

COMMUNICATION POLICY



COMMUNICATION POLICY	
Reference Number	750802
Responsible Business Unit	Corporate Services
Responsible Officer	General Manager Corporate Services
Legislation	Local Government Act 1999 State Records Act 1997 Freedom of Information Act 1991
Delegations	Local Government Act 1999
Related Policies Management Guidelines Frameworks	Communication Management Guideline 2015 Community Engagement Framework
Link to Strategic Plan	Objective 4.3 - Improve customer services
Date Adopted	14 September 2015, item 217.7
Review Date	2019
Previous revisions	Click here to enter text.
PURPOSE	
<p>Every Council staff member communicates daily, and in a variety of ways with diverse groups and audiences.</p> <p>This policy;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - outlines the values that underpin the creation, approval, distribution, evaluation and improvement of communications, which include written hard copy, soft copy (electronic), spoken and non-spoken methods - enables communication with stakeholders that advances Council's reputation as an honest, open, trustworthy, respectful, fair and equitable organisation - ensures that Council's corporate communications create a current and consistent message and professional image 	
OBJECTIVES	
<p>It is the intention of the Rural City of Murray Bridge to communicate with its diverse stakeholders by providing information that is accurate, relevant, timely, clear and concise and is available in a variety of formats to suit the requirements and preferences of these stakeholders.</p> <p>When communication is carried out in line with the values that underpin this plan, it assists in the creation of a consistent look and feel across these diverse activities or Council, leading to the delivery of a strong and consistent corporate identity through;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - corporate communications - corporate design - corporate customer service culture 	
DEFINITIONS	
<p>For the purposes of this policy:</p> <p>Communication is the imparting or exchange of information by speaking or through the</p>	

non-verbal or in printed form by either text or imagery.

Stakeholder - a person, group, organisation, or system who affects or can be affected by Council's actions, including Council Members and workers.

A **Mandated Publication** is a publication that Council has a legislated responsibility to produce.

The **Mandated Publications register** is a document that states all publications that Council has a legislative responsibility to produce, and the locations where the publications should be made available.

Social media is used to define a range of websites and applications that allow individuals to interact with each other and organisations through the exchange of messages, comments, files and images.

APPLICATION

The policy outlines requirements for compliance with confidentiality, governance, legal, privacy and regulatory parameters when using communication tools to conduct Council business.

This policy provides standards for the creation, distribution, monitoring and review of Council communications which may include:

- Mandated publications including reports
- Council newsletters
- Corporate publications
- Advertising and Notifications
- Website content
- Social media
- CEO Blog
- Press releases
- Media liaison and enquiries
- Promotional items

This policy applies to Council members, Council employees, contractors, apprentices, trainees and volunteers.

LEGISLATIVE OBLIGATIONS

Local Government Act 1999

The policy is based on the legislative requirements of which Council is bound, specifically, the *Local Government Act 1999*.

By ensuring that key communication messages are disseminated through appropriate channels, Council can help ensure that it meets its responsibility under Section 2 (8i) to *ensure equitable access to its services, facilities and programs*.

Under section 58 of the *Local Government Act 1999*, the principal member, the Mayor, has the responsibility to act as the official spokesperson of the Council. The Mayor

also has the power to delegate this responsibility to an approved person such as the CEO.

State Records Act 1997

The *State Records Act 1997* outlines responsibility for the capture and maintenance of records created to inform about, promote or advertise Council programs, services and activities. Records created under this policy need to be captured and maintained in accordance with the *State Records Act 1997* and *General Disposal Schedule 20*, as per all other official records held by Council.

Freedom of Information Act 1991

The *Freedom of Information Act 1991* gives legally enforceable right of access by members of public (subject to certain restrictions) to corporate records held by government agencies and Councils. Any communication submitted to Council, either electronically or in hard copy form, becomes a Council record and is required to be kept in accordance with the *State Records Act* and Council policies. This includes material submitted to, distributed by, or received by Council's internet and any social media sites. The material may be accessible to an applicant under the *Freedom of Information Act*.

COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Council strives to utilise any form of communication as an opportunity to reinforce and improve its reputation as an honest, open, trustworthy, respectful, fair and equitable organisation. Council will maintain systems, procedures and templates to facilitate the creation, distribution, capture and review of communications. Communication tools can assist Council to carry out productive community engagement, effectively promote its services, programs and activities and remain compliant with all relevant legislation, standards and codes. A proactive approach to the review of existing communications and consideration of new communication tools will help the Rural City of Murray Bridge manage the inherent challenges of speed and immediacy of new media and technologies.

Mandated publications including reports

Council maintain and monitor a list of mandatory publications, and prioritise the production and distribution of these documents to fulfil Council's legislative requirements.

Council newsletters

Council utilise hard copy and electronic methods to distribute information about the activities, services and successes of Council. Council will maintain procedures for the creation, distribution and evaluation of newsletters, and ensure that newsletters are distributed in an effective way to suit the needs of recipients.

Corporate publications

Publications including flyers, brochures and information sheets allow Council to share information related to its activities, services and programs. Council will maintain procedures for the creation, distribution and evaluation of corporate publications.

Notifications and advertising in externally produced publications

Council will maintain procedures for advertising in external publications, including newspapers, to ensure it fulfils its legislative requirements in relation to public notifications.

Content on Council's website

Council's website enables Council to distribute accurate, relevant, timely, clear and concise information, and enables stakeholders to carry out business with Council. Council will maintain procedures and standards for content on its website.

Social media

Council will maintain procedures for the use of any social media, and develop procedures for the consideration and implementation of new social media tools.

Media releases

Press releases enable Council to deliver strategic, planned messages to the public. Council will maintain procedures for the creation, distribution and capture of press releases.

Media liaison and enquiries

Council will delegate authority to the Chief Executive Officer to appoint/nominate senior officers to conduct media liaison. Effective media liaison is of particular importance during crisis or emergency situations. The Chief Executive Officer will maintain procedures related to the handling of media enquiries.

Promotional items

Promotional items can be used to promote awareness of Council, and enhance Council's brand. The Chief Executive Officer will maintain procedures about the production of promotional items, and ensure that any promotional item produced will positively promote Council, help Council achieve strategic communication objectives and offer value of money.

Privacy

Communications should be sensitive to the privacy of others. Staff will seek permission from anyone who appears in any photographs, video or other footage before sharing these via any form of publication. If asked to remove materials from publications or the website, Council will do so as soon as practicable.

PROCESS

It is important to ensure that any Council communication conforms to the approved content and approval processes outlined below. Ensuring all communications reinforce and improve our reputation as an honest, open, trustworthy, respectful, fair and equitable organisation.

Create

Communication items should be created in response to an identified requirement for that communication. Communication objectives should be considered, taking into account the requirements and needs of target audiences.

Communication plans can be developed to support high-level, long-term plans and strategies (Major) such as:

- Council's Strategic Plan
- Major redevelopment projects
- Large community consultation program
- Roll-out of a new internal system or organisation restructure
- An ongoing community issue

They can also be developed for small, short-term projects and initiatives (Minor) such as:

- Promoting an event
- Informing residents about works in their street, disruption to a service
- Rate payment reminders, animal registration reminders
- Seeking feedback on a plan or proposal

Plans can be developed for internal communication, external communication or both.

Communication Plan templates are available within the Communications Management Guideline, with instructions on how to use the templates and checklists.

Approve

Proof versions of documents should be created and will be provided so that approval can take place.

Officers must ensure appropriate authorisation has been obtained before publishing, in any format, any communication about Council. Actions to ensure that appropriate authorisation has occurred will vary, but may include- sign off by email, or a hard copy document.

Approval officers must ensure that communications are accurate and informative and do not contain any of the ineligible content listed in this policy

Capture

Any officer creating communications is responsible for ensuring that the final version of any report, advertisement, promotion, press release or other communication is registered within Council's corporate record management system.

Notes can be used against documents to record how and when documents were distributed.

Council communications will not contain:

- Abusive, profane or sexual language
- Unrelated or irrelevant content
- Content which is false or misleading
- Confidential information about Council or third parties
- Copyright or Trade mark protected materials owned by other party.
- Discriminatory material in relation to a person or group based on age, colour, creed, disability, family status, gender, nationality, marital status, parental status, political opinion/affiliation, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, race or social origin, religious beliefs/activity, responsibilities, sex or sexual orientation
- Statements which may be considered to be bullying or harassment
- Illegal material or materials designed to encourage law breaking
- Materials that could compromise the safety or reputation of Council, Council Members, employees or Council's corporate systems
- Materials which would breach applicable laws (defamation, privacy, trade practices, copyright, financial rules and regulations, fair use, trademarks)
- Material that would offend contemporary standards of taste and decency
- Material which would bring the Council into disrepute
- Personal details or references to Council Members, Council staff or third parties
- Spam, meaning the distribution of unsolicited bulk electronic messages
- Consideration should be given to relevance and appropriateness of language and expression

An action based process is to be applied to the creation and distribution of communications. The following should be considered with regard to the creation of any corporate communication.

Distribute

Distribution/ publication methods for communications will vary, however methods of distribution will take in to consideration the level of access of the intended audience. Some communications will require multiple distribution methods to ensure equity of access amongst relevant stakeholder groups.

Council's commitment to reducing hard copy waste should be considered when ordering the print of publications and options for uploading information to Council's website, or the utilisation of other technologies should always be explored.

Evaluate

Communications should be evaluated on a regular basis, considering the extent to which communication objectives have been met, the appropriateness of dissemination methods selected, and value for money provided. Evaluation methods may include, but are not limited to:

- attendance
- responses
- comments
- complaints
- enquires
- return custom/ contact
- surveys and
- focus groups

Improve

For communications that are required on a regular basis, evidence should be created and captured regarding modifications and improvements that are made.

Communications should be created in a way that they can be readily edited, improved or have materials removed or appropriately moderated.