

CORPORATE POLICY AND PROCEDURE



Media Relations Policy

Category:	Corporate
Authority:	Corporate Communications
Related Polices:	Media relations tools (appendix) Responsible Computing Policy City of Guelph social media guidelines for employees
Approved by:	Executive Team
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Policy statement

The City recognizes a strategic approach to media relations is crucial to building mutually beneficial and trusting relationships with news media. Such relationships will help foster accurate, balanced and fair reporting; help allow the City to convey information through media to stakeholders; increase positive coverage; and protect and enhance the City's reputation.

City spokespeople are encouraged to participate in interviews with journalists and/or bloggers who:

- identify themselves and any affiliation they may have with print, broadcast or online media outlets
- conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the [Canadian Association of Journalists' Principles for Ethical Journalism and Ethics Guidelines](#)

Scope

This policy applies to all City of Guelph full-time, part-time, casual and temporary workers, volunteers and co-op placements.

It addresses how employees interact with traditional (e.g., print, radio, TV), online and social media according to principles outlined in the *City of Guelph Communications Plan*:

- Work collaboratively across the organization to ensure information provided to media is accurate, thorough, clear, easy to access and timely.
- Consider the range of communication tools available and use those most appropriate to address the needs associated with each circumstance.
- Respect the access to information and privacy rights of employees and citizens.
- Support opportunities for engagement with the media to inform public policy.
- Strive to achieve a culture of two-way communication and communications excellence practices.

This policy also aligns with two strategic directions in the City's 2012-16 corporate strategic plan [Our City, Our Future](#):

- Ensure accountability, transparency and engagement
- Strengthen citizen and stakeholder engagement and communications

Purpose

This policy outlines who can interact with media in an official capacity on behalf of the City; and when, how and why to initiate or respond to inquiries from print, broadcast, online and social media outlets.

The Corporate Communications department leads the organization's media relations activities, but all City departments have a role to play in building co-operative and mutually beneficial relationships between the City and media.

Definitions

Media

Media include traditional news media (print, radio and television), online (websites) and social media (blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter and other sites where content is generated by users).

City spokesperson

A spokesperson is a City employee who has the authority to make statements to traditional, online and social media on behalf of the organization. Unless otherwise authorized, the City's spokespeople are:

- Mayor and members of City Council
- Chief Administrative Officer
- Executive Directors
- Employees reporting directly to the CAO or an Executive Director (e.g. General and Corporate Managers)
- Corporate Manager, Corporate Communications (who may delegate this authority to Communications Coordinators, as appropriate)
- Senior Communications and Issues Management Coordinator (in the absence of the Corporate Manager, Corporate Communications, or as delegated)
- Police and Fire and Emergency Medical Services Officers (Police and Fire and Emergency Medical Services have media guidelines that govern their procedures)

Public discussion

A public discussion includes but is not limited to media interviews, public presentations, open houses, public meetings, posts, comments and questions on websites, blogs and social media sites – anywhere an audience can see or hear the statements being made by participants.

When participating in public discussions online (e.g., commenting on blogs, Twitter posts), it is important to understand the difference between personal use, professional use and official use:

Personal Use - when you participate on a social media site or blog and comment as yourself about your opinions, interests, family and friends. Personal social media activity should be done outside work hours, using your own personal computer/Smartphone/device, from an account or profile associated with your personal email address.

Professional Use – when you participate on a social media site or blog and comment personally as an experienced person in your field of expertise. This should be done using your own personal computer/Smartphone/device from a profile or account associated with your personal email address.

Official Use - when you are delegated the authority to participate on a social media site or blog as a spokesperson for the City of Guelph. This should be done using a City-owned computer/Smartphone/device using a City email address or online account established and administered by the City's Information Technology department.

Procedure

Initiating media relations

Most City-initiated media relations activities are led by the Corporate Communications department. The Mayor's Office, Economic Development, and Culture and Tourism have dedicated staff resources who may initiate media relations on behalf of those departments.

Responding to media inquiries

Authorized City Spokesperson

City spokespeople may address media inquiries on matters pertaining to their day-to-day operations without the involvement of Corporate Communications.

City spokespeople may contact Corporate Communications for support and advice in preparation for media interviews at any time.

A spokesperson may share or delegate their spokesperson responsibilities when subject matter expertise/information is sought beyond what the spokesperson could provide, and when the delegated spokesperson is adequately prepared to undertake this responsibility.

Following media interviews of consequence, City spokespeople are required to email the Mayor, City Councillors, the Executive Team, the Corporate Manager, Corporate Communications and any other relevant staff the following information:

- the media outlet and reporter
- the interview topic and a brief summary of questions and responses
- date and time when the article, online post or broadcast will be published or aired

Non-spokespeople

Employees who are not authorized spokespeople must refer media inquires to the authorized spokesperson for the department or project (i.e., General or Corporate Manager) and notify Corporate Communications.

City employees who are not designated spokespeople are not authorized to make statements to the media and/or in public discussion on behalf of the City.

Personal point of view

All employees have the right to express personal points of view and, at times, an employee's opinion may conflict with the City's official position.

Personal opinions must not be expressed using City letterhead, email addresses or online accounts.

If an employee expresses his or her personal opinion during a public discussion, he or she must identify himself or herself as a City employee, and state that his or her views do not represent the views of the City, but rather, are the employee's personally held opinions. Employees should use a disclaimer when expressing personal opinions in public.

During public discussions and media interviews, employees acting as City spokespeople are expected to convey the official position of the City of Guelph rather than personal points of view.

Known or potentially contentious issues

All media inquiries regarding known or potentially contentious issues must be immediately referred to the Corporate Manager, Corporate Communications and the appropriate General/Corporate Manager and Executive Director. In collaboration with the General/Corporate Manager and Executive Director, Corporate Communications will coordinate a plan and/or response on behalf of the City.

Litigation, personnel and election issues

Inquiries regarding pending litigation, exposure to litigation or staff-related information must be immediately referred to the Corporate Manager, Corporate Communications, the General Manager, Human Resources, and/or General Manager, Legal Services and/or any other relevant General Manager(s).

Inquiries regarding municipal election matters should be referred to the City Clerk, who will consult with Corporate Communications as appropriate.

Public safety issues

Because the Guelph Police Service, the Guelph Fire Department and the Guelph-Wellington Emergency Medical Service operate 24 hours a day, seven days per week, and their work generates a high volume of media inquiries, those service areas have designated employees as media spokespeople and follow other guidelines when releasing information. City staff who are not Fire or Emergency Medical Service and Police personnel are required to refer media inquiries regarding a police or fire or emergency medical service issue to the Guelph Police Service or the Guelph Fire Department or Guelph-Wellington Emergency Medical Service immediately.

Crisis or emergency issues

During an emergency, the procedure for working with the media is outlined in the City's crisis communications procedure and Emergency Plan. Under the procedure and the plan, a designated Information Officer is the main point of contact for the media.

Anonymous media requests

The City reserves the right to refuse anonymous media requests.

Non-media information requests

All employees are encouraged to answer general or routine inquiries, provided they pertain to their area of work, the employee is knowledgeable enough about the subject to answer, and the information is already in the public domain (e.g., published in public reports or on the City's website).

Responding to blog posts

The City's practices for responding to blog posts continue to evolve. Corporate Communications leads the City's response to blog posts. Employees are required to contact Corporate Communications if they feel a City response to a blog post is warranted and/or required.

Policy application

Subject to applicable collective agreements and employment agreements, the City may consider disciplinary measures or legal action if an identifiable employee makes defamatory or otherwise inappropriate statements in public about their co-workers and/or employer. This includes comments made on websites, blogs and social media networks using personal computers, Smartphones or devices, from an online account or profile associated with a personal email address.