

COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA POLICY

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Policy statement

Blue Mountains City Council (Council) will encourage open communication with the community and the media, with an emphasis on promoting a positive, progressive and professional image of Council and employees.

Effective, clear and consistent communication throughout our organisation is vital if Council is to effectively engage with, serve and inform the community.

This policy explains who is authorised to make comments to the media and approve promotional material on behalf of Council.

Scope

This policy applies to Councillors, employees and Council delegates.

Roles and responsibilities

Positions	Responsibilities
Mayor	Act as spokesperson for Council, particularly on business that is before the elected Council.
Councillors	Identify all public statements as their own opinion, not that of Council.
Chief Executive Officer	Act as a spokesperson for Council. Delegate authority to speak on behalf of Council. Approve media releases. Approve employees' public speaking engagements, if required. CEO may delegate responsibilities to a Director or Executive Business Manager as required.

Positions	Responsibilities
Executive Business Manager	<p>Give approval for specific employees to speak to the media on behalf of Council.</p> <p>Approve media releases.</p> <p>Approve employees' public speaking engagements.</p>
Manager Communications & Marketing	<p>Respond to media enquiries on behalf of Council.</p> <p>Coordinate media liaison on behalf of Council.</p> <p>Nominate employees with relevant expertise to speak to the media about a specific topic.</p> <p>Inform Councillors and relevant employees of media releases at the time of release.</p> <p>Ensure media releases are published on Council's website in a timely fashion.</p> <p>Provide input on other organisations' media releases on behalf of Council, when appropriate.</p> <p>Monitor the media and inform the Chief Executive Officer, directors and/or the Executive Business Manager of significant media enquiries.</p> <p>Brief the Chief Executive Officer, relevant directors, the Executive Business Manager and/or the Mayor on any issues likely to generate media interest.</p> <p>Liaise with employees about public speaking engagements.</p> <p>Approve service-specific logos or taglines.</p> <p>Approve promotional material.</p>
Directors	<p>Give approval for specific employees to speak to the media on behalf of Council.</p> <p>Approve media releases.</p> <p>Approve employees' public speaking engagements.</p>
Employees	<p>Do not speak to the media on Council-related topics except with the approval of the Chief Executive Officer, the relevant director or the Executive Business Manager.</p> <p>Do not accept a public speaking engagement without approval from the Chief Executive Officer, the relevant director or the Executive Business Manager.</p> <p>Ensure any comments they make in public debate, including on social media, are clearly identified as their personal opinions and not those of Council.</p>

Definitions

Term	Definition
Code of Conduct	The current Code of Conduct as adopted by Blue Mountains City Council.
Council	Blue Mountains City Council, which includes all Services and programs of Council, e.g. libraries, Blue Mountains Cultural Centre, Family Day Care, Leisure Centre, Visitor Information Centres, Blue Mountains City of the Arts, Blue Mountains Youth Council, Blue Mountains Theatre and Community Hub, Bushcare and Healthy Waterways.
Councillors	The current elected Councillors of Blue Mountains City Council.
Council officials	Includes volunteers, contractors, Council committee members and delegates of Council.
Communications	Includes (but is not limited to) marketing or promotional material such as signage, brochures, posters, newsletters and online content as well as letters, forms, fact sheets and surveys.
Employees	Includes permanent, temporary and casual members of employees of Council, volunteers and contractors, Council committee members and delegates of Council.
Media	The means of communication (television, radio, newspapers, magazines, as well as online platforms and applications) that reach or influence people.
Public debate/speaking	Undertaking a presentation, or speech, to a group that may be recorded for publication.
Promotional & marketing material	Communications material that promotes the organisation in order to raise awareness and/or seek information and/or improve its reputation. This includes - but is not limited to - signage, brochures, posters, newsletters, online content, as well as letters, forms, fact sheets and surveys.
Major projects	Projects undertaken by Council (particularly those from the annual Asset Works Program and/or any that may be sensitive to members of the community) should include a communications strategy.

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1. Making public comments

The Mayor and/or the Chief Executive Officer are the official spokespersons for the Council on all matters. The Chief Executive Officer may delegate other employees to act as a spokesperson for the Council.

The Manager Communications & Marketing is responsible for coordinating Council’s media liaison and is delegated responsibility to respond to media enquiries on behalf of Council. The Manager Communications & Marketing will liaise with relevant employees, managers, the Chief Executive Officer and/or Mayor to prepare a response to a media enquiry.

1.1 Councillors

The Mayor will be the spokesperson on Council business that is before the elected Council. Therefore all media enquiries must be directed to the Mayor in the first instance, in consultation with the Manager Communications & Marketing.

Statements made by Councillors must be identified as their opinions only and as such do not necessarily represent the position of the Council. As specified by the *Local Government Act 1993* (NSW) and the Code of Conduct, Councillors must not disclose publicly, or to the media, any confidential material of the Council.

Council’s Code of Conduct applies to all Councillor comments to the media. Councillors must not, generally and in the media, conduct themselves in a manner that:

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- a. is likely to bring the Council or other Council officials into disrepute,
- b. is contrary to statutory requirements or the Council's administrative requirements or policies,
- c. is improper or unethical,
- d. is an abuse of power,
- e. causes, comprises or involves intimidation or verbal abuse,
- f. involves the misuse of their position to obtain a private benefit,
- g. constitutes harassment or bullying behaviour under the Code of Conduct, or
- h. is unlawfully discriminatory.

1.2 Employees

Employees are not permitted to speak with the media without prior permission from the Chief Executive Officer and advance consultation with the Manager Communications & Marketing.

In some instances the Chief Executive Officer or the Manager Communications & Marketing will nominate employees with particular expertise to speak to the topic of a media enquiry. This will be done following the approval of the relevant director or the Executive Business Manager.

Employees may express their views in a public debate in their capacity as a local citizen, but not as a Council representative. Employees must avoid any perception of a conflict of interest and take care not to give the impression that their comments are made on behalf of Council.

Employees also need to be aware of their responsibilities under the Code of Conduct, which include the obligation not to "conduct yourself in a manner that ... is likely to bring the council or other council officials into disrepute".

Public speaking

From time to time employees may be asked to undertake a public speaking engagement on behalf of Council. All requests for public speaking must be approved by the Chief Executive Officer, the relevant director or the Executive Business Manager. They should also be referred to the Manager Communications & Marketing to assist in the preparation of the presentation.

1.3 Other delegates

Volunteers, contractors, Council committee members and/or other delegates of Council are not permitted to speak with the media on behalf of Council.

Delegates may express their views in a public debate in their capacity as a local citizen, but not as a Council representative.

Advisory committees as a Council function operate within the provisions of this policy. All media representation, press contact and publications relating to advisory committees must be directed to Council's Manager Communications & Marketing via the Council Support Officer.

2. Media activity

2.1 Media releases

Media releases are distributed in a standard format. The Manager Communications & Marketing will ensure that Councillors and relevant employees have access to media releases at the time of release and that all employees and the community have access to media releases in a timely fashion via the Council website.

The Communications & Marketing Service will obtain approval from the relevant director or the Executive Business Manager, the Chief Executive Officer and the Mayor on significant media releases prior to release.

Where a media release is prepared by another organisation that relates to a Council project or in which Council is involved, the Manager Communications & Marketing may provide an official comment on behalf of Council, in consultation with the Mayor and/or the Chief Executive Officer.

2.2 Media monitoring

The Manager Communications & Marketing will:

- maintain records of media enquiries and responses, copies of media releases, associated background information and media clippings, including web, TV footage and radio recordings where possible;
- maintain 'issues' folders on subjects in which the Council has an interest and which could become controversial;
- produce a weekly media roundup in which a record of media exposure is kept by date and publication; and
- inform the Chief Executive Officer, directors and/or the Executive Business Manager of significant media enquiries or liaison.

2.3 Media briefings

The Manager Communications & Marketing may provide briefings to the Chief Executive Officer, relevant directors or the Executive Business Manager, and/or the Mayor on issues likely to generate media interest.

2.4 Media alerts

Any Council employee who becomes aware of an issue relating to Council that may be of interest to the media (positive or negative) should contact their director, the Executive Business Manager and/or the Manager Communications & Marketing.

3. Other communication channels

Any external promotional material must be reviewed and approved by a member of the Communications & Marketing Service (or an existing, authorised communications and marketing officer of a specific Council Service) before being published or distributed. This includes (but is not limited to) marketing or promotional material such as signage, brochures, posters, newsletters and online content, as well as letters, forms, fact sheets and surveys.

3.1 Branding

All written and visual communications, regardless of their purpose, intended audience or the channels they will be distributed through, must comply with Council's *Brand Guide* and *Writing Style Guide*. This includes using Council's logo in conjunction with Service sub-brands.

Any materials that use Council's logo must be created using an approved template, if available, or comply with correct usage of the logo (and/or correct usage of Service logos) as outlined in the *Brand Guide*.

A new Council service logo or tagline cannot be created without the consent of the Manager Communications & Marketing.

3.2 Paid media advertising

The design and content of any paid advertising material must be undertaken in consultation with the Communications & Marketing Service and must align to Council's *Writing Style Guide* and the *Brand Guide*.

3.3 Online communication

All Council material that is to be published on Council's corporate website, intranet or Staff App must be submitted in a timely manner to the Web Administrator (at WebRequest@bmcc.nsw.gov.au) for publishing by the Communications & Marketing Service.

Please see the *Social Media Policy* for further information on the correct use of social media platforms.

Any other Council website for a Service or project must adhere to the *Development of Council Websites Policy* and Council's *Brand Guide*.

3.4 Communications strategies as a component of projects

All major projects undertaken by Council should include a communications strategy. Members of the Communications & Marketing Service will provide advice to employees on the preparation of a communications strategy, as required.

4. Breaches of this policy

Council employees must be aware of their obligations under Council's Code of Conduct and this policy. Any breaches of this policy will be referred to the Chief Executive Officer, the relevant director or the Executive Business Manager and/or Human Resources.

Related documents

This document should be read in conjunction with:

Legislation

- *Local Government Act 1993 (NSW)*
- *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW)*

Other documentation

- Council's Code of Conduct
- Council's Social Media Policy
- Council's Development of Websites Policy
- Council's Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct
- Council's Brand Guide
- Council's Writing Style Guide