

County of Essex Policy Manual

Corporate Communications & Media Relations Policy

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Approved by:	County Council
Department:	Council Services
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The Corporation of the County of Essex “The County” recognizes the role our employees, partners, the public and the media can play in raising awareness of our programs, as well as promoting public confidence in our commitment to providing quality services for residents. As such, this policy aims to provide guidance for staff with respect to communication guidelines and practices as well as to provide direction about how to effectively handle requests from the media.

The Communications and Media Relations Policy is intended to protect and promote the image of the County 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, traditional and online communications, social media, marketing materials, County of Essex visual and corporate identity guidelines, public statements made to media sources, and the management of media inquiries.

1.0 Scope

This policy applies to all County of Essex employees, temporary and contract employees, volunteers, and any individual retained by the County to act on the County’s behalf.

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2.0 Definitions

- 2.1 **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, residents, customers, volunteers, vendors, suppliers, elected officials, citizens, and other stakeholders.
- 2.2 **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.
- 2.3 **Online Communications** refers to the sharing of information for any purpose through the use of email, the Corporate Intranet (County Connect), 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.
- 2.4 **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."
- 2.5 **A Public Statement** is a declaration made by a County of Essex employee on behalf of the employer, in any public forum, that relates to the County 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.
- 2.6 **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**.

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- 2.7 **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).

3.0 Responsibility

- 3.1 The Chief Administrative Officer is responsible for ensuring compliance with this policy.
- 3.2 The Manager of Corporate Communications and Accessibility is responsible for monitoring this policy and the procedures outlined below.
- 3.3 Directors and Managers are responsible for drafting and/or assembling relevant information related to public relations and communications for their respective departments.
- 3.4 The Manager of Corporate Communications and Accessibility is responsible for scrutinizing, editing, and approving public relations and 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.
- 3.5 The Manager of Corporate Communications and Accessibility 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.
- 3.6 The Chief Administrative Officer and Directors speak to issues in their areas of responsibility and authorize subject matter experts to respond to media inquiries as authorized spokespersons.
- 3.7 The Chief Administrative Officer, Directors and staff are to inform the Manager, Corporate Communications & Accessibility of any media inquiries and responses.

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- 3.8 Employees are responsible for directing media inquiries to their Director, Manager and/or the Manager of Corporate Communications & Accessibility to facilitate a timely and accurate response.
- 3.9 Authorized spokespersons respond promptly to media inquiries and provide factual information on programs, activities and initiatives that relate specifically to their area of responsibility.
- 3.10 The Chief Administrative Officer approves all corporate media releases prior to their issuance.

4.0 General

- 4.1 Employees who become aware of issues that may result in media scrutiny are to advise the Chief Administrative Officer and/or the Manager of Corporate Communications & Accessibility, with notice to the appropriate Director or Manager.
- 4.2 The Chief Administrative Officer shall be the chief staff spokesperson and may speak on behalf of the municipality regarding all functions of the organization.
- 4.3 Only authorized spokespersons may speak on behalf of the County through any medium.
- 4.4 The Manager of Corporate Communications & Accessibility shall serve as the primary media liaison, directing media inquiries on subject-specific matters to appropriate authorized spokespersons.
- 4.5 In the absence of an authorized spokesperson, the Manager of Corporate Communications & Accessibility may speak on behalf of the County when appropriate subject knowledge, information and/or support are available.
- 4.6 Authorized spokespersons are to remain neutral and factual, speaking only to their area of expertise.
- 4.7 Corporate responses to media stories, comments, blogs and discussion forums about County-related business shall be coordinated through the Manager of corporate Communications & Accessibility.

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- 4.8 Members of the media must be escorted by a staff member at all times when reporting on County of Essex premises.

5.0 Confidentiality

- 5.1 In all communications, employees may not disclose confidential, proprietary or sensitive information related to the County, its business and affairs, residents of the Sun Parlor Home, patients, employees, volunteers, vendors, suppliers, elected officials, citizens, or other stakeholders.

6.0 Visual and Corporate Identity

- 6.1 A clear and consistent visual identity assists the public in recognizing and accessing the County's policies, programs, services and initiatives. To present a strong, unified, consistent identity, staff shall adhere to the County of Essex's Visual Identity standards and display the corporate logo in an approved fashion in all communications, regardless of medium, for internal and external use.
- 6.2 Providing a consistency in language, tone and 'personality' for the County of Essex, when communicating externally, is equally as relevant for reputation management and communication practices. It is integral that messaging and language/writing styles for external communication products remain consistent. For clarification or assistance, consult the Manager of Corporate Communications & Accessibility.
- 6.3 Employees and volunteers are prohibited from using the County and its department's protected materials, material subject to copyright and trademark protections (like logos or marks) without advanced approval.
- 6.4 All department materials must include the County logo on all of its branded, marketing or corporate communication pieces. Departments are not permitted to use stand-alone logos.

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7.0 Communications Planning

- 7.1 When preparing campaigns, strategies, events or initiatives that will include a public relations/media engagement component, or marketing initiative, consultation with the Manager of Corporate Communications & Accessibility is essential.
- 7.2 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 Corporate Communications & Accessibility.
- 7.3 For media releases, advisories, press conferences and advertising, public events and publishing services, early and regular consultation with the Manager of Corporate Communications & Accessibility is best practice.
- 7.4 The Manager of Corporate Communications & Accessibility shall assist with the preparation of speaking notes, briefing notes and fact sheets.

8.0 Other

- 8.1 Any employee or volunteer who fails to comply with this Policy may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including the termination of employment or, in the case of a volunteer, may have his or her engagement terminated.

9.0 Related Documents

13-001 Social Media – Online Communications Policy