



Media and Public Relations Communications Policy

Effective Date: March 07, 2009

Revised Date: June 16, 2015

I. Policy Statement

It is the policy of The City of Pitt Meadows to:

- 1) Engage citizens, ideally through a two way dialogue, about the City's policies, programs, services and initiatives.
- 2) Consult and inform stakeholders when establishing or developing priorities, policies, programs and services in a timely, accurate and consistent manner.
- 3) Ensure that City staff and Council are visible, accessible and responsive to the citizens they serve.
- 4) Anticipate the needs of the community, Council and Administration for timely and relevant information.
- 5) Engage in a proactive communications program that uses a variety of formats and resources to accommodate diverse needs.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines to facilitate effective communications amongst City of Pitt Meadows personnel, Council, the general public and the media so they can understand and be aware of City issues, policy decisions and services. The guidelines support the development of an organizational framework to coordinate actions that provide channels for input and feedback.

Scope

The objectives of the corporate communications function are to:

- Coordinate communications activities across the organization so that we are working towards shared communication expectations, in support of Councils' wider strategic objectives.
- Provide support and advice to ensure that corporate communication activities are of a high quality, effective and that messaging is factual and consistent.



3. Exclusions

[This should identify when this policy would not apply, under what conditions or circumstances, or for which group of people.]

4. Policy

Definitions

Briefing Notes: A brief, factual written summary of information for Members of Council or Officials of the City or partner agencies.

Consultation: To seek advice or information. This may, where warranted, involve a formal consultation process designed to seek the views of citizens and community stakeholders or the public at large, including collecting and analyzing public input and feedback.

Crisis: A situation, present or future, or major issue that may disrupt service or impact on public trust in the City.

Emergency: An unusual situation that requires prompt action to limit damage to persons, property or the environment.

Media: Representatives of the print and electronic Media.

Media Advisory: A notice to the media to announce an upcoming Media event such as a news conference, a special meeting of City Council, or a photo opportunity.

Media Backgrounder: A document or set of materials that provides technical information or historical background and, when used, generally accompanies a Media Release or Media Advisory or Corporate Report.

Media Conference: A meeting of News Media representatives arranged for the purpose of making a statement, announcement or replying to questions from the Media.

Media Liaison: A communicator who facilitates Media relations and communication between the News Media and the appropriate spokesperson.

Media Release: A factual written summary of information issued to the Media for the purpose of making a statement or announcement or replying to questions from the Media.



Outside Boards and Agencies: Organizations recognized by the Corporation through the Budget process as an outside board or agency.

Plain Language: Effective communication that is clear, concise, relevant and easy to understand.

Public Events: An event arranged by the City directly, or in partnership, to release information, raise awareness, or to celebrate a civic milestone. Some of the most common include: award presentations, dedication ceremony, ground breaking, official opening, program launch, ribbon cutting, sod turning, major announcements.

Public Service Announcement: A brief factual written summary to draw attention to an event, program or resources offered to the public.

Public Statement: A statement made verbally or in writing by spokespersons or civic employees to the Media, collectively or individually.

Stakeholder: Any individual, group of individuals, elected representative or organization with a specific stake or interest in the outcome of a decision.

Confidentiality: In all communications, spokespersons and departments must comply with all legislated requirements regarding access and disclosure of information. The *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* extends access and privacy principles.

Copyright: Departments must comply with the *Copyright Act* to ensure the ownership rights associated with works subject to copyright are fully respected in all communications. Departments must maintain a record of authorizations to use copyright material.

Visual Identity: A clear and consistent visual identity assists the public in recognizing and accessing the policies, programs, services and initiatives of the City. To present a strong, unified, consistent identity, corporate communications will develop and update a *City of Pitt Meadows Visual Identity Manual*. The corporate logo is to be displayed on all applications, regardless of medium, for external and internal use. Use of the logo outside the corporation must be pre-approved.

Roles and Responsibilities

Mayor and Council:

The Mayor is the City's chief spokesperson, explaining Council policies, priorities and decisions to the public.



Administration:

- The Chief Administrative Officer is the chief administrative spokesperson..
- Requests for interviews should be referred to the Communications Department to arrange with either the Mayor or CAO..

Coordination:

The CAO's Office, through Corporate Communications, is responsible for strategic communication and coordination of the flow of information to the Media and the public, with the exception of public safety issues.

Corporate Communications, in partnership with Information Systems and with input from departments, manages the overall look and feel of the City's website and central sections. Corporate Communications will meet regularly with senior management to discuss major issues to facilitate communication planning.

Pitt Meadows Fire Services release information through their respective Public Information Officers and conduct their own Media relations.

Prohibitions

[Provide any examples of where actions are explicitly prohibited under the policy, e.g. an action related to the policy that may cause a conflict of interest or public embarrassment.]

Procedures and Guidelines

GUIDELINES

EXTERNAL CHANNELS

INFORMING CITIZENS

Information on the City's policies, programs, services and initiatives should be generally available to the public in a variety of formats, subject to the available resources.

Guidelines for Departments are as follows:

- a) Information is provided to the public by trained and knowledgeable staff.
- b) Service is timely, courteous and efficient.
- c) When information is unavailable, a prompt and clear explanation is provided.
- d) Information in all formats is well identified as being from the City of Pitt Meadows in accordance with the Visual Identity program.
- e) Published information is provided in Plain Language.



- f) A record of any published information is maintained and the published information includes the publication date.
- g) Information is available on the standard of service a department provides, including timelines for response to inquiries, mail and complaints.
- h) Information is available for review or on the website where it is needed by a citizen to use a service for which they are eligible, to inform citizens of risk(s) to health and safety, or to explain a major new policy, program, service or initiative.
- i) Copies of material may be subject to Fees and Charges incorporated into various by-laws.

MEDIA RELATIONS

The Media play an important role in providing information to the public on matters of civic interest.

Media inquiries, whether by phone, e-mail, letter, or in person, should be addressed promptly to accommodate publication or broadcast deadlines, wherever possible.

Corporate Communications and/or departmental communicators ensure that Media requests, particularly for interviews or technical information, are directed to knowledgeable staff designated as spokesperson(s) for their department or division.

Guidelines for Departments are as follows:

- a) Respect the authority and responsibility of City Council, who's Members are entitled to learn about proposed policy initiatives or major new programs, services or initiatives before information about them is released to the Media.
- b) Consult with Corporate Communications when preparing campaigns or strategies that require participation by the Mayor or Members of Council, or when preparing a response to a Media inquiry that could have implications for the Mayor or Members of Council.
- c) Keep confidential information that is related to matters before the courts, in closed Council or under the jurisdiction of another authority such as the Police.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

In a crisis, coordinated communication must be used to maintain or restore confidence. Departments must advise the CAO's Office and Corporate Communications as soon as they identify an event or situation occurring in or affecting their department that may attract widespread interest to the Media. Communications staff will contact the CAO's Office and coordinate a response including designating a spokesperson after consultation with the CAO's Office and the appropriate department.

Emergency Communications

The City of Pitt Meadows Emergency Plan details the protocol for Emergency Media communications.

PUBLIC EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS



Public Events are arranged to communicate about major developments or to release information that is new and important to municipal services, programs and initiatives and especially to public health, safety and essential services.

Guidelines for the corporate communications/special events function are as follows:

- a) Determine whether the City will arrange, or participate in an event, or announcement and the extent of that involvement.
- b) Prepare a Public Event or Media Conference Plan to ensure well-managed communication. The plan should take into account appropriate recognition of partners and funders. Such recognition may include use of partner or funder corporate names and logos.
- c) Provide in advance an agenda or copy of the Public Event or News Conference Plan and Briefing Notes to Council representative(s) taking part, together with an advance copy of any Media Advisory, Release or Background.
- d) Coordinate participation through Corporate Communications when multiple departments, community partners, and/or other levels of government are involved, or as requested by the Mayor or CAO.

WEBSITE, INTERNET & ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

The Internet and other electronic communication are important tools, which allow 24-hour access to information and support two-way communication.

Guidelines for Departments are as follows:

- a) Make publications of interest to citizens that are widely distributed in paper copy available on the website as soon as possible after distribution to the public.
- b) Incorporate mechanisms for receiving and acknowledging public inquiries and feedback.
- c) Maintain a record of information posted to the City's website prior to changes.
- d) Establish ongoing updates and regular reviews of departmental pages and sub-sites so that information on policies, programs, services, initiatives and related third-party links is accurate and easy to understand.
- e) Develop and follow standards for the look and feel of the City's website.
Links to Third Party Sites

This type of link, which will generally open a new browser, is provided for the convenience of the visitor. The City will only provide links to external sites if the content enhances the service or information provided by the City. Links from, advertising on, groups in the community directory and Councillor information are all covered under City Policy CO7. The inclusion of the link does not imply endorsement by the City and the City accepts no responsibility for the content found on any third party website. Links are subject to the approval of appropriate department and may be removed without notice at the discretion of the department. Factors affecting approval or removal may include business case considerations, an assessment of the needs of the intended audience, the relevance to the City or appropriate department and technical or legal considerations.



CONSULTATIONS

Open and effective communication is the key to successful public consultations.

Guidelines for Departments are as follows:

- a) Inform citizens and stakeholders about opportunities to participate in public consultation and citizen engagement processes (such as surveys, town hall meetings and committees). This may be done through the City's website, Reports to Citizens, letters of invitation, posted notices, notices to the Media, advertising and other formats normally used by departments.
- b) Clearly identify public information materials as being from the City.
- c) Inform participants, in summary form, of the results of the public consultation and outcomes. This may be done through the City's website, reports to Citizens, letters, posted notices, notices to the Media, advertising and other formats normally used by departments.
- d) Collaborate with Corporate Communications who provide support and advice to management staff who plan, implement and evaluate public consultation processes. Corporate Communications and/or departmental communicators prepare and help to implement communication plans and strategies.
- e) Prepare Public Consultation plans for any significant changes in service levels, notify Council in advance of the Consultation plan and report back to Council on the results.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Guidelines for Departments are as follows:

- a) In order to assure quality service that meets the needs of the community, it is necessary to have trained and knowledgeable staff providing information services to the public.
- b) Service provided should be timely, courteous, fair, efficient and offered with regard for the privacy, convenience and needs of the public.
- c) A variety of new and traditional methods of communication are used to fulfill the needs of the public including multiple formats to accommodate persons with disabilities or where English is the second language, wherever practical.
- d) Information is available on standards of service the City provides to the public, including timelines for responding to inquiries, mail and complaints.
- e) Opportunities are available for the public to provide feedback on major policies, services and initiatives and that feedback is carefully considered in reviews to help make improvements.
- f) Useful, timely, accurate, clear consistent and complete information is provided to the public.

Plain Language

Guidelines for Departments are as follows:

- a) Ensure clarity and consistency of information, plain language and proper grammar usage.
- b) Use an appropriate and standard type style with a font size of 12 or larger for ease of reading, wherever possible.
- c) Use bold text to highlight key points.
- d) Have adequate white space and ample margins.
- e) Use graphics to accompany text wherever possible.



- f) Avoid writing far above a grade seven level.
- g) Use simple words where feasible. If a technical term or acronym is used, ensure that a definition is provided.
- h) Instructions should be positive rather than negative
- i) Where possible and practical, have a member of the intended audience review and comment on a draft version

INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Open, two-way communication, between Council and Administration and among Directors/Supervisors and Employees is vital to the effective operation of the Corporation and to achieve our Mission and Goals. Internal communication is an integral part of any Corporate Communications Plan. Within our corporation we have committed to an open/honest culture; open door policies; no retribution for bringing issues forward and an environment that encourages employees to learn about and contribute to the broader organization not just the department they work in. The City recognizes that employees are ambassadors for the City and, as such, will attempt to provide employees with basic information to respond to general public issues while they are out in the community.

Council & Administration

Corporate Reports are the formal means of communication between Administration and Council. Clear, concise, relevant reports provide Members of Council with the information they need to make decisions on municipal policies, programs, services and initiatives.

Members of Council bring forward items for the Committee Agendas in accordance with the Procedural Guidelines.

Public announcements must be distributed concurrently to Members of Council, except in urgent situations affecting public health, safety or danger to persons or property, where every attempt will be made to distribute as soon as possible after distribution to the Media.

Councillor Inquiries

Councillor inquiries, whether by phone, e-mail, letter, or in person, must be addressed promptly and formal inquiries are managed by the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer. All reports to Council will be signed off by the Chief Administrative Officer. The primary point of contact between Council and the administration is through the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer.

For informal inquiries, Directors are available to ensure that information requests, particularly for technical information, are directed to knowledgeable staff designated as a spokesperson for their department or division. Where the nature and scope of the inquiry is unclear, or a conclusive response is not brief and direct, departments should seek clarification by responding to the Councillor using the same method of communication. Where an inquiry is expected to involve detailed research on



information that is not generally available, the Councillor may be referred to a more formal inquiry process and may require a reply or resolution by all of Council.

Where a response is provided to an inquiry that is expected to attract media attention or become part of a Committee Agenda, the response shall be provided to all Members of Council.

Directors/Supervisors & Employees

Effective internal communication is a shared management responsibility, led by the CAO and Directors with support from Corporate Communications.

Directors and supervisors must communicate with employees openly, often and, wherever possible, before information is made public.

To inform and engage employees, a variety of formats must be used, as appropriate and as resources permit, to reach the diverse audience across the Corporation. This may include the City's Intranet, a mix of published materials including but not limited to memoranda, notices, employee newsletters, paystub stuffers and electronic bulletins, oral presentations and staff meetings.

The needs of all employees should be considered including outside workers who may not have access to electronic information. To ensure consistency and effective use of corporate communication channels and formats, departments should consult Corporate Communications for support and advice before undertaking corporate-wide communication initiatives.