

Media Policy & Protocols

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1. Overview

1.1 Introduction

Federation Council recognises the importance of providing information to the community relating to Council activities, programs, events, services and initiatives.

The media plays an important role in effectively engaging with the community and as such, it is vital that Council has appropriate processes in place to support strong media management.

This document provides a framework around roles and responsibilities, the identification of authorised spokespersons, commenting in the media (including social media) and procedures for generating media coverage.

It is aligned with Council's values and will help to ensure the key objectives and goals of the organisation are achieved.

1.2 Definitions

The following definitions are provided for the purpose of this policy.

Communications team - This team includes the Communications Officer & General Manager.

Media - Includes print media such as newspapers, magazines, newsletters, brochures and other documents and the broadcast media including radio and television broadcasters and internet publishers (including social media).

1.3 Related Council policies and legislation

- Code of Conduct
- Business Ethics Policy
- Delegations of Authority Policy
- Defamation Act 2005
- Privacy Act 1988

2. Objectives

2.1 Policy purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the interface between Council and the media is managed appropriately to maximise communication opportunities for Council and to minimise the risk of adverse publicity and misunderstanding due to inaccurate information or inappropriate sharing of information.

2.2 Scope

This policy applies to the Administrator/Mayor, Councillors, General Manager, Council staff, Section 355 committee members and Council volunteers when representing Federation Council in the media.

It includes verbal and written comments made to the media, public speaking engagements, media releases and the use of social media.

2.3 Policy objectives

This policy is not intended to prevent information which is in the public interest from entering the public arena.

The objectives of this policy are:

- To implement a streamlined approach to media management and facilitate timely responses to media enquiries with accurate information.
- To promote the importance of effective media management throughout the organisation.
- To clearly identify the roles and responsibilities of the Administrator/Mayor, Councillors, General Manager, Council staff and volunteers in respect to their interaction with the media.
- To ensure a proactive approach to the promotion of Council initiatives and projects.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 Communications Team

The communications team is the central point of contact for the majority of incoming media enquiries.

The communications team will also act as a support to staff who wish to promote their activities, services, programs or events to the community through the media.

Service	Activities
Centralised media service	Interface between organisation and media: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Central point of contact for the majority of incoming media enquiries.• Coordination of media responses.• Organisational contact for all media-related issues/enquiries.
Providing information to the media	Provision of information: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Distribution of all media releases, official statements, editorials, columns and background information to the media.• Media briefings.• Media kits.• Attendance at monthly Committee and Council meetings as required.• Distribution of media materials: Media contacts database.
Coordination of spokespersons	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appointment of authorised spokespersons in consultation with General Manager.• Spokesperson briefing / coaching.
Management of contentious issue / sensitive news events	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Development and implementation of high level communication strategies.• Key message development.• Written statements.

Development and implementation of proactive media program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted media campaigns and public relations support. • Proactive release of information through various media channels. • Public participation support (notification, engagement, consultation). • Special communications support.
Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly media reports. • Statistical reports (enquiries / proactive media releases / social media and website reports). • Media monitoring.
Media skills training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of media skills training for key Council spokespersons, in consultation with Human Resources.
Media briefings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination of required media briefings in consultation with Administrator/Mayor and General Manager.
Ministerial liaison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaison with Agency, Departmental or Ministerial communications staff regarding media associated with joint media announcements and official openings or project milestones

3.2 Council staff

All Council staff (including volunteers, contractors, casual and part time employees) are required to comply with this policy and related Council policies and legislation.

Media enquiries are to be directed to the communications team so they can be managed appropriately and in accordance with this policy. If direct contact by the media is made with a Council staff member, the communication team should be informed about the nature of the enquiry and the response provided for reporting purposes.

3.3 Administrator or Councillor

This policy does not apply to an Administrator or Councillor who wishes to present their personal views or political position to the media. However, they must clearly identify their comments do not represent the official position of Council.

An Administrator or Councillor, who is an authorised Council spokesperson as per this policy, may comment in the media on behalf of Federation Council.

4. Commenting in the Media

Only authorised Council spokespersons may be interviewed by the media, ensuring the community receives the most accurate information.

Staff approached by media out of business hours should be aware that any comment they make in a personal capacity, may reflect on the organisation (for example Vox pops, social media etc).

4.1 Appointment of media spokespersons

Requests from the media for interviews or comments will be referred to the General Manager for nomination of a spokesperson. Where the General Manager is not available, nomination of a spokesperson will depend on the nature of the enquiry and the table below will be used as a guide:

Spokesperson	Role
Administrator/Mayor	Primary spokesperson for Federation Council.
	Primary spokesperson on political and major issues such as government announcements, significant Council projects, events and high profile issues.
Administrator/Mayor	Primary spokesperson for decisions made at Ordinary and Extraordinary Meetings of Council. May delegate this task to General Manager or Director where appropriate.
Administrator/Mayor	As Local Government representatives in the community, Administrators/Mayors are entitled to speak on any topic but may not act as an authorised Council spokesperson except in the circumstances outlined in this policy.
General Manager	Spokesperson for all operational issues and other issues in consultation with the Administrator/Mayor.
	May authorise a nominated member of staff to speak on matters.

4.2 Protocols for media interviews

The following protocols apply to Federation Council's authorised media spokespersons:

- Do not provide personal comment on, or speculate about Council decisions, policy or issues.
- At all times, adhere to the interview topic and the facts and avoid speculation.
- The communication team must be notified of any inaccurate quotations made during the interview so that an appropriate response can be determined.
- Ensure adequate preparation for the interview.
- Be open, honest and co-operative.
- Avoid saying 'no comment' if you are unsure how to answer a question. Instead, let the journalist know you will endeavour to get back to them with a response where possible.
- Avoid providing comment as opposed to factual information (whether 'on' or 'off' the record) to the media.
- In line with privacy legislation, do not provide contact details (for example, details relating to volunteers, community members etc) or confidential information to the media without prior permission.
- Where possible, all enquiries must be responded to in a timely manner and the media's expectations thoroughly managed if this is not achievable.
- Intentionally providing misleading or inaccurate information to the media, is considered a breach of this policy.
- Be aware of defamation laws.

4.3 Protocols relating to Council business

Reports before Committees/Council

In the following circumstances, Council staff are not permitted (unless authorised by the General Manager) to comment publicly on information and recommendations contained in reports that are before Committees and Council:

- If the issue is of a contentious/political nature
- If it is a matter that has not previously been considered by Council and has no policy direction
- If the report is confidential.

In any case, requests from media for staff to publicly comment on a particular item in the Business Papers (other than to seek a clarification on information contained within the reports) must be brought to the attention of the General Manager. This does not include quotes taken from Council Meetings.

Tenders

As a general rule, it is inappropriate to comment on a tender until it has been awarded by Council. When there is media interest in a tender, the media may be advised of the following:

- The tender closing date and project details.
- The number of tenders received by Council, the names of companies that submitted tenders and when Council will determine the tender.
- The outcome of the tendering process (Council resolution only).

In order to maintain probity to any tender process, no further comment will/should be made.

4.4 Contentious or sensitive issues

Notification

It is the responsibility of Council staff to notify the communications team of any potential contentious or sensitive issues relating to Council that may be of concern to the community, as soon as the potential issue arises.

This will ensure a strategic and proactive approach is undertaken so the community/or affected stakeholder groups are appropriately informed about the facts in a timely manner.

Unfavourable events (such as a serious dog attack, allegations against staff, accidents or chemical spills for example) may sometimes occur. The General Manager, relevant Director and communications team are to be contacted immediately to ensure the correct procedure is followed; this is consistent with good crisis communication planning.

If staff receive an enquiry from the media afterhours relating to a sensitive issue or unfavourable event, they are required to notify their respective Director immediately.

Response

Council will endeavour to provide the media with as much information as is practical and possible about the work of the organisation, as long as it is clearly in the public interest for such matters to be known.

Council will not, for operational and legal reasons, comment on any matter that is the subject of an ongoing investigation or consideration, or where it is not in the public interest for the matter (or the details of the

matter) to become publicly known. In some cases, the issue may be subjected to the public interest test (GIPA Act) to determine what information should/can be released, or information may be withheld to avoid potential defamation/privacy breaches.

4.5 Confidential information

The integrity and security of confidential documents or information in an authorised media spokesperson's possession, or for which the spokesperson is responsible, must be maintained and managed in line with Council's Code of Conduct and Privacy Laws.

Information discussed in confidence at Council meetings may not be disclosed.

5. Defamation

Council staff and the Administrator/Mayor and Councillors should be aware of defamation laws when commenting in the media (this includes social media).

As a guide, under Defamation Act 2005, published material that identifies a person (not necessarily by name) and meets any of the below criteria may be considered defamatory:

1. Exposes a person to ridicule, or
2. Lowers the person's reputation in the eyes of members of the community, or
3. Causes people to shun or avoid the person, or
4. Injures the person's professional reputation.

6. Online Communications

6.1 Use of social media

Official use of social media is any use of a Federation Council managed social media account, profile or presence. Comments made through official social media accounts are representative of Council and can only be made by those authorised to do so.

6.1.1 Staff responsibilities

This policy does not apply to a Council employee's personal use of social media, where staff make no reference to Federation Council and do not identify themselves as an employee of Federation Council.

However, staff that do comment via social media on issues regarding the organisation are linked to Council.

With this understanding, staff should be aware that comments made via social media are in the public domain, and use of such should be aligned to this policy and to Council's Code of Conduct.

Defamatory, disrespectful or deliberately misleading commentary provided on these platforms may bring staff in breach of Council's Code of Conduct.

6.1.2 Administrator/Councillor guidelines

An Administrator or Councillor is entitled to speak on any topic via social media platforms, but may not act as authorised Council spokespersons except in the circumstances outlined in this policy. Administrators or Councillors are able to freely identify and promote their role, but personal social media channels should not suggest that they are official Federation Council accounts (for example, Council logo / corporate imagery should not be used).

Defamatory, disrespectful or deliberately misleading commentary provided on these platforms may bring an Administrator or Councillor in breach of the Federation Council Code of Conduct.

6.2 Responding to online media

The internet revolution has opened up a whole new world of media outlets. This includes online newspapers/news sites, blogs and forums.

Whilst enquiries will be judged on a case-by-case basis, this policy aims to provide procedures for responding to requests for information or comments by online media outlets (including social networking sites):

- Find out the site's name, purpose and author/journalist's name.
- Assess the potential benefits of providing information to this site for your project.
- Notify the communications team of your intention to respond to the request (and include the above details).
- When responding as an authorised spokesperson, use your real name, title and make it clear that you are officially representing Federation Council.
- Only comment on topics that fall within your area of responsibility.
- Ensure your response/publication of your response is filed in line with Council's Records Management procedures.

7. Media Management Procedures

The following processes should be implemented by Council staff in regards to media management.

7.1 Media Releases

- All media releases are to be drafted by the responsible officer and provided to the communications team for feedback and approval. Media releases should be provided to the communications team where possible, 5 working days in advance of the release date.
- Media releases will include contact details for the relevant spokesperson.
- Approved media releases will be distributed to appropriate media outlets by the communications team.
- Media releases are to be uploaded at to Council's website if the communication team deems necessary following its approval.
- Media releases will be circulated to all staff, Administrator/Mayor and Councillors upon release to the media.

7.2 Media Statements

- Media statements are to be prepared by the communications team, with the necessary information having been provided by the responsible officer in a timely manner.
- Media statements must be approved by the Communications Officer and General Manager for final approval.
- Approved media statements will be distributed to appropriate media outlets by the communications team.

7.3 Background information

Requests may be received from the media for background information to support news stories.

Generally, staff are to advise the communications team if they receive such a request and seek approval from their Director to release information.

The communications team will provide support to develop media information kits (including fact sheets and frequently asked questions) for issues relating to major projects / announcements.

7.4 Promotional material / use of Council's logo or corporate imagery

Approval must be sought from the communications team prior to the circulation of any material that promotes a Council project, service, initiative or uses the Council logo and/or corporate imagery.

Where possible, material should be provided to the communications team 5 days in advance of its required date.

8. Policy History

Version	Date	Changes / Amendments
Version 1	28 Aug 2014	Development of document.
Version 2	13 May 2016	Update Council name and references to structure in accordance with Department of Premier and Cabinet Amalgamation guidelines.
Version 3	9 Aug 2017	Update responsible department details.

9. Reviews

This policy will be reviewed every two years or as deemed necessary by the Administrator/Mayor or the General Manager.

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