



County of Lethbridge Policy Handbook

EFFECTIVE: September 19, 2013 **SECTION:** 100 NO. 162 Page 1 of 10

APPROVED BY: County Council **SUBJECT:** Communications

REVISED DATE:

POLICY STATEMENT

It is the policy of the County of Lethbridge to:

1. Inform citizens about the County's policies, programs, services and initiatives through communication that is timely, accurate and consistent.
2. Consult and inform Stakeholders when establishing or developing priorities, policies, programs and services.
3. Ensure the County is visible and responsive 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.

PURPOSE

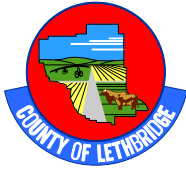
The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines to facilitate communications that are coordinated and consistent as well as open and responsive.

CONFIDENTIALITY

In all communications, spokespersons and departments must comply with all legislated requirements regarding access and disclosure of information. The Alberta Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP Act) extends access and privacy principles to Alberta municipalities.

COPYRIGHT

Departments must comply with the Copyright Act to ensure the ownership rights associated with works subject to copyright (e.g. photos) are fully respected in all communications. Departments must maintain a record of authorizations to use copyrighted material.



County of Lethbridge Policy Handbook

EFFECTIVE: September 19, 2013 **SECTION:** 100 NO. 162 Page 2 of 10

APPROVED BY: County Council **SUBJECT:** Communications

REVISED DATE:

VISUAL IDENTITY

A clear and consistent visual identity assists the public in recognizing and accessing the policies, programs, services and initiatives of the County. Visual Identity Guidelines need to be written and approved that explain how to display the corporate logo in all applications, county colours, etc.

DEFINITIONS

Advertising: Paid space in media that informs citizens of a service, program, or event or to relay a single message.

Citizen: Person living within the County; landowners and residents.

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 or major issue, present or future that may disrupt service or impact public trust in the County.

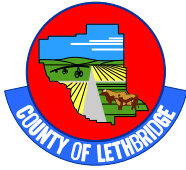
Communications Coordinator: The County staff in charge of facilitating departmental communications such as media liaison, communication planning and implementation, internal and external communications and emergency communications.

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 County Council, or a photo opportunity.

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



County of Lethbridge Policy Handbook

EFFECTIVE: September 19, 2013 **SECTION:** 100 NO. 162 Page 3 of 10

APPROVED BY: County Council **SUBJECT:** Communications

REVISED DATE:

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, also known as the Media Contact.

Media Release: A factual written summary of information issued to the Media for the purpose of making a statement or announcement.

Plain Language: Effective communication that is clear, concise, relevant and easy to understand.

Public Events: An event arranged by the County 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 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 to the Media, collectively or individually.

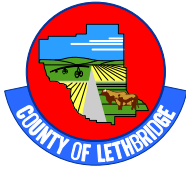
Ratepayer: A person within the County who pays taxes. This term will be replaced by 'Citizen'

Spokesperson: An advocate who represents the County and speaks to the Media.

Stakeholder: Any individual, group of individuals, elected representative or organization with a specific stake or interest in the outcome of a decision.

GUIDELINES - INFORMING CITIZENS

Information on the County's policies, programs, services and initiatives should be generally available to the public in a variety of formats, subject to the available resources.



County of Lethbridge Policy Handbook

EFFECTIVE: September 19, 2013 **SECTION:** 100 NO. 162 Page 4 of 10

APPROVED BY: County Council **SUBJECT:** Communications

REVISED DATE:

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 County of Lethbridge
- e) Published information is provided 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.

MEDIA RELATIONS

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

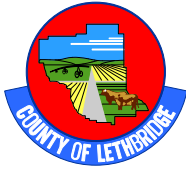
Media inquiries, whether by phone, e-mail, letter, or in person, should be addressed promptly by the Communications Coordinator to accommodate publication or broadcast deadlines.

The Communications Coordinator ensures that Media requests, particularly for interviews or technical information, are directed to a designated spokesperson.

Prior to interviewing with any media, the Communications Coordinator will prepare the designated spokesperson with key messages, talking points, and tips for giving interviews.

Guidelines for Departments are as follows:

- a) Respect the authority and responsibility of County 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.



County of Lethbridge Policy Handbook

EFFECTIVE: September 19, 2013 **SECTION:** 100 NO. 162 Page 5 of 10

APPROVED BY: County Council **SUBJECT:** Communications

REVISED DATE:

-
- b) Consult with the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) when preparing campaigns or strategies that require participation by the Reeve or Members of Council, or when preparing a response to a Media inquiry that could have implications for the Reeve or Members of Council.
 - c) Keep confidential information until the appointed release date.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

In a crisis, coordinated communication must be used to maintain or restore confidence. Departments must advise the CAO's Office and the Communications Coordinator as soon as they identify an event or situation occurring in or affecting their department that may attract widespread interest to the Media. The Communications Coordinator will contact the CAO and after consultation coordinate a response including designating a spokesperson.

Contacting County Council is one of the primary functions of the County's response to major emergencies according to the Municipal Emergency Plan (MEP).

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

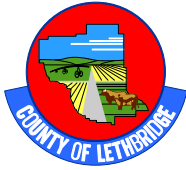
The County of Lethbridge will detail communications protocol for emergencies in a Emergency Media communications plan annexed to the MEP.

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) Contact the Communications Coordinator who will help plan and coordinate the event including logistics, protocol, media, etc.
- b) 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.



County of Lethbridge Policy Handbook

EFFECTIVE: September 19, 2013 **SECTION:** 100 NO. 162 Page 6 of 10

APPROVED BY: County Council **SUBJECT:** Communications

REVISED DATE:

INTERNET & SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION

The Internet and other electronic communication (email, social media) are important tools, which allow 24-hour access to information and support two-way communication. The Communications Coordinator, in partnership with the Information Technology department 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) 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.
- d) Follow the established standards and guidelines for the look and feel of the County's website.

Social Media

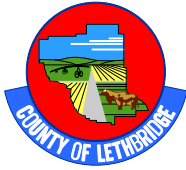
The County of Lethbridge will utilize social media tools as a form of two-way communication with citizens. See *Social Media Guidelines* for directive on how to manage social media accounts.

Links to Third Party Sites

The County of Lethbridge does not link to third party websites unaffiliated with the municipality with the exception of other government entities (e.g. Government of Alberta, Government of Canada, local municipalities, etc.) Any other exceptions must be approved by the Computer Services Manager and the Communications Coordinator.

PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS

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



County of Lethbridge Policy Handbook

EFFECTIVE: September 19, 2013 **SECTION:** 100 NO. 162 Page 7 of 10

APPROVED BY: County Council **SUBJECT:** Communications

REVISED DATE:

- a) Inform citizens and stakeholders about opportunities to participate in public consultation and citizen engagement processes (such as surveys, open houses and committees). This may be done through the County's website, letters of invitation, posted notices, notices to the Media, advertising, social media, and other formats normally used by departments.
- b) Clearly identify public information materials as being from the County.
- c) Inform participants, in summary form, of the results of the public consultation and outcomes. This may be done through the County's website, letters of invitation, posted notices, notices to the Media, advertising, social media, and other formats normally used by departments.
- d) Collaborate with the Communications Coordinator who will provide support and advice to management staff who plan, implement and evaluate public consultation processes. Communications Coordinator prepares and helps 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.

ADVERTISING

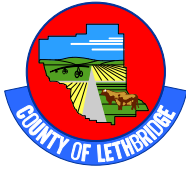
The County of Lethbridge purchases ads for a variety of reasons. Common advertisements include employment ads, development permits, programs & services, and events.

If you require advertising that does not fit into the above categories, please contact the Communications Coordinator for assistance.

COMMUNICATION PLANNING

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

The Communications Coordinator must develop a Corporate Communications Plan, with input from all Departments, that integrates the County's Mission and Goals,



County of Lethbridge Policy Handbook

EFFECTIVE: September 19, 2013 **SECTION:** 100 NO. 162 Page 8 of 10

APPROVED BY: County Council **SUBJECT:** Communications

REVISED DATE:

identifies target audiences (both internal and external) as well as strategies, objectives, tools, messages, responsibilities, resources required, and evaluation.

All departments must be familiarized with the Communications Plan and understand their role in corporate communications.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Open, two-way communication between Council and the CAO and from the CAO to administration & staff is vital to the effective operation of the County and to achieve the Mission and Goals of the organization. Internal communication is an integral part of Corporate Communications.

Council & Administration

Corporate 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 in accordance with the Procedural Bylaw.

Public announcements must be distributed co-currently to Members of Council & staff.

Councillor Inquiries

All Councillor inquiries, whether by phone, e-mail, letter, or in person, must be addressed by the CAO with support from administration as needed.

Managers/Supervisors & Employees

Effective internal communication is a shared management responsibility, led by the CAO and senior managers with support from the Communications Coordinator and Human Resources representative.

Managers and supervisors must communicate with employees openly, often and, wherever possible, before information is made public.



County of Lethbridge Policy Handbook

EFFECTIVE: September 19, 2013 **SECTION:** 100 NO. 162 Page 9 of 10

APPROVED BY: County Council **SUBJECT:** Communications

REVISED DATE:

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 organization. This may include a County 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 Region. To ensure consistency and effective use of communication channels and formats, departments should consult Corporate Communications for support and advice.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Spokesperson

A media spokesperson is to be chosen based on the nature and requirements of the story/article.

Typically, the Reeve or CAO are the County's chief spokespersons, explaining policies, priorities and decisions to the public. The Deputy Reeve may serve as media spokesperson in the place of the Reeve if he/she is unavailable.

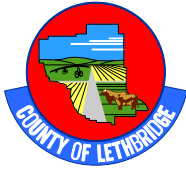
In the case of emergencies, when answers are needed immediately, and the chief spokesperson is unavailable, the Communications Coordinator may serve as the designated spokesperson.

On occasion, when the story is highly specialized and requires a department head to speak (ex. a story on road grading and dust control services would be better served speaking to the Director of Municipal Services), the Communications Coordinator will give that person media training prior to the media interview.

Staffs other than those mentioned above are not to give media interviews. All media inquiries should be directed to the Communications Coordinator.

Coordination

Corporate Services, through the Communications Coordinator is responsible for communication planning and coordination of the flow of information to the Media and the public.



County of Lethbridge Policy Handbook

EFFECTIVE: September 19, 2013 **SECTION:** 100 NO. 162 Page 10 of 10

APPROVED BY: County Council **SUBJECT:** Communications

REVISED DATE:

The Communications Coordinator, in partnership with the Information Technology department, manages the overall look and feel of County's website and central sections.

The Communications Coordinator will meet regularly with senior management to discuss major issues and to facilitate communication planning.

Departments are responsible for sharing information on programs and service-specific information with the Communications Coordinator to coordinate writing/distribution of Media Releases/PSA's, posting the information to the County's website, and sharing on social media.