



Policy Title: **Communications Policy**
Policy Category: **Administration**
Policy No.: A-047
Department: Corporate Services
Approval Date: June 22, 2026
Revision Date: NA
Author: Cari Van Niekerk, Director of Corporate Communications
Attachments: NA
Related Legislation: Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Municipal Act, Canada's Anti- Spam Legislation (CASL)
Related Documents: [Social Media Policy](#), [Social Media Guidelines](#), [Accessibility Policy](#), [Respectful Behaviour Policy](#), [Public Engagement Policy](#), [Honoraria and Compensation Policy](#), [Website Guidelines](#), [Waterloo.ca Content Design Guidelines](#), Responding to the Media Procedure, Digital Newsletter Guidelines, Corporate Standards Manual.
Key Word(s): communication, accessible, inclusive, proactive, responsive, timely

POLICY STATEMENT:

The City of Waterloo is dedicated to building positive relationships and public trust through effective two-way communication. The City commits to open and honest public communication that is timely, consistent, inclusive and responsive, while considering the diverse information needs of our residents, businesses, students, visitors and additional community organizations and partners.

PURPOSE:

This policy provides guidance for City communications by establishing standards that reflect the Guiding Principles of Equity and Inclusion, Integrity and Operational Excellence. City communications promote awareness of municipal priorities and objectives, so the community can be better informed and engaged. This policy supports responsible and informed municipal decision-making and service delivery by ensuring the City:

- Shares clear, accurate and timely information in a way that is inclusive, proactive and responsive.
- Creates opportunities for two-way communication and community feedback.
- Protects privacy and respects access to information requirements.

Mandatory Policy, *Municipal Act*: no

Policy Administration Team, Review Date May 25, 2026

Corporate Management Team, Review Date June 3, 2026

- Ensures all communications meet quality and accessibility standards.
- Keeps communications across the organization aligned and connected to the City's brand and strategic priorities.
- Supports a consistent and shared approach to communications across the organization.

DEFINITIONS:

Accessible: Accessible communications involves creating and delivering information in formats that everyone, including people with disabilities can find, understand, and use. The goal is to use conscious planning, design, and/or effort to remove barriers to provide equitable access to information for people with visual, hearing, cognitive, or physical disabilities, as well as those with developing literacy skills. It includes meeting the requirements laid out in the ***Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, SO 2005, c 11, as amended or replaced ("AODA")***.

City Leaders: Supervisors, Managers, Directors and Commissioners/Deputy Commissioner at the City of Waterloo.

Consultant: Any person(s) or firm(s) that provides communication support to the City under terms specified in a contract or other agreement and is not paid through the City's payroll.

Equity and Inclusion: (Guiding Principle, 2023-2026 Strategic Plan) The City builds relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples and equity-denied groups and embraces Reconciliation, equity, accessibility, diversity and inclusion.

Inclusive: Inclusive communication involves sharing information in a way that is respectful, accessible, and welcoming to all individuals, regardless of their background, identity, or disabilities. This sometimes involves accommodations.

Integrity: (Guiding Principle, 2023-2026 Strategic Plan) The City operates with integrity and transparency and we strive for well-considered comprehensive, responsive, diligent and thoughtful decision-making.

Operational Excellence: (Guiding Principle, 2023-2026 Strategic Plan) The City provides fiscally responsible, exceptional service that meets the needs of residents, partners and equity-denied groups, employees and volunteers of the City.

Public: Individuals and special interest groups who live, work, play and/or learn in the City of Waterloo.

Proactive: Proactive communication involves anticipating needs, problems, or questions and addressing them by reaching out to the public before they occur.

Examples include informing residents of service and program changes, providing project updates, or offering early solutions for potential customer service concerns.

Responsive: Responsive communication involves listening to understand, adapting one's tone or communication method to the needs of the recipient, and providing prompt feedback.

Timely: Timely communication involves delivering relevant information promptly, ideally when it is needed or at an opportune time to enable action, decision-making, or reassurance. This includes providing responses within designated timeframes (such as those laid out in the Customer Service Policy).

SCOPE:

This policy applies to all City of Waterloo employees, including permanent full time and part-time, temporary, casual, contract, and co-op students, contractors and consultants responsible for communicating, directly or indirectly with the public on behalf of the City of Waterloo.

The Corporate Communications Division provides general guidance, support and oversight of communications activities, with shared responsibility across City divisions to develop, send and receive internal and external communications.

POLICY COMMUNICATION:

The policy will be saved on the corporate intranet and posted on the corporate website. It will be shared as part of new employee and new council orientation sessions.

It will be reviewed on an ongoing basis as part of new employee and new council orientation sessions. The policy will also be shared with consultants by project leads when the city issues bids, or requests for information are issued.

POLICY:

Guiding Principles

To support the City's guiding principles of equity and inclusion, effective engagement and service excellence, it is the policy of the City of Waterloo to:

- 1. Provide information that is timely, accurate, and easy to understand.** To maintain public trust, we have a duty to communicate about municipal priorities, policies, programs and services with honesty and integrity, using plain language

and proactively removing language barriers so that information is easily understood by all whenever possible, including offering translation and interpretation services.

2. **Communicate in ways that acknowledge diverse needs and reduce barriers to accessing information.** City information should be readily available to anyone looking for it. The City will use a variety of ways to communicate and provide/receive information that considers the diverse perceptual and physical abilities of all residents, recognizing and accommodating based on the requirements outlined in the AODA and the City's Accessibility Policy. This includes providing American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation when spoken communication is used.
3. **Routinely identify and address communication needs in the development and implementation of City programs and services.** Gathering and providing municipal government information requires professional tools and resources. Communication requirements must be identified when planning or reviewing City programs and services, including methods for receiving and responding to external communication, and appropriate timelines for that response.
4. **Ensure all City departments work together for aligned and effective communication with the public.** As a core activity and shared responsibility across the organization, the Corporate Communications team will work with all departments to ensure a consistent approach to City communications. Information from the City should be easily recognized and align with the City's strategic priorities and visual identity.
5. **Apply related communication guidelines to all City programs and services.** Administrative guidelines and procedures will be established for various communication tools and formats in support of this policy. The related guidelines surrounding the City's visual identity (Corporate Standards Manual), media relations, website, community engagement, emergency management, customer service and other communications (e.g. website, newsletters) will provide detailed standards for how this policy is implemented in the City's daily operations and will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.
6. **Respect the access to information and privacy rights of employees and City residents.** We will strive to be open and proactive in all communication. This includes providing proactive disclosure of information when appropriate and according to applicable City policies and procedures. Access to information, and the privacy of those we communicate with will be protected appropriately based on the requirements outlined in the [Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#) and related City policies and procedures.
7. **Ensure that communications are respectful and appropriate.** All communication should be respectful and not diminish or unduly criticize differing

points of view on matters or issues under consideration. Staff will consider the key principles of inclusive communication in developing messages. The City will not engage with communication that is discriminatory, promotes hatred, harassment, violence or racism or that is abusive or derogatory.

Key Principles of Inclusive Communication

- **Accessibility:** Making information available to people with disabilities, such as using alternative formats (captions, screen reader compatibility) and clear, high-contrast visuals.
- **Respectful Language:** Using terminology that recognizes and values diversity and promotes equal opportunities, often favoring person-first language (e.g., "person with a disability" instead of "disabled person").
- **Avoiding Assumptions:** Actively identifying and removing language that reflects biases or stereotypes based on gender, race, age, or ability (e.g. assuming someone's gender based on their name or appearance).
- **Context and Flexibility:** Acknowledging that communication should adapt to the audience and that language evolves.

Responsibilities

Employees involved in City communications are responsible to:

- Be familiar with the policy, and any communications guidelines specific to their division, particularly specific program or service requirements for timely response.
- Work with Corporate Communications to develop communications plans that align with the commitments in this and related policies and guidelines.
- Ensure that accessibility and accommodations that promote equity and inclusion, including interpretation (ASL and additional languages) and translation will be planned and budgeted for, and clearly communicated to the public.
- Work with consultants, committees or other third parties involved in developing City communications to ensure this policy and legislated requirements are met when developing the communications plan.
- Seek opportunities for ongoing learning for continuous improvement in communication.
- Ensure communication meets legislated and City requirements to be inclusive, accessible, and reflect the needs of the community.

City Leaders are responsible to:

- Support staff by allocating enough time, funding, and people to plan, carry out, and evaluate communication activities.

- Provide consistent resources to support accessibility and equitable service delivery.
- Promote a culture where inclusive, accessible and timely communication is valued and prioritized.
- Monitor and support consistent use of the policy and related guidelines across departments.
- Support staff in ongoing learning for continuous improvement in communication.

COMPLIANCE:

In cases of policy violation, the City may investigate and determine appropriate corrective action.