



Subject: Media Relations

Service Area: Corporate Services

Division: Corporate Communications

Approved: September 11, 2017

Supersedes: August, 2005

Purpose:

A strategic approach to media relations is required to build an equally beneficial and trusting relationship with news media in order to foster accurate and fair reporting; increase positive news coverage; and protect and enhance the City's reputation and integrity. This policy provides general principles and guidelines to facilitate the release of information and interaction with the media regarding the City of Sault Ste. Marie's policies, programs and services.

This document outlines who can interact with the media in an official capacity on behalf of the City and when, how, and why to initiate or respond to inquiries from print, broadcast, online and social media outlets.

Corporate Communications leads the organization's media relations activities; however, all City departments have a role to play in building professional and cooperative relationships and to ensure media inquiries are responded to in a timely manner that is accurate and clear, and by the most appropriate City spokesperson.

Scope:

Media relations are managed by Corporate Communications on behalf of the organization. This policy applies to all City employees including full-time and part-time workers, casual and temporary staff, as well as students, volunteers and interns. It addresses how employees interact with traditional (i.e. print, radio, TV), online and social media sources.

Definitions:

Media includes traditional news sources (print, radio, and television), online (websites) and social media (blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter) and other sites where content is generated by users.

City spokesperson is an employee who has the authority to make statements to traditional, online and social media outlets on behalf of the organization. Unless otherwise authorized, the City's spokespersons are:

1. **Mayor or acting Mayor (in the mayor's absence):** The Mayor or acting Mayor, in cases of the Mayor's absence, shall be the chief spokesperson at all times for the City of Sault Ste. Marie representing City Council.



2. **City Councillors:** City Councillors shall be spokespersons on events or issues of personal interest to them. It is understood that comments and communications from a councillor represent the views of the councillor and not necessarily the formal position of the City of Sault Ste. Marie.
3. **Chief Administrative Officer:** The Chief Administrative Officer shall be the chief staff spokesperson and speaks on behalf of the municipality regarding all functions of the organization.
4. **Executive and Senior Management Team members (EMT, SMT):** The EMT and SMT of City department shall speak on behalf of his / her area of accountability and responsibility as the chief spokesperson for the department.
5. **Signatories of a specific report:** Authors and signatories on a report that is brought before City Council shall provide clarification or background to the media on a specific report's content prior to its consideration by Council. However, staff shall not give their opinion on such reports (including recommendations) before Council makes a decision on the report or comment on decisions of Council.
6. **Corporate Communications Officer:** The Corporate Communications Officer is the official City spokesperson overseeing communication strategy and media relations for the Corporation.
7. **Other employees as directed or delegated by EMT or SMT:** Staff may provide background information to the media that is publicly available only when directed to do so by EMT or SMT. Requests for interviews shall be referred to the appropriate spokesperson or department head. Staff members can be delegated / designated the duties of spokesperson on issues concerning programs, operations and activities that fall within their area of responsibility, where authorized by the Chief Administrative Officer or department head.

Police, Fire and Emergency Medical Service employees follow their own media guidelines and protocol that govern their procedures. Corporate Communications should nevertheless be made aware of individuals speaking to the media on behalf of the Corporation.

Communications Guiding Standards of Practice

The Corporation's media relations are conducted in conformance with the following principles:

- Work collaboratively to respond to all media queries in a timely way. This may include media contacts outside traditional office hours or days of work.
- Make available the most appropriate spokesperson(s) based on accountability and responsibility and consider the wide range of communication tools available to address the needs associated with each unique circumstance.
- The Corporation reserves the right to time news releases and events in ways that are most beneficial to its own interests. This recognizes that media have different timing requirements.



- Communications prepared by the Corporation conform to professional journalistic practices and standards in terms of style, content and timing and will support two-way symmetrical communication engagement opportunities with the media.
- The Corporation recognizes that Council and staff should have the opportunity to learn about major developments from the Corporation first. Accordingly, efforts will be taken to post news releases and messages appropriately.

Media Contacts

The Corporate Communications Officer or City Clerk is the designated management contact for media activity whether initiated by the City or by media outlets. The centralization of this role ensures consistency and responsiveness.

Any employee who receives media calls or requests for information should refer them to the Corporate Communications Officer or City Clerk for processing.

The Communications Officer, City Clerk or designate is the official spokesperson for the City. This role involves both direct media responses and the coordination of media responses in which the CAO, Executive Management and / or Senior Management employees are interviewed or featured. Such involvement is dependent on a variety of factors including the sensitivity of the news item, news value of the item and the availability / sustainability of official spokespersons for interview.

The Corporate Communications Officer or City Clerk must determine when responses are appropriate from others in the organization and facilitate such responses.

Members of the organization are encouraged to identify achievements or activities that may be newsworthy. When they identify such items, they should contact Corporate Communications for for guidance and assistance.

As appropriate, subject matter experts will be interviewed by the media. These interviews provide opportunities to promote awareness of staff, projects and programs as well as provide recognition for members of the organization. The Corporate Communications Officer may provide guidance and assistance to those who are the subject of media interviews.

The Spokesperson Role

A spokesperson may share or delegate their responsibility when the subject matter expertise / information is sought beyond what the spokesperson could provide, and when the delegated spokesperson is not adequately prepared to undertake this responsibility.

Following media interviews, City spokespeople are required to email Corporate Communications and any other relevant staff providing the following information:



- the media outlet and reporter
- the interview topic and a brief summary of questions and responses
- date and time when the article, online post or broadcast is expected to be published or aired

Representing the Corporation as a spokesperson:

Any communications that employees make in a professional capacity must not:

- I) Breach confidentiality, for example:
 - Reveal confidential intellectual property or information owned by the Corporation or information that is subject of a closed City Council meeting pursuant to the Municipal Act;
 - Release confidential information about an individual (such as a colleague or partner) or organization (such as a stakeholder or partnership agreement) or;
 - Discuss the Corporation's internal workings (such as working agreements or its future business plans that have not been communicated to the public) or;
- II) Do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying, or harassment of any individual, for example by:
 - Making offensive comments relating to race, sex, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, age or;
- III) Bring disgrace on the Corporation, for example by:
 - Criticizing or arguing with colleagues, partners or competitors or;
 - Posting or sharing images or links that are inappropriate or;
- IV) Breach copyright, for example by:
 - Using someone else's images or written content without permission or;
 - Failing to give acknowledgement where permission has been given to reproduce something.

Non-spokespeople

Employees who are not authorized spokespeople must refer all media inquiries to the authorized spokesperson for the department or project and immediately notify Corporate Communications. This excludes access to routine publicly available information in which City employees are permitted to answer to members of the public (e.g. committee meeting dates, building permit information normally available to the public). Nothing in this policy is intended to prevent the access of information to the public that is normally available.

City employees who are not designated spokespeople are not authorized to make statements to the media and / or in public discussion on behalf of the City. City staff who are not designated spokespersons and who are contacted by a news media representative shall:

- Be courteous and professional.



- Explain that they are not a spokesperson for the City and respectfully decline the request for an interview or information. An appropriate response to the media would be: “I do not have the information for you regarding that topic. I will forward your request to the Communications Officer who will respond to you as soon as possible.”
- Provide timely responses to the media by collecting the following information to be forwarded to Corporate Communications:
 - Journalist’s name and who they work for
 - Contact number of the journalist or news agency
 - Journalist’s deadline
 - Topic of the interview

(Refer to Appendix B: Media Tracking form)

Policy application

Subject to applicable collective agreements and employment agreements, the City may consider disciplinary measures or legal action if an identifiable employee makes defamatory or otherwise inappropriate statements in a public domain about their co-workers and / or employer. This includes comments made on websites, blogs and social media networks using personal computers, Smartphones or devices, from an online account or profile associated with a personal email address.

Employees should be aware that the use of media relations in a way that is unfavourable or malicious may lead to disciplinary action under the City’s Code of Conduct. Employees that contact the media without first notifying Corporate Communications, and / or who cause serious damage to the Corporation may lead to action up to and including dismissal.

Monitoring

The City of Sault Ste. Marie and its various online websites and social media accounts are monitored by Corporate Communications. Various monitoring sites ensure the Corporation receives information almost instantly once “City of Sault Ste. Marie” is mentioned. Corporate Communications prompts corrective action when required to ensure the Corporation is not at risk.

Known or potentially contentious issues

All media inquiries regarding known or potentially contentious issues must be immediately referred to Corporate Communications and the appropriate person on the Executive Management Team (EMT). In collaboration with the EMT member, Corporate Communications will coordinate a plan and / or response on behalf of the City.



Crisis or emergency issues

During an emergency, the procedure for working with the media is outlined in the City's Crisis Communications Procedure and Emergency Plan. Under the Procedure and the Plan, a designated Information Officer is the main point of contact for the media.

Use of Logos and Branding

Unauthorized use of the Corporation of the City of Sault Ste. Marie name, logo or trademarks without the express permission of an authorized official of the Corporation is strictly prohibited. Logos shall not be altered in any way and will be prominently displayed. Only logos and imagery provided by Corporate Communications will be approved. Refer to the City's Corporate Identity Guidelines for details.

Content Strategy – Use of Voice

The popularity of social media and other media platforms has changed the way the Corporation communicates. It's important to speak to stakeholders in a language that is approachable, friendly, easy-to-read and understand and that speaks conversationally in all facets of communication. The voice used in traditional media, web, social media communications and content is warm, welcoming and engaging, using a personal and respectful tone at all times.

Training

Staff training will be offered in a variety of formats:

- Spokespersons will be trained to measure the success or failure of news items
- Social media information sessions will be included in new employee and student orientation sessions
- Upon request, Corporate Communications may provide assistance

Policy Updates

The City of Sault Ste. Marie's Corporate Communication will monitor and update this policy as required.

News Release or Advisory

- The initiative for the development of all news media communication is the responsibility of the individual department and the department's spokesperson.
- The Corporate Communications Officer will be a resource when preparing the spokesperson in the preparation of news releases and in the organization of news conferences.
- Corporate Communications must be notified two-weeks in advance or as soon as possible prior to an event or activity in order to ensure ample time to format information for various media platforms and to provide advance notice to media outlets for scheduling purposes.



- Corporate Communications should be involved in promoting outreach initiatives to the community. This includes open houses, information sessions and future plans where constituents are involved and affected.
- Whenever a member of staff initiates a news release, regardless of the purpose, a copy of the news release must be sent to the Corporate Communications Officer, or their designate **before** it is released to the media or public. The Corporate Communications Officer, or their designate, will review the news release and, if approved, they will distribute it to all appropriate media.
- When initiating a release on behalf of the City and quoting any City staff or elected official, the release must be approved in writing by the person being quoted in advance of its release.
- The release must include a contact phone number and email of the corporate spokesperson as the source of the news release (Appendix A). All staff and officials identified as a contact should be available for comment during the day in which the release is issued.
- Corporate Communications reserves the right to determine which media relations tool is most appropriate to use in certain circumstances (Appendix A).

As soon as possible, the Corporate Communications Officer shall forward news releases, public meetings, notices and advisories to the following officials and staff before sending to the media in the order below:

- Mayor and Members of Council where applicable
- The CAO, Deputy CAOs and or respective SMT member where applicable.
- All City Staff
- Media

News releases are posted to the City's website by the Web Content Coordinator or designate.

Responding to Council's Actions

Staff must not make judgmental comments regarding individual Council members, Council actions or City policy when responding to media enquiries. Staff should also refrain from anticipating an action or position that has not been formally taken by City Council or the City. Any enquiry regarding a specific Council member's decision should be forwarded to the Council member.

Council members are accessible to the news media and every attempt should be made to encourage the news media representative to contact Council members directly. Telephone numbers and e-mail addresses for all Council members are available on the City website, as well as in printed form in the Clerk's Department.



Litigation, including prosecutions

Staff should not respond to media enquiries regarding City litigation or legal issues. News media enquiries regarding legal matters should be referred to the city solicitor.



Appendix A: Media Relations Tools

There is a diverse range of techniques and tools that can be utilized to reach audiences through the media to deliver messages that are on target, accurate and effective. Media relations should be handled by Corporate Communications or a specialist with experience in working with the media. It is up to the discretion of Corporate Communications to determine which Media Relations tool is most appropriate to use in each circumstance.

The techniques of media relations are part of a larger strategy that Corporate Communications develops on an annual basis. While Corporate Communications need to have the capacity to react quickly to events, most techniques can be prepared in advance and planned carefully.

In addition to staying informed about activities of the City of Sault Ste. Marie departments, Corporate Communications will benefit from closely watching political and social happenings in the community and in the country that are of relevance to, or might influence the organization. This will ensure that spokespersons are not caught off guard when the media brings issues to their attention and requests a comment (whether or not the questions warrant comment). Staying informed will allow Corporate Communications to predict questions or concerns which might arise and create responses to potential questions.

News Releases

News Releases are issued when there is something newsworthy to announce such as a major service change or a new City initiative. The message must be written for journalists and must be part of the overall Corporate Communications Plan. As a guideline, staff may consider:

- That the news being released is “newsworthy”
- A news release as an introduction to a subject, inviting the news media and others to make further enquiries or to seek an interview on a particular subject matter
- That news releases should be limited to one page
- Avoiding technical or complicated jargon. As a general rule, keep paragraphs to two to three sentences in length.
- Using direct quotes from a spokesperson to make the release more effective and relevant.
- Spelling out numbers one through nine (except for dates, times, age or money). For all other numbers, use numerals (e.g., 10, 11, 12 etc.)
- Proofreading , spell checking and date and time verification
- Being mindful of news media deadlines
- Additional background information may be provided in the form of a media kit that may include fact sheets, background information, multimedia content and contacts



Media Advisory

A media advisory invites the media to an event happening at the City at a specific date, time and place to which the media is invited.

Public Service Announcement

A public service announcement is a message in the public interest with the objective of raising awareness of an upcoming event or activity.

Media Events / Photo Opportunities

Media Events provide an excellent opportunity for media to see a City initiative, service, program or facility in action. Such events allow the City to communicate directly with authorized spokespeople and the media.

News Conferences

A news conference is a means of conveying more information that can be carried in a single press release. It is also a way of providing a venue for all media to gather and ask questions of the City's authorized spokespeople.

Interviews

One-on-one interviews allow the media to have a more in-depth and focused discussion with a City spokesperson. It is best if interviews are scheduled through Corporate Communications. An interviewee may benefit from reviewing talking points to guide his or her answers prior to participating in the interview and should be experienced in talking with the media. Corporate Communications may suggest certain topics to focus; a skilled interviewee will know how to redirect conversations back to topics of importance.

Website

The City's news section on its website provides a one-stop location for media and the public that is constantly updated by the addition of new material as it becomes available.

Social Media Platforms

The City subscribes to various platforms including but not limited to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn.



News Release

For Immediate Release

Create Interest with an Attention Grabbing Headline

Sault Ste. Marie, ON (Year Month Date) – The first paragraph contains the most important information. The reader should be able to tell what the release is about from the first paragraph.

All information in your news release should be written in plain, easily understandable language. The second paragraph can identify the timing, location or significance of the release. Add a quote from the subject matter expert. Quotes highlight certain aspects of your story and provide another perspective other than that of the writer.

In the remaining space, expand on any details of the matter. Remember your news release should cover who, what, where, when, why as well as how.

All news releases should contain the spokesperson as the contact that the media can follow up with for more details.

-30-

(adding “-30-” identifies the end of the news release)

Media Contact:

Name

Job Title

Service Area

City of Sault Ste. Marie

Phone

Email

Appendix B: Media Tracking Form



Media Tracking Form

Date of media call or inquiry: _____

Journalist's name and media outlet: _____

Contact number of the Journalist or news agency: _____

Journalist's deadline: _____

Topic of discussion:

Questions Asked:

Type of interview (on camera, telephone): _____

Staff who responded: _____

Was a News Release issued? Yes No

Air Date / Publication date: _____

Other important information:

Please return to Corporate Communications for tracking purposes.