client's best interests to participate in a particular media interview.
- At no time will any client be encouraged to participate in a media interview against their will, and without being fully informed and supported.

### ***2.3 Media Relations***

Media contact involving national or state-wide issues, or an issue with significant public relations implications or where the Society has to defend itself against public criticism should be directed through the Communications Manager or General Manager, Fundraising and Communications who will respond promptly with a whole-of-Society perspective of the request and can navigate contact with media, to ensure Society responses are well-considered and accurate.

The Communications Manager will brief the relevant spokesperson about the nature of the request, the context, and the appropriate key messages before they speak to the media.

Those who speak on behalf of the Society must not allow themselves to be pressured by media deadlines into making unguarded or inappropriate comments that might have damaging consequences.

### ***2.4 Fundraising and Communications***

The Fundraising and Communications team is responsible for ensuring that the Society's external communications follow a consistent pattern at all levels, and that they conform to the media policy of the Society. Incompatible statements by Society members inevitably compromise the message the Society is trying to give to the wider community and detract from its credibility.

The Fundraising and Communications team should be regarded as a resource to be used by all members of the Society who have dealings with the media. The Communications Manager or the General Manager, Fundraising and Communications should be informed immediately about media requests that deal with other than routine operational matters. .

## 2.5 Government Relations

It is inevitable that some of the policies of the federal and state governments will run counter to the policies of the Society. Because the Society is an advocate for the rights of the poor and marginalised, it has an obligation to challenge policies that are oppressive or unjust. Comment on matters relating to government policy is the prerogative of State Council through the State President or CEO. Other stakeholders within the Society should not become involved in political debate.

Those who speak on behalf of the Society must use every endeavor to ensure that criticisms are directed at the issues, and not at particular political parties or individuals. Expressions such as ‘the Federal Labor Government’, ‘the State Labor Government’, ‘the Coalition Government’, or ‘the ALP Government’ should never be used in statements by the Society. ‘The federal Government’ or ‘the NSW Government’ is acceptable.

In dealings with governments the Society should be seen to be speaking with one voice. Where Society statements challenge federal government policies applying in NSW, the Society’s National Council should be informed, if possible in sufficient time to provide input if it wants to. This is why all requests with political implications should be referred to the Communications or General Manager, Fundraising and Communications in the first instance.

## 2.6 Advice and assistance

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Contact Details</b>
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## 3. Effectiveness and review

The General Manager, Fundraising and Communications is responsible for the review of this policy every 12 months.