

Town of Truro – Policy & Procedure Manual

Subject: Communications Policy
Policy Number: P100-022
Approval Date: May 11, 2015
Departments: All Departments

POLICY STATEMENT

It is the policy of the Town of Truro to:

1. Inform citizens about the Municipality’s policies, programs, services and initiatives through communication that is timely, accurate and consistent.
2. Consult and inform stakeholders when establishing or developing priorities, polices, programs and services.
3. Ensure the Municipality is visible and responsible 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 and that reflects the diversity of the community.
6. Provide timely, accurate and relevant information to staff and Council on key issues prior to release to public.

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 Town of Truro through the development and implementation of a comprehensive communication plan.

A Communications Plan (to be coupled with the “Council Code of Ethics/Accountability and Transparency – Roles and Responsibilities for Council and Senior Staff” document – TO BE DRAFTED) will foster greater awareness of our programs and services and the creation of new partnerships and will enhance the dialogue about municipal services and activities.

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 Town of Truro.
3. Increase in the variety of information available to the public on the municipal website.
4. Establish standards for communications with the public, Council and municipal staff.
5. It is necessary for Department Directors to keep the Chief Administrative Officer informed of any issue, or matters that relate to corporate or politically sensitive matters, health/safety, legal, fiscal matters and to communicate to the CAO as appropriate, in a timely manner, so the Chief Administrative Officer can advise Council as required and make suggestions regarding any actions and communications approaches and content.

WHEN REPRESENTING THE COUNCIL IN THE COMMUNITY, COUNCIL WILL:

1. Provide an accurate and fair representation of Council decisions.
2. Recognize that Council Members have a duty to respect Council decisions and policy directions.
3. Conduct themselves in a manner that will not reflect unfavorably on the Council.
4. Maintain mature and constructive working relationships based on mutual trust and respect.
5. Conduct the relationship with courtesy and respect.
6. Accept and respect their different but complementary roles.
7. Every member of Council shall display the reserve inherent in his/her position with the Municipality when publicly expressing his/her personal opinions on matters of political controversy or on existing or proposed municipal policy or administration. This policy is not intended to restrict the legitimate public comment of spokespersons of Council, nor the public comment of Council Members on matters of essentially a personal interest related to his/her position as a Council Member with the Town of Truro. In cases where comments are made prior to an issue being discussed with the full Council, Councillors or the Mayor are to ensure they clearly indicate they are speaking for themselves and not on behalf of the Council. All members of Council should exercise caution when speaking publicly on issues not yet before Council as not to compromise their objectivity prior to information being presented for their consideration.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Community participation is a communication activity, and Council and staff should play a strategic role in this regard.

Council and staff promote the community participation program as they interact with all stakeholders and role-players for the success of the program.

Communication should be involved in all three stages of public participation (pre, during and post).

Council and staff should be made aware of the Communication Plan 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. Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIPOP) Act extends access and privacy principles to Nova Scotia Municipalities.

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 materials.

VISUAL IDENTITY

A clear and consistent visual identify assists the public in recognizing and accessing the policies, programs, services and initiatives of the Town. To present a strong, unified, consistent identity, departments must display the Town logo in all applications, regardless of medium, for external and internal use.

DEFINITIONS

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

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 Town.

Departmental Communicator: Staff assigned by the Chief Administrative Officer, Department 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 Town Council, or a photo opportunity.

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

GUIDELINES TO INFORMING CITIZENS

Information about the Municipality'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 Town of Truro in accordance with the Visual Identity policy and program.
- e) Published information is provide 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. Depending on the type and volume of material, fees or charges may apply to the information being provided. In such cases, estimated costs will be provided.

MEDIA RELATIONS

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

Media inquiries, whether by phone, email, letter, or in person, should be addressed promptly to accommodate publication or broadcast deadlines, wherever possible, subject to the policies and guidelines established by Town Council.

Town 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

- a) Respect the authority and responsibility of Town 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.
- b) Consult with the Chief Administrative Officer 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, 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 CAO's office 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 Town of Truro 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.

Departments must:

- a) Determine whether they will arrange, or participate in an event, or announcement.
- 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 Backgrounder.
- d) Coordinate participation through CAO's office when multiple departments, community partners, and/or other levels of government are involved, or as requested by the Mayor or CAO.

INTERNET & ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

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

- 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 Town'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) Follow the standards for the look and feel of the Town'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. Inclusion of the link does not imply endorsement by the Town and it accepts no responsibility for the content found on any third party website. Links are subject to the approval of the Chief Administrative Officer or appropriate Department 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 Town or appropriate department and technical or legal considerations.

CONSULTATIONS

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

Departments must:

- 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 Town'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 Town.
- c) Inform participants, in summary form, of the results of the public consultation and outcomes. This may be done through the Town's website. Reports to citizens, letters, posted notices, notices to the Media, advertising and other formats normally used by departments.
- d) Collaborate as appropriate with the CAO's Executive Assistant who provides support and advice to management staff who plan, implement and evaluate public consultation processes. The Executive Assistant 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.
- f) Consult with the Chief Administrative Officer as appropriate.

ADVERTISING

The Town's logo shall appear on all public notices and advertisements in the local media and website.

COMMUNICATION PLANNING

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

The Communications Plan integrates the Town'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, Chief Administrative Officer, Department Director, Manager/Supervisors and Employees is vital to the effective operation of the Town and to achieve the Mission and Goals of the Municipality. Internal communication is an integral part of the Town Communications Plan.

Council & Administration

Departmental 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 for discussion and in some cases, decisions of Council.

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, email, letter, or in person, must be addressed promptly.

Formal inquiries are managed by the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer and the particular Department Directors.

For informal inquiries, Chief Administrative Officer, 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 Council Member using the same method of communication and/or by phone. 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, Chief Administrative Officer and Department Directors.

Managers/Supervisors & Employees

Effective internal communication is a shared management responsibility, led by the Chief Administrative Officer and senior managers with support from the Executive Assistant to the Chief Administrative Officer.

Department Directors, 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 Town. This may include a Municipal 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 Municipality. To ensure consistency and effective use of Town communication channels and formats, departments may consult with the Executive Assistant to the Chief Administrative Officer for support and advice before undertaking Town-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 – TO BE DRAFTED.

Mayor and Council:

The Mayor is normally the Town's chief spokesperson, explaining policies, priorities and decisions to the public, unless otherwise designated to another member of Council or the Chief Administrative Officer.

The Mayor is normally the chief spokesperson for decisions approved by Municipal Council and for the Municipality as a Corporation unless another Member of Council is designated.

Committee Chairs are normally the chief spokesperson 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.

Once Council has rendered a decision, all members of Council have a duty to support that decision whether they voted for or against the particular motion. They can express their views when asked, however, it is incumbent upon them as a member of Council to support the decision of the majority.

In cases where a member of Council speaks with the media on a Town related issue, they should notify the Chief Administrative Officer and other members of Council as soon as practical. This notification will ensure that everyone is aware of the interview prior to it being made public.

Administration:

CAO, Department Directors: The Chief Administrative Officer is the primary administrative spokesperson. Department Directors are normally the spokespersons for programs, services and initiatives they administer unless otherwise directed by the Chief Administrative Officer.

Legal, Personnel and Election: Inquiries regarding pending litigation, or involving a significant exposure to litigation, should be directed to the Chief Administrative Officer or designate. Inquiries regarding personnel-related information should be directed to the Human Resources Officer or designate, and subject to contacting the Director of Finance in terms of potential insurance liability, and the respective Director having jurisdiction over the matter. Inquiries regarding municipal election and campaign issues should be directed to the Chief Administrative Officer with the exception of election sign issues, which should be directed to Bylaw Enforcement.

Designated Spokesperson: Directors may designate departmental spokespersons 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 Media Liaison or Director.

Coordination:

The CAO's office 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 and information publicly available.

The Executive Assistant to the CAO, in partnership with the Technology Section and with input from departments, manages the overall look and feel of the Town's website and central sections. The Executive Assistant to the CAO will discuss with senior management major issues to facilitate communication planning.

Departments are responsible for the release of program and service-specific information and for filing a copy of Media Releases and PSAs with the Chief Administrative Officer or designate prior to posting to the Municipality's website. Department Heads should appoint departmental communicators to coordinate communications of department-specific information and participate in the Town Communications Network. Training in communications and the Municipality's communications policies must be available to them to ensure they are effective communicators.

The Truro Police Services and Truro Fire Services release information through their respective Public Information Officers and conduct their own Media relations and shall be copied to the Chief Administrative Officer's office.

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