

**MEDIA POLICY**

# **Overview**

The following has been developed to support best practice policies and/or guidelines to provide guidance to staff and the organisation in managing media enquiries, requests for comment and the provision of information to the media. This specifically is aimed to guide the release of external facing information/statements to media or similar organisations and manage reputational risk and employee exposure, whilst also meeting legislative obligations.

This policy template supports codes of conduct and other policies (i.e., social media). This policy can either support or expand on elements of the Councillor’s code of conduct, however, Council must ensure that there is no conflict between the various documents and determine if a separate policy is required or whether training or the development of a guideline is more appropriate.

Depending on the levels of authorisations, risk appetite, committee or portfolio structures, each Council will need to consider the level and extent of authority for spokespersons in their organisation. The following policy provides a baseline approach, however it can be amended/expanded (guides and options are provided throughout the template) as appropriate to your Council’s environment. In addition, the policy can specifically be for employees only or incorporate elected representatives (if the latter is not incorporated, ensure there is a guiding document endorsed by Council).

There are options to combine communication and social media policies or maintain these are separate documents. Regardless, ensure there are no conflicts, that they complement each other, are related and reviews of any document includes a review of the other/s.

# **Related templates**

* *Social Media Policy (not yet drafted)*

# **References/acknowledgements:**

These templates have been developed referencing the *Local Government Act 2009* and other available reports/documentation. Other research and reference material sourced from council websites), which the following list acknowledges:

* Blackall-Tambo Regional Council
* Gladstone Regional Council
* Ipswich City Council
* Noosa Shire Council

*This resource has been prepared in partnership between LGMA and the Department of Housing, Local Government, Planning and Public Works through the Governance Advisory Service.*

# **TEMPLATE**

It is acknowledged that Councils will format to their own inhouse style guide when converting this template into their Policy or Document Management Framework

# **MEDIA POLICY**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Policy Number** |  | **Doc.ID** |  |
| **Policy Type:** |  | | |
| **Policy Owner** |  | | |
| **Approval Authority** | Council | | |
| **Approval Date** |  | **Resolution Number** |  |

# Purpose

The purpose of the Policy is to establish protocols for managing communication between the Council and the media so as to ensure coordinated, coherent, accurate and reliable presentation of Council information, so that Council maintains credibility, integrity and customer confidence, and Council's corporate values and brand are reinforced.

# Scope

This policy applies to all elected members, employees (staff, contractors, consultants and volunteers) when responding to media enquiries or when seeking to make comment on behalf of Council or otherwise by a Councillor on a particular matter.

This policy specifies who is authorised to act as a Designated or Lead Spokespersons and the procedures to be followed for issuing of any proactive or reactive media statement or publication of any public facing document.

# Definitions

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TERM** | **DEFINITION** |
| Council | <insert Council name> |
| Communication | Refers to all forms of communication with the media and similar outlets including, but not limited to, interviews, press statements, emails, facsimiles, letters, phone calls etc |
| Councillor | All elected representatives who hold (current) office with Council, including the Mayor |
| Employee/s | includes a person who carries out work in any capacity for Council (i.e. temporary or permanent employee, contractor, sub-contractor, employee of a labour hire company, outworker, trainee, apprentice, volunteer, work experience student. |
| LGA | *Local Government Act 2009* |
| LGR | *Local Government Regulation 2012* |
| Media | all forms of published or broadcast content such as newspapers, radio, television, magazines, media releases, social media, plus digital media platforms including blogs and online news sites. All organisations involved in publishing (external) media contact, including freelancers |
| Spokesperson | a person who speaks as a designated representative of Council. |

# Policy Statement

Council encourages open, prompt and accurate communication with the media to promote a positive, progressive and professional image of Council.

It is the policy of Council to provide relevant, timely and accurate comment and information to media outlets when requested.

## Guiding principles

All media requests will be managed as per the <media procedure> and are to be coordinated through the <department/branch>. Councillors and Employees are required to advise the <branch/position> immediately when approached by the media for information or comment, even when a previous delegation has been authorised.

The <department/branch> will release approved media statements and media releases to communicate matters including, but not limited to:

* Approved policy and organisational decisions;
* Clarifying organisational strategic direction;
* Protecting the reputation and upholding the integrity of Council or the region as a whole;
* To ensure transparency with the community;
* To promote the achievements and activities of Council and the wider region which are in the public interest; and
* Ensure all personal information is collected, handled or released as per Council’s policies and procedures, adhering to the privacy principles outlined in the *Information Privacy Act 2009*.

Nothing in these guidelines shall prevent councillors or staff in the course of their normal engagements/work responsibilities from issuing general promotional material and information relating to the activities and events for the programs and services under their jurisdiction, and that have been published or approved as per Council’s processes.

## Interacting with the media

The Mayor is the official spokesperson for the Council. No other Councillor or employee may assume this responsibility unless specifically authorised by the Mayor.

The Mayor will be responsible for communication Council’s Policy, Strategy, Service Levels and political responses to, or on behalf of, the Council.

Elected members who wish to initiate a Council media release or respond to an enquiry must first obtain approval of the Mayor, and content must be authorised by the Mayor and CEO prior to release.

The Chief Executive Officer (or their delegate) will be responsible for communicating with the media on operational matters including events and programs.

The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for and must authorise paid advertisements, social media pages, community notices and promotional material prepared by Council.

Council employees are not permitted to engage with the media about any Council-related matter without authority from the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

This policy is not intended to limit a Councillor from communicating with or engaging with their constituents. Councillors are actively encouraged to do this, provided that the Councillor Code of Conduct requirements are complied with. In doing so, Councillors need identify that they are not speaking on behalf of Council.

<This policy does not preclude Councillors from making their own statements or comments which may conflict with Council’s position, or on matters that are not current Council programs or initiatives. In these scenarios, Councillors must be aware of their Code of Conduct obligations by ensuring that their comments are not portrayed by them as the official view of Council.>

## Record-Keeping

All media releases, responses to media or external requests for statements, information etc, must be recorded and stored according to Council’s records management policy and procedures.

## Non-Compliance

Non-compliance with the provisions of this policy may result in disciplinary action being taken in accordance with Council’s policies and procedures.

# Legislation/Literature

*Public Sector Ethics Act 1994*

*Information Privacy Act 2009*

*Local Government Act 2009*

*Local Government Regulations 2012*

# References

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Doc Reference** | **Document Name** |
|  | Refer to any other relevant policies/procedures/forms |
| Councillor Code of Conduct Policy |  |
| Code of Conduct (Staff) |  |
| Community Engagement Policy |  |
| Disciplinary Procedure |  |
| Social Media Policy |  |
| Information Privacy Policy |  |
| Media Guidelines/Standard |  |
| Records Management Policy |  |
| Caretaker Period Guideline |  |

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### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

When preparing your councils Policy and supporting documents, the following may also be considered and/or more appropriate for your requirements. The following is not a comprehensive list of issues and each council must consider its level of delegations/authorisations and protocols to support their council.

* Include a Caretaker Period provision (or refer to another governance document);
* Expand roles and responsibilities where more elected members and/or senior employees have authority in certain situations;
* Include references to managing enquiries during emergent situations (natural disasters etc).

Authorisations – other examples of expanding roles and responsibilities

* The Mayor is the official spokesperson of Council. At the Mayor’s discretion this responsibility can be delegated to the CEO, another Councillor or a Director. The CEO is the official spokesperson for all staff-related or organisational issues.
* The CEO, at their discretion, will delegate the responsibility to a Director or Manager where appropriate.
* Councillors may comment on division specific issues and to the media on Council’s behalf with delegation from the Mayor.
* Manager xxx, or nominee, may issue statements on behalf of the Council or act as an official spokesperson for the Council at the direction of the CEO.
* The Mayor (or acting Mayor) is Council's official spokesperson and has primary responsibility for communicating decisions of Council or its position on a particular issue. All editorial media enquiries and requests for media comment should be directed to the <position> in the first instance, where the Mayor will be offered the first opportunity to respond. Only spokespeople delegated by the Mayor may provide media statements on behalf of Council for the purpose of marketing, communicating and engaging with the community.
* Councillors who are Committee Chairpersons are Council's spokesperson for that specific portfolio matters and are authorised to communicate decisions of Council or its position on a particular issue relating to that portfolio/committee.