

Policy

POLICY TITLE: COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

POLICY NO.: COM-16-01

RESOLUTION: 024-14

EFFECTIVE DATE: 2014-01-22

DEPARTMENT RESPONSIBLE: Administration

NEXT REVIEW DATE: -

POLICY STATEMENT:

The MD is committed to providing the public with timely, clear and accurate information about the MD's priorities, policies, programs, services, events and emergencies.

The MD shall employ a variety of ways and means to communicate, and shall provide information in the most appropriate formats to accommodate diverse needs while respecting both privacy and individual rights.

PURPOSE:

The primary purpose of this policy is to ensure that communications across the MD are well coordinated, effectively managed, and responsive to the information needs of residents.

This policy is designed to ensure that all officials and employees of the MD understand the procedures in communicating and are confident in their roles.

Communicating with residents is a key function of the MD, involving officials and employees at all levels. This policy serves as a guide for MD Administration with:

- Informing and serving residents
- Listening to residents
- Communicating clearly and professionally
- Communicating in emergencies
- Clearly identifying programs of the MD
- Delivering coordinated communications
- Communicating with MD Administration
- Making information available electronically
- Communicating through the media (Council; MD Spokespeople)
- Advertising MD policies, programs, and services
- Entering partnerships
- Retaining copyright

POLICY:

1. Informing and serving residents

The MD is committed to providing residents with information about priorities, policies, programs and services. To assure a quality of service that meets the information needs of all residents, the MD strives to ensure that:

- a. Trained and knowledgeable staff provide information services to the public;
- b. Service is timely, courteous, fair, efficient and offered with respect for the privacy, safety, convenience, and needs of the public;
- c. An appropriate variety of new and traditional methods of communication are used to accommodate the needs of a diverse public;
- d. MD programs and services are clearly listed on the MD website and presented in MD publications;
- e. Information requests or inquiries from the public and media are responded to promptly, and as easily as possible, within the parameters of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*;
- f. Up-to-date information about the MD's plans, programs and performance is available – including posting plans and reports on the MD website; and
- g. Communications activities, processes and expenditures are assessed on a regular basis to identify areas for improvement and to make adjustments as needed.

2. Listening to residents

Effective communication programs address the needs and interests of residents. The MD is committed to consultation and provides ongoing opportunities for residents to provide feedback and input on issues that concern them. The MD encourages input on an ongoing basis through such mechanisms as Website e-mail inquiry systems, social media sites, traditional print/telephone correspondence and face-to-face dialogue. To promote two-way communication, MD materials provide residents with a phone number, mailing, and/or Internet address for more information or input.

On particular issues and topics, residents are sometimes invited to participate in public consultations. Each consultation provides opportunities for residents to give feedback, ranging from , town hall meetings or open houses to surveys (printed or online), or individual submissions.

Current and past public consultations may be listed on the MD website or standalone microsite, making it convenient for residents to provide input and acquire information, including consultation results.



3. Communicating clearly and professionally

The MD is committed to making it easier for residents to understand and use MD information. Information about policies, programs and services must be professional, clear, relevant, accurate, easy to understand and useful.

To ensure clarity and consistency of information, the MD uses plain language in communicating with the public, as well as internally. To assist staff in writing materials that are easy to understand, free of jargon and appropriate for the intended audience, external communications resources are sometimes utilized.

In an effort to ensure appropriate messages reach the target audiences and are delivered in a clear and professional manner, departments may work collaboratively with external communications resources.

4. Communicating in emergencies

Effective communication is key in times of crisis or emergency. The MD's priority is to communicate information that will protect the health, safety, security and property of residents. The goal is to ensure residents receive accurate, timely and relevant information designed to help prevent, mitigate, respond to or recover from an emergency.

Although the lead communications agency may vary depending on the nature and scale of the threat, the important role communications plays in responding to an emergency or crisis remains the same. The Communications Coordinator has the lead responsibility for public communications within the emergency response plan in place for the MD.

Together with its external communications resources, the MD manages emergency communications via:

- The *Emergency Broadcast Mode* of the municipal Website
- Social media channels including Facebook and Twitter
- Local media channels including radio and newspaper
- Postings on Community Kiosk boards and digital signs

Several government agencies at the regional, national, provincial or local level may be involved in responding to an emergency or crisis. Co-operation with others such as industry or community leaders and non-governmental organizations may also be required. In the event that an outside agency assumes legal responsibility for the management of an emergency situation, the MD will seek a documented release of responsibility.

The MD recognizes the need to be proactive in communicating to its residents and staff both in advance of an emergency event and during the height of any crisis to ensure they remain well informed. To meet this priority, a



strategy to deliver emergency communications in a way that is credible, reliable, timely, consistent, and accurate is outlined in the MD's *Emergency Communications Procedure*.

5. Clearly identifying programs and services of the MD

A clear and consistent municipal identity is required to help the public in recognizing, accessing and assessing the facilities, programs, and services provided through the MD. To maintain a recognizable and unified municipal identity throughout the MD, all departments follow the *Municipal Identity Guidelines*.

The *Municipal Identity Guidelines* includes the MD logo, wordmark, *Rugged & Real* tagline, and proprietary photography library.

6. Delivering coordinated communications

Communications is a responsibility of the Communications Team that is supported by each department. Departments are expected to integrate communications priorities into their annual business and budget planning processes in consultation with the Communications Coordinator.

Departments support the MD's municipal communication efforts by:

- a. Reflecting MD priorities, key themes and messages in communication plans and strategies;
- b. Working collaboratively with other departments to develop communication plans and strategies;
- c. Providing communication plans as part of proposals for new initiatives;
- d. Seeking approval of all communications efforts and announcements with the Communications Coordinator;
- e. Providing materials and information on key programs across the MD to maintain awareness and support municipal messages;
- f. Using established templates and material formats; and
- g. Seeking approval of all advertising with the Communications Coordinator.

7. Communicating with MD Administration

Effective internal communication is a shared management responsibility. Directors, managers and supervisors champion each department's commitment to open and collaborative internal communications with the support of the entire management team.

Recognizing the importance of regular interaction, directors, managers and supervisors are expected to communicate with employees openly and frequently. The MD endeavours to support internal communications and help ensure coordinated communications exist within each department.



8. Making information available electronically

Electronic communications, including e-mail, social media channels and the municipal Web presence comprise the main tools for building and sustaining effective internal and external communications.

Electronic technologies help provide information and services to the public, and facilitate interactive, two-way communication and feedback. They provide opportunities to connect with – and deliver services to – residents wherever they reside. Departments ensure that electronic communications, including those via the Internet, conform to MD policies and standards.

To ensure alignment with other communication activities, websites, microsites and social media sites conform to *Municipal Identity Guidelines*. This includes a common look and feel, standardized navigation, standardized search functions, and a page with basic contact information. All departments consult with the Communications Coordinator on the editorial and visual content of web pages, including design, presentation and image usage in order to ensure publishing standards and other communication requirements are met.

To ensure technology advances the MD's ability to connect with residents in efficient and practical ways, new communication technologies should serve to:

- a. Enhance public access to information, programs and services;
- b. Achieve efficiencies in the preparation, accessibility and dissemination of information, while preserving its availability to residents;
- c. Foster interactive communications with residents and facilitate public consultation in the development and delivery of policies, programs and services; or
- d. Improve service performance and/or integrate service delivery.

From time to time, the Communications Team may also utilize social media and networking sites to deliver MD messages and inform residents of upcoming events or advertise programs and services. All communication disseminated on behalf of the MD through social media and networking sites is approved and administered by the Communications Coordinator and follows the guidelines set forth in the *Social Media Policy*.

9. Communicating through the media

Media plays a critical role in the communications process by providing the public with information about the MD, and by reporting on the public's views. The MD works in a proactive manner with media representatives to promote public awareness and understanding of municipal policies, programs and services. Each department works with the Communications Coordinator to coordinate municipal announcements and media releases. Designated spokespeople must be able, on short notice and on a 24-hour basis, to inform the media on issues of importance to decision-makers and the public.



The Communications Coordinator facilitates information or interview requests from the media, and manages plans and strategies for communicating with the media. A variety of communication tools are used to engage the media, including interviews, news conferences, background or technical briefings, and media releases. The MD generally uses its external communications resources when preparing media materials.

Media releases, information bulletins and other announcement documents are distributed to media via the Communications Coordinator. Media releases are also posted to the MD website, and maintained in the Media Releases subsection of the Municipal Website.

Municipal spokespeople: All designated municipal spokespeople undergo media orientation and are supported in their role by the Communications Team.

Members of Council, the CAO, and individuals chairing a MD board or committee, leading work, or making presentations on behalf of the MD, may also serve as official spokespeople for these assigned duties.

The Communications Coordinator is also designated as an official spokesperson. Where appropriate, each department may designate other managers and knowledgeable staff, including technical or subject-matter experts, to speak in an official capacity on issues or subjects for which they have responsibility and expertise. To ensure coordinated and effective communications to residents, departments should receive authorization for any media relations activities from the Communications Coordinator.

At all times, spokespersons will respect privacy rights, security needs, legal or personnel matters, municipal policy, Council confidences and municipal responsibilities.

Council: The Reeve shall be the designated spokesperson for Council as a whole, except in cases where the Reeve may delegate another Councillor as spokesperson (e.g., where a Councillor is the chairperson of a committee).

When speaking as an official Council spokesperson, individuals identify themselves by name and position, speak on the record for public attribution, and confine their remarks to matters concerning the policies, programs, services or initiatives of the Council. On technical or complex matters, subject-matter experts may provide background information that is not for attribution.

When a member of Council is speaking to a personal position counter to MD policy or resolution of Council as a whole, the Council member must be clear to any media representative that they are not speaking as an official MD spokesperson.

10. Advertising: statutory requirements, policies, programs, and services

The MD advertises to inform residents about MD policies, programs and services, or about dangers or risks to public health, safety or the environment or an individual's rights or responsibilities. Advertising may also be directed at audiences outside of the MD to promote Lesser Slave River's interests.



In planning advertising campaigns, the Communications Team ensures products are aligned with MD priorities, and support the MD's key themes and messages. MD advertising is clearly identified in keeping with the *Municipal Identity Guidelines*.

To ensure the integrity and efficiency of MD advertising, departments follow existing advertising procedures and channels as determined by the Communications Coordinator.

11. Entering partnerships

Departments take communication requirements into account when planning, negotiating or implementing a partnering or collaborative arrangement. Joint activities or initiatives involving another municipality, a company, an organization, a group, or an individual are communicated in a manner that is fair and equitable to all parties.

Employees responsible for negotiating, implementing or administering collaborative arrangements consult with the Communications Coordinator for communication advice and support. Such consultation takes place either prior to establishing a collaborative arrangement or at the earliest opportunity, as well as when one is under way, to ensure compatibility with the interests and communication goals of the MD.

When informing the public or publishing information about partnering activities, departments ensure that the contributions of all participants, including the MD, are fairly acknowledged and attributed, consistent with the *Municipal Identity Guidelines*. Municipal names and/or logos, without consumer-directed promotional taglines, are appropriate identifiers for use in acknowledging the contributions of participants.

13. Retaining copyright

The MD will comply with the *Canadian Copyright Act* and ensure that the ownership rights associated with works subject to copyright are fully respected in all applications.

All communications materials including text, photographs, images and multimedia materials that are authorized, accepted and paid for by the MD can be used for all and any future reproductions required for any communications by The MD. The MD retains limited copyright to the original materials. These finished materials can only be reproduced with the permission and acknowledgement of the MD.

_____"Original Signed"_____
Chief Administrative Officer

_____"January 22, 2014"_____
Date

_____"Original Signed"_____
Reeve

SPECIAL NOTES/CROSS-REFERENCE: COM-16-01 Reformated B.26

AMENDMENT DATE: -

