



Title of Policy	SMRC 5 – Communications Policy		
Responsible Department	Engagement	Document Register ID	250.2016.4.2
Policy Owner	Communications	Review Date	18 February 2023
Date of Council Meeting	18 February 2021	Resolution Number	23/21
Legislation, Australian Standards, Code of Practice	Reference to the following Acts: Local Government, Environmental Planning and Assessment, Copyright, Spam, Privacy and Personal Information Protection, State Records, Defamation, Anti-Discrimination, Government Information (Public Access) NSW Government Advertising Guidelines - Social Media (<i>under review</i>) https://www.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government-communications/social-media		
Aim	As an organisation responsible and accountable to the local community, Snowy Monaro Regional Council (SMRC) will ensure information about its programs and services is conveyed to the public in an effective and professional manner. Effective communication between the Council and the community is vital to successful and sustainable engagement. Key elements of effective communication are consistent, accurate, timely, transparent and informative communications, irrespective of the mediums used. Council will inform the community about relevant decisions, activities and achievements and ensure that community members are engaged in relevant projects through a clear stakeholder engagement framework.		

POLICY DETAILS

1.1 Introduction

The objectives of this policy are to:

- a) Develop positive working relationships with the local media, community and stakeholders
- b) Ensure provision of consistent, accurate and timely information about SMRC services, facilities and policies to the community
- c) Manage difficult/controversial issues
- d) Outline the approved media/social media platforms utilised by SMRC
- e) Link to Community Engagement Framework
- f) Provide guidelines to underpin SMRC Communications Strategy
- g) Link to corporate style and signage guidelines to protect corporate brand and ensure consistency of branding across all mediums – print and digital
- h) Define guidelines to assist in the protection of Council’s reputation
- i) Assist in the development of a positive public image about Council, its services and staff
- j) Progressively work to promote Council’s image as a professional and efficient organisation committed to working in partnership with its community

1.2 Public Comment – Definition for the purpose of policy

Public comment may include public speaking engagements (including events and media), expressing views in letters to the media or on social media, or in notices where that publication or circulation will be in the public domain.

This policy aims to ensure that comment made to the public across all SMRC's platforms and channels is accurate and in the best interests of the Council.

1.2.1 Role: Mayor/Administrator

The Mayor/Administrator (or their nominated representative) shall at all times be the official spokesperson for the Council.

1.2.2 Role and responsibility: Councillors

Councillors may express their view to print or electronic media on any matter relating to routine Council business, unless information contravenes Council's duty of care, confidentiality agreements, or could infringe laws or regulations governing Council's operation.

Councillors do have an individual right to express their own views to the media. However, Councillors must clarify if they are speaking as individuals, as business owners, or on behalf of their Council. Councillors' use of media and social media must be appropriate and done with the understanding that this may lead to positive, negative or neutral community feedback. It is important that Councillors are also able to protect themselves against unacceptable online behaviour.

1.2.3 Role and responsibility: Chief Executive Officer and Chief Executive Team

On matters of Council policy or operations, the CEO is the official spokesperson. The Chief Communications Officer (CCO) is also an official spokesperson and can approve others within the organisation to speak on a case by case request basis. All Chief Executive Team members should advise the CEO and/or CCO if they are approached by media for any commentary.

With prior approval only from the CEO, CCO or their direct Chief, Council employees may comment or provide information (not involving opinion, interpretation of Council policy, or making predictions as to future Council actions).

1.2.4 Council Employees

While Council employees are also members of the community, each employee must be aware that any public comment, even as a private citizen, may be viewed an official comment of the Council. Employees should be mindful of this before entering into any public debate or social commentary.

1.3 Approval and Authorisation

All information provided to the media/community by SMRC is to be approved by one central point within Council. This is assigned to the Communications Team with the approval of the CEO.

Only council employees specifically delegated by the CEO, CCO or relevant Chief can make public comment. All media releases, statements or announcements are to be cleared for release by the CCO.

1.4 Social Media

Social media collectively represents a compilation of online platforms for the distribution and discussion of information. SMRC currently utilises Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and Twitter to disseminate information relevant to the community and to the specific users (audience) of those platforms.

SMRC acknowledges that social media platforms are:

- a) a two-way mechanism to encourage feedback and comment from employees and community
- b) used to listen to community and better understand public attitude towards particular topics
- c) used to assist Council to monitor and gauge the sentiment in the community in realtime
- d) a useful tool to share information and consult with specific communities on current or planned policies, programs and services
- e) another medium in which to place Council’s statements of facts directly onto the public record
- f) useful to support information conveyed on Council’s website and in traditional media (e.g., radio/print)
- g) important in the engagement of a broader demographic across the region

The use of social media must follow the same principles and standards of professional practice and conduct, specifically:

- a) be honest, polite and considerate
- b) be apolitical and impartial when using social media for official purposes
- c) demonstrate Council’s values

Only approved employees, as determined by the CCO and Coordinator Engagement, are authorised to post and respond on behalf of SMRC across all Council’s social media platforms.

1.4.1 Organisational Responses to Public Comments

User safety is a key priority. Council will not tolerate content that is offensive, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist, infringes copyright, constitutes a contempt of court, breaches a Court suppression order, or is otherwise unlawful. Such content will be removed.

Posts will also be assessed for removal or reporting that are:

- libellous, disruptive or unreasonably negative in tone and content
- encouraging or glamorising the use of alcohol, tobacco, or illegal drugs
- an advertisement for a business or commercial operation or is a solicitation of donations
- not generally suited for an audience of all ages
- off-topic or not related to published content

Council will also protect the privacy and rights of individuals and will not allow for information that identifies people or confidential information about Council and its employees to be posted on social media channels.

Council reserves the right to moderate content from individuals who seek to repeatedly post, monopolise and dominate Council’s social media sites for their own purposes.

If a comment, post or message includes specific information relating to a negative comment, Council may respond by requesting the user formally submit their concerns in writing, or direct them to the snap send solve app or customer service number (1300 345 345) to lodge their request officially. This allows the user an opportunity to provide any comments directly, in accordance with Council's Customer Service Charter, and for Council to respond appropriately.

1.4.2 Elected Officials and Staff Comments via Social Media

Whether using social media for official use, or in a private capacity, elected officials and staff must behave in a manner that does not adversely affect their standing as a public official, or undertake actions which could bring themselves, the Council, or the public sector into disrepute. Any actions or comments that could bring the Council into disrepute, even if using social media in a private capacity, may be subject to disciplinary action.

1.5 Organisational Responses to Enquiries

All Council staff will adhere to SMRC's Customer Service Charter across verbal and written (print, email and online) correspondence.

1.6 Corporate Brand

Council's public image is reflected in its letterhead, publications, organised events, media coverage, signage and customer perceptions and experiences of its programs and services. Any usage of the Council logo must be approved by the Communications team and align with the organisation's style guides. Core to the function of Communications is protection of organisational reputation at all levels.

Items produced and activities undertaken including, but not limited to: media releases, advertorial features, flyers, posters, brochures, photographs, annual reports, newsletters, coordination of major events, displays and specific purpose campaigns.

Council's Communications Team is responsible for providing guidance and advice where necessary. Employees may also refer to the Style Guides for Brand and Signage.

1.7 Community and Stakeholder Engagement

SMRC's communications will inform the community about services, projects, decisions, achievements and activities to support and strengthen relationships with all stakeholders. Information and content will be in line with Council's principles and values, and will endeavour to build trust with the community to deliver the organisation's vision and mission.

The Community Engagement template being utilised in project and campaign activities includes a stakeholder mapping tool where audiences (groups/stakeholders are defined along with their potential concerns, impact of the project/activity on that audience, what value they can add and what influence they have, key contacts and preferred communication methods.

This process provides a reference document for phased communications and details the engagement levels of each stakeholder, be it to inform, consult, involve, collaborate or empower. In mapping these details, the project or communications campaign team members are then informed in the development of their engagement plan, from end to end. The engagement plans helps communicate the steps and process internally with the opportunity to identify gaps in information. This includes timing, key messages, target audience, method of communication, activities, tasks and milestones.

Community engagement goals are:

- To ensure key stakeholders are provided opportunity to review, comment influence preliminary design before broader community consultation
- To place the design on public exhibition (where applicable) to understand the broader community reaction to the proposed project before finalising for approval by council.
- To provide transparency at all stages of end to end communications from determination of audience through to finalisation of project. This includes informing stakeholders of outcomes and project milestones such as official launch events and associated communications including media releases and resulting coverage.

Documentation

- SMRC 0001 – Policy – SMRC Code of Conduct
<https://intranet.snowymonaro.nsw.gov.au/DocumentCenter/View/5761>
- The Model Code of Conduct of Local Councils in NSW
<https://intranet.snowymonaro.nsw.gov.au/documentcenter/view/7177>
- SMRC Customer Service Charter
<https://intranet.snowymonaro.nsw.gov.au/documentcenter/view/6472>
- SMRC Community Engagement/Stakeholder Mapping Tool
- SMRC Communications Activity Plans (ongoing)
- SMRC Style Guides – Standard and Signage
<https://intranet.snowymonaro.nsw.gov.au/DocumentCenter/View/5794>

Variation

Council reserves the right to review, vary or revoke this policy and should be reviewed periodically to ensure it is relevant and appropriate.