

CITY OF WHITEHORSE
COUNCIL POLICY

POLICY: **COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

PURPOSE: To provide guidelines for a Communications Policy.

AUTHORITY: Council Resolution # 2010-04-07 dated February 22, 2010

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

POLICY STATEMENT

It is the policy of the corporation of the City of Whitehorse to.

1. Inform citizens about the City's policies, programs, services and initiatives through communication that is timely, accurate and consistent.
2. Consult and inform stakeholders when establishing or developing priorities, policies programs and services.
3. Ensure the City is visible and responsive to the citizens it serves.
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 to accommodate diverse needs reflect the diversity of the community.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines to facilitate communication that is coordinated and consistent as well as open and responsive.

GOAL

To share information and provide opportunities for feedback about the programs and services of the City of Whitehorse through the development and implementation of a comprehensive communication plan.

OBJECTIVES PERFORMANCE TARGETS

1. Identify the components of a communication plan and enhance infrastructure, where required to support implementation and maintenance of the plan.
2. Increase opportunities for information sharing and feedback from the community regarding the programs and services of the City of Whitehorse.
3. Develop and implement a policy related to internal and external communication.

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4. Increase the variety of information available to the public on the City website
5. Establish standards for communications with the public, council and City staff.
6. Department Managers and Directors are to keep the City Manager's office informed of any issue, or matters including but not limited to those that relate to corporate or politically sensitive matters, health/safety, legal, fiscal matters and to communicate to the City Manager's office as appropriate, in a timely manner.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

1. Community participation is a communication activity, and council and staff should play a strategic role in this regard. A communications plan is to be integrated into community participation activities.
2. Council and staff promote the community participation program as they interact with all stakeholders and role-players for the success of the program.
3. Communication should be involved in all three stages – pre, during and post – of public participation.
4. Council and staff should be made aware of the Communication Policy to understand the rest of the communication environment.

CONFIDENTIALITY

In all communications, spokespersons and departments must comply with all legislated requirements regarding access and disclosure of information.

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, departments must display the corporate logo in all applications, regardless of medium, for external and internal use.

DEFINITIONS

Administrative Report: A factual representation of the issue's history, past decisions, related research, alternatives and analysis of the alternatives and recommendations for council consideration.

Briefing Notes: A brief, factual written summary of information for members of council or Administration.

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.

Corporate Communications Network: A team comprised of Corporate Communications and departmental communicators who meet regularly to train, network and provide two-way input on communication plans.

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

Departmental Communicator: City Manager or Staff assigned by the City Manager, Division Director or designate to facilitate departmental communications such as media liaison, communication planning and implementation and to participate in the Communications Plan.

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.

Press 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.

Press 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, or other means, 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, dinners, conference greetings, dedication ceremony, ground breaking, official opening, program launch, ribbon cutting, sod turning, and major announcements.

Public Service Announcement: A brief factual written summary to draw attention to an event, program or resource 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.

Technical Briefing: A meeting involving media and/or members of council and the public arranged for the purpose of providing technical details of a specific project, initiative or program.

GUIDELINES TO 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 availability of resources.

Guidelines for City Departments are as follows.

1. Information is provided to the public by knowledgeable staff.
2. Service is timely, courteous and efficient.
3. When information is unavailable, a prompt and clear explanation is provided.
4. Information in all formats is well identified as being from the City of Whitehorse in accordance with the Visual Identity policy and program.
5. Published information is provided in Plain Language.
6. A record of any published information is maintained and the published information includes the publication date.
7. Information is available on the standard of service a department provides, including timelines for response to inquiries, mail and complaints.
8. 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. Copies of material are subject to the Fees and Charges Bylaw.

MEDIA RELATIONS

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

When contacted by the media, whether by phone, e-mail, letter, or in person, staff should address inquiries promptly when received to accommodate publication or broadcast deadlines, wherever possible, subject to the policies and guidelines established by City Council.

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.

In-house media training may be provided to both new and existing staff upon request or if deemed necessary with respect to the nature of their position.

Guidelines for Departments:

Respect the authority and responsibility of City Council, whose 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.

Consult with the City Manager's office when preparing campaigns or strategies that involve interaction with the public and/or 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.

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Keep confidential information that is related to matters before the courts, or under the jurisdiction of another authority such as the Police Services Board.

Crisis Communications

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

Emergency Communications

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

PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS, EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

Departments must:

1. Contact the City Manager's Office prior to the arrangement or participation in a public event or announcement.
2. Liaise with the City Manager's Office in the creation of a Public Event or Media Conference Plan to ensure well-managed delivery. (should have format for plan in appendix)
3. Communication plans should take into account appropriate recognition of partners and funders. Such recognition may include use of partner or funder corporate names and logos.
4. Provide in advance an agenda or copy of the Public Event or News Conference Plan to City Manager
5. Briefing Notes to council representative(s) taking part, together with an advance copy of any Media Advisory, Release or Backgrounder.
6. Coordinate participation through City Manager when multiple departments, community partners, and/or other levels of government are involved, or as requested by the Mayor.

INTERNET & ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

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

1. 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.
2. Remove out of date content from the City website as soon as practicable and include uploading and removal dates in communications planning.

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3. Incorporate mechanisms for receiving and acknowledging public inquiries and feedback.
4. Maintain a record of information posted to the City's website prior to changes.
5. 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 are accurate and easy to understand.
6. Follow the standards for the look and feel of the City's website.
7. Provide a detailed analysis of any communications initiative involving social media (such as Facebook) and seek direction and approval from the City Manager prior to the development and implementation of the initiative.

E-mail Policy

The inclusion of e-mail provisions has been incorporated into this policy in an effort to better manage the quality and quantity of corporate e-mail messages and to reduce the data management burden on city systems.

E-mail is a primary internal and external communication tool for the City of Whitehorse. While it is recognized that employees have by and large been responsible in the use of this tool there is also the recognition of the growing incidence of "internal spam" (e-mails not pertaining to City operations or not relevant to the vast majority of recipients to whom the message is sent). These types of e-mails can represent a communications burden on fellow employees and the corporation as a whole.

Employees are reminded that any message communicated is corporate property, can be traced back to the City of Whitehorse and may be subject to Freedom of Information and Privacy Act requests.

Corporate e-mail is a business tool, its reasonable, incidental use for personal purposes is acceptable so long as it does not interfere with staff productivity and/or pre-empt any business activity.

Employees should endeavour to follow all City e-mail guidelines as laid out.

The following is a list of e-mail user guidelines:

1. E-mails must contain a full signature including organization name, position, title and contact information.
2. Carefully consider the intended audience, length, tone, formality and format for all e-mail messages.
3. A message received which is intended for another person should be returned to sender and/or forwarded to the intended recipient if known.
4. The creation of single topic messages should be done whenever possible.
5. The sending or forwarding of "joke" e-mails is strongly discouraged and the inclusion of profane, libellous or criminal material in e-mails is not permitted.
6. "All Employees" e-mails (e-mails addressed to every staff member in the organization) are to be sent by management, human resources and communications staff only. Employees seeking to send e-mails out to all staff are required to receive their manager's

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authorization. In lieu of all employee e-mails staff members are encouraged to use specified distribution lists relevant to their department.

Links to Third Party Sites

This type of link, which will generally open a new browser, is provided for the convenience of the visitor. Inclusion of the link does not imply endorsement by the corporation and the City accepts no responsibility for the content found on any third party website, which include links to private businesses. Links are subject to the approval of the City Manager or appropriate Divisional Director 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.

Departments must.

1. 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 a combination of mediums including the City's website, Reports to Citizens, letters of invitation, posted notices, notices to the Media, advertising and other formats normally used by departments.
2. Clearly identify public information materials as being from the City.
3. 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.
4. Collaborate as appropriate with the City Manager's office which provides support and advice to management staff that plan, implement and evaluate public consultation processes. The departmental communicators co-ordinate with the City Manager's office in the preparation and delivery of communication plans and strategies.
5. 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.
6. Consult with City Manager's office as appropriate.

ADVERTISING

The Corporation's logo shall appear on all public notices and advertisements in the local media and/or web sites.

COMMUNICATION PLANNING

Communication planning must be part of the annual business planning process and evaluation of communications must be part of business operations.

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The Corporate Communications Plan integrates the City's mission and goals, identifies target audiences, both internal and external, as well as strategies, objectives, tools, messages, responsibilities, resources required, evaluation.

In the implementation of communication plans, external partnering arrangements should be considered including appropriate recognition and the inclusion of themes relative to the partnership.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Open, two-way communication between council and administration and among City Manager, Directors, Managers, Supervisors and Employees is vital to the effective operation of the corporation and to achieve the mission and goals of the corporation. Internal communication is an integral part of the corporate communications plan.

Council and Administration

Administrative 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 City 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.

Council Member Inquiries

Council member inquiries, whether by phone, e-mail, letter, or in person, must be addressed promptly.

Formal inquiries are managed by the City Manager and subject to appropriate consultation with the Directors and Department Managers.

For informal Inquiries, the City Manager, Clerk, Senior Management Team, and/or departmental communicators are available to ensure that information requests, particularly for technical information, are directed to knowledgeable staff designated as a spokesperson for their department. 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 City Manager. Where an inquiry is expected to involve detailed research on information that is not generally available, the council member may be referred to the formal inquiry process and may require a resolution of council.

Where a response is provided to an inquiry that is expected to attract media attention or become part of a council or Committee Agenda, the response shall be provided to all members of council, City Manager, Directors and Managers.

Managers/Supervisors & Employees

Effective internal communication is a shared management responsibility, led by the City Manager's office and Directors with support from Administrative Services.

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Directors, Department Managers 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 a City Intranet, a mix of published materials including but not limited to memoranda, notices, employee newsletter and electronic bulletins, oral presentations and staff meetings.

The needs of all employees should be considered including outside workers who do not have access to electronic information and employees who work across the City. To ensure consistency and effective use of Corporate communication channels and formats.

Departments may consult Corporate Services for support and advice before undertaking corporate-wide communication initiatives.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Council and senior staff responsibilities regarding the Corporate Communications Plan are consistent with the "Accountability / Transparency: Roles and Responsibilities for council and Senior Staff" Policy document.

Mayor and Council:

The Mayor is normally the City's chief spokesperson, explaining policies, priorities and decisions to the public, unless otherwise designated to another member of council or the City Manager.

The Mayor is normally the chief spokesperson for decisions approved by City Council and for the City as a Corporation unless another member of council is designated.

Committee Chairs are normally the chief spokespersons for matters dealt with under the jurisdiction of their particular committee unless another member of council is designated.

On occasion, council may designate an individual member of council as spokesperson on a particular issue.

Administration:

City Manager, Directors: The City Manager is the primary administrative spokesperson. Divisional Directors are normally the spokespersons for programs, services and initiatives they administer unless otherwise directed by the City Manager.

Legal, Personnel:

Inquiries regarding pending litigation, or involving a significant exposure to litigation, should be directed to the Director of Administrative Services or designate. Inquiries regarding personnel-related information should be directed to the City Manager or designate, and subject to contacting the Director of Administrative Services in terms of potential insurance liability, and the respective Director having jurisdiction over the matter

Election: Inquiries regarding City election and campaign issues should be directed to the City Clerk with the exception of election sign issues, which should be directed to By-law Enforcement.

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Designated Spokespersons: Directors may designate departmental spokespersons on assignment-by-assignment basis including technical experts to communicate about policies, programs, services and initiatives they are familiar with and for which they have responsibility. As well, Directors should appoint Media and Community Liaisons for major construction or planning projects.

Departmental Staff: Staff may provide background information that is publicly available. Requests for interviews should be referred to the appropriate Manager or Director.

Coordination

The City Manager's office is responsible for strategic communication and coordination of the flow of information to the Media and the public with the exception of immediate public safety issues and information publicly available.

The Director of Administrative Services, in partnership with Information Systems and with input from departments, manages the overall look and feel of City's website and central sections. The Clerk will discuss with senior management major issues to facilitate communication planning.

Departments are responsible for compiling and sending program service-specific information with the City Manager's office or designate for the creation of public information such as news releases or information that is to be posted to the City's website. Department Heads and/or their designate should coordinate communication with the City Manager's office for the creation of public information content. Training in communications and the City's communications policies must be available staff members acting as City spokespersons to ensure they are effective communicators.

City Services Boards, Outside Boards and Agencies are not subject to this policy. They may use the policy for guidance as required.

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