



Policy Manual

Section:	Office of the CAO, Communications
Subject:	Communications and Media Relations
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Policy Statement

The Corporation of the Town of Essex (the "Town") is committed to open and transparent communication that enhances the public's knowledge and understanding of municipal affairs. The Town shall make every effort to communicate with the public in a meaningful, timely and accurate manner using a variety of accepted tools, including traditional and online communication tools.

Purpose

The Communications and Media Relations Policy is intended to protect and promote the image of the Town of Essex, while ensuring accurate, informative, consistent and professional messaging.

This policy is designed to clearly designate corporate spokespersons and set general guidelines in relation to corporate communications, public statements made to media sources, and the management of media inquiries.

This policy aims to ensure that all employees authorized to communicate on behalf of the Town provide appropriate, accurate and consistent information that represents municipal policies, services and values.

Scope

This policy applies to all Town of Essex employees, firefighters, temporary and contract employees, appointees to agencies, boards, commissions and committees, volunteers, and any individual retained by the Town to act on the Town's behalf.

In the event of an emergency, the communications protocols as outlined in the Town's Emergency Response Plan will supersede this policy.

This policy does not apply to the Mayor and members of Essex Town Council, as they are governed by the Code of Conduct for Members of Council and Employees, which appears as Schedule "B" to Transparency and Accountability By-law 861.

This policy shall be reviewed every three years from the date it becomes effective, or sooner at the direction of the Chief Administrative Officer.

Definitions

Confidential Information refers to information that is not generally available to the public and is used in the course of our operations. It includes sensitive information and personal information about employees, taxpayers, customers, volunteers, vendors, suppliers, elected officials, citizens, and other stakeholders.

Intellectual Property describes a set of intangible rights held by musicians, authors, artists and inventors over ownership of their intellectual and creative output. It legally excludes others from using intellectual property without prior written permission. Intellectual property may have commercial value and encompasses the areas of Copyright, Trademarks, Patents and Design.

Online Communications refers to the sharing of information for any purpose through the use of the Internet, including website development and maintenance, online advertising, and social networking. In particular, social networking tools, like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, focus on building online communities of people who share interests through two-way communication.

Public Relations or Corporate Communications, as defined by the Canadian Public Relations Society, is "the strategic management of relationships between an organization and its diverse publics, or stakeholders, through the use of communication, to achieve mutual understanding, realize organizational goals, and serve the public interest."

A **Public Statement** is a declaration made by a Town of Essex employee on behalf of the employer, in any public forum, that relates to the Town of Essex, its employees and/or its

business and includes statements made in person, by email, via blogs, online forums or discussions, social networking sites, and elsewhere in the public record.

Social Media describes the tools that people use to build online profiles and share content, opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives in an online environment. These tools are also called **Social Networking Tools**.

Traditional Communications refers to the sharing of information for any purpose through the use of commonly used or traditional tools, such as media relations (releases, advisories, interviews), print media (brochures, posters, advertisements), or broadcast media (radio and television).

Responsibility

The Chief Administrative Officer is responsible for ensuring compliance with this policy.

The Manager of Communications is responsible for monitoring this policy and the procedures outlined below.

Directors and Senior Managers are responsible for drafting and/or assembling relevant information related to public relations and media communications for their respective departments.

The Manager of Communications is responsible for scrutinizing, editing, and approving public relations and media communications, including releases, advisories, newsletters, flyers, brochures, guides, booklets, website content, social media postings, and any other print or non-print materials intended for public or media consumption that are, at times, assembled and/or created by others.

The Manager of Communications is responsible for providing general information to media outlets and the public at large, and directs media inquiries on subject-specific matters to authorized spokespersons with subject-specific expertise.

The Chief Administrative Officer, Directors and Senior Managers speak to issues in their areas of responsibility and authorize subject matter experts to respond to media inquiries as authorized spokespersons.

Authorized spokespersons respond promptly to media inquiries and provide factual information on programs, activities and initiatives that relate specifically to their area of responsibility.

Employees are responsible for directing media inquiries to their Director, Manager and/or the Manager of Communications to facilitate a timely and accurate response. Where inquiries are

specific to Essex Fire and Rescue events, services or investigations, employees shall direct inquiries to the Fire Chief, Deputy Fire Chief, or designate.

Contravention of this policy and related policies may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

Guidelines

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

Subject to the guidelines established in this policy, media inquiries, whether by phone, email, letter, online forum, social networking site, or in person, should be addressed promptly whenever possible.

Employees who become aware of issues that may result in media scrutiny are to advise the Chief Administrative Officer and/or the Manager of Communications, with notice to the appropriate Director or Manager.

Media Engagement

The Chief Administrative Officer shall be the chief staff spokesperson and may speak on behalf of the municipality regarding all functions of the organization.

Only authorized spokespersons may speak on behalf of the Town through any medium.

Authorized spokespersons commenting on Town business, regardless of medium, must identify themselves as Town of Essex employees.

The Manager of Communications, in consultation with the Chief Administrative Officer, Directors and Senior Managers, shall maintain a list of pre-approved spokespersons authorized to make public statements related to their areas of accountability and responsibility. The list shall be updated annually or as required. Other approvals may be granted on a case-by-case basis.

The Manager of Communications shall serve as the primary media liaison, directing media inquiries on subject-specific matters to appropriate authorized spokespersons.

In the absence of an authorized spokesperson, the Manager of Communications may speak on behalf of the Town when appropriate subject knowledge, information and/or support are available.

Authorized spokespersons are to remain neutral and factual, speaking only to their area of expertise.

Authorized spokespersons shall accurately and adequately communicate decisions of Council without providing personal opinions.

Media training shall be made available to all corporate spokespersons through the Manager of Communications.

Whenever possible, media releases shall be issued to members of Town Council in advance of being released to the media.

Corporate responses to media stories, comments, blogs and discussion forums about Town-related business shall be coordinated through the Manager of Communications.

Confidentiality

In all communications, employees may not disclose confidential, proprietary or sensitive information related to the Town, its business and affairs, employees, volunteers, vendors, suppliers, elected officials, citizens, or other stakeholders.

Copyright

In all communications, employees must comply with intellectual property laws, including the Copyright Act, to ensure the ownership rights associated with works subject to copyright are fully respected. There may be legal ownership in text, images, photographs, video footage, sound recordings, graphics, logos, artwork, photographs, publications or music created by others. Copyright law requires prior written permission from the copyright owner before reproducing, publishing or posting images, text or videos in any medium, including social media. Departments shall maintain a record of authorizations obtained to use copyrighted material. For clarification or assistance, consult the Manager of Communications.

Visual Identity

A clear and consistent visual identity assists the public in recognizing and accessing the Town's policies, programs, services and initiatives. To present a strong, unified, consistent identity, staff shall adhere to the Town of Essex Graphic Standards Policy and display the corporate logo in an approved fashion in all communications, regardless of medium, for internal and external use. For clarification or assistance, consult the Manager of Communications.

Plain Language

Whenever possible, plain language that is clear, concise, relevant and easy to understand shall be used in all communications.

Communications Planning

When preparing campaigns, strategies, events or initiatives that will include a public relations or media engagement component, consultation with the Manager of Communications is essential.

To help ensure the best and most positive results, and to meet media deadlines and secure necessary approvals, departments and committees using corporate communications or seeking media engagement shall provide sufficient advance notice to the Manager of Communications.

For media releases, advisories, press conferences and advertising, advance notice of 5 to 10 business days is needed.

For public events and publishing services, early and regular consultation with the Manager of Communications is expected.

The Manager of Communications shall, upon request, assist with the preparation of speaking notes, briefing notes and fact sheets.

References and Related Documents

Other applicable policies and legislation include but are not limited to the following:

- Copyright Act
- Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act
- Town of Essex Code of Conduct for Members of Council and Employees
- Town of Essex Computer Data Sharing, Internet and Email Use Policy
- Town of Essex Corporate Graphic Standards Policy (in development)
- Town of Essex Emergency Response Plan
- Town of Essex Media Inquiries Procedure
- Town of Essex Respectful Workplace Policy
- Town of Essex Workplace Harassment Policy