

**REGIONAL DISTRICT OF OKANAGAN-SIMILKAMEEN  
BOARD POLICY**

<b><u>POLICY:</u></b>	Communications Policy
<b><u>AUTHORITY:</u></b>	Board Resolution dated July 16, 2015.
<b><u>AMENDED:</u></b>	Board Resolution dated May 20, 2021. <sup>1</sup> Board Resolution dated September 7, 2023. <sup>2</sup>

**POLICY STATEMENT**

Consistent communications enable the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS) to optimize the customer experience and build the organization’s brand by fostering dynamic and effective community relationships. The Regional District strives to elevate external communications to a high performing level and values effective communications as an integral part of good governance. It embraces open government and transparency as a fundamental responsibility.

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines to facilitate coordinated, open and responsive corporate communications that consistently and effectively provides information concerning the Regional District’s policies, programs, services and initiatives to ratepayers, stakeholders and other partners.

**DEFINITIONS**

**Brand:** The personification of our organization: the visual, emotional, rational, and cultural image that is associated with our organization. It is a collection of perceptions in the mind of our stakeholders.

**CAO:** The Chief Administrative Officer of the Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen, duly appointed by resolution or bylaw of the Board of Directors, and holding the designations under s. 235, 236 and 237 of the Local Government Act.

**Chair:** The person elected as Chairperson of the Board of Directors for the Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen by their peers on the Board.

**Communications Committee:** A team comprised of Regional District staff who meet regularly to network and provide input on communication issues.

**Corporate Advertising:** Advertising generated at the corporate or departmental level with the function of building the Regional District’s corporate image or name-awareness or to disseminate information.

**Corporate Signature:** The primary way the Regional District identifies itself visually. It is composed of two elements: the symbol and the word mark.

**Information Release:** A factual written summary of information issued to the Public for the purpose of making a statement or announcement.

**Legislative Advertising:** Advertising generated at the corporate or departmental level with the function of meeting the statutory advertising requirements specified in relevant legislation.

**Manager of Legislative Services:** The person delegated the responsibility of s. 236 (Corporate Officer) of the Local Government Act by the CAO.

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**Media:** Representatives of the print and electronic Media.

**Plain Language:** Effective communication that is clear, concise, relevant and easy to understand.

**Senior Management Team:** The Senior Management Team for the Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen, as appointed by the CAO.

**Stakeholder:** Any individual, group of individuals, elected representative or organization with a specific stake or interest in the outcome of a decision.

**Target Audience:** Groups of people that the RDOS is impacting. In general, target audiences can be divided into two groups, internal and external:

#### Internal

- Regional Board
- RDOS Staff and Management
- Regional Committees
- RDOS Volunteers

#### External

- RDOS residents, rural and urban
- Member municipalities, including councillors and staff
- First Nations
- Media
- RDOS business communities
- Identified stakeholder groups
- Senior governments

## RESPONSIBILITIES

Information provided by the Regional District to the public will be delivered by trained and knowledgeable staff.

### Legislative Services Department

While every employee has an influence on the Regional District's communication efforts, the Legislative Services Department is responsible for managing overall corporate communications.

As part of this function, the Manager of Legislative Services is responsible for the development, management and implementation of corporate communication efforts. The Manager of Legislative Services, with the assistance of staff in that department, will work with all departments and Directors to assist with and guide as necessary, communication and engagement issues.

### Regional Board<sup>1</sup>

The Chair and/or their Designate is the primary spokesperson for the Regional District on regional matters. The Chair is authorized to release information releases on behalf of the Regional District and provide media interviews in relation to any Board position.

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Other members of the Regional Board are secondary spokespersons for the Regional District on regional matters.

The Electoral Area Director or designate is the primary spokesperson and promoter for their electoral area on matters pertaining specifically to their electoral area.

### **Senior Management Team**

Senior Management Team should be prepared to speak to media and/or designate staff from their departments to speak to the media. Management must ensure messages coming from their departments are consistent and timely, and that good media relations are maintained.

Designated staff are expected to maintain media relationships with respect to their specific programs and present consistent and timely messages as required by the Senior Manager.

### **Communications Committee**

The Communications Committee is organized under and administered through the Manager of Legislative Services. Its primary function is to provide advice to the Manager of Legislative Services on communications matters.

### **Volunteer Fire Departments<sup>2</sup>**

Volunteer Fire Departments within the RDOS administer their own Social Media accounts. Fire Department personnel are not permitted to speak on behalf of the RDOS and must comply with the guidelines set out in this policy.

## **PROCEDURES**

### **General**

Information provided by the Regional District to the public will be delivered to various target audiences in a timely, courteous and efficient manner. As much as possible, information provided shall be delivered using Plain Language.

When information is provided, it shall be delivered in a format that ensures it is identified as being delivered by the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen and will be accompanied by the Corporate Signature.

The range of communication tools at the Regional District's disposal shall be considered with each communication application and staff will identify and use those tools deemed most effective.

When information is unavailable, a prompt and clear explanation shall be provided to the party requesting the information.

### **Communication Planning**

To ensure coordinated and consistent communication practice, strategic communication planning should be part of the annual business planning process.

The Manager of Legislative Services, with input from the organization's various departments and managers, is responsible for developing a strategic communications plan that integrates the Regional District's Vision, Mission and Key Success Drivers.

This plan will broadly identify target audiences, and develop objectives, tools, messages, responsibilities, resources required and means of evaluation parallel to the organization's strategic business plan.

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## **Communicating on behalf of the Regional District**

Members of the Regional Board, the Chief Administrative Officer, and Senior Managers are authorized to communicate on behalf of the Regional District in interviews, publications, news releases, on social media sites, and related communications. Other staff may represent the Regional District if approved by a Senior Manager to communicate on a specific topic.

When discussions are held with the media and/or material such as ads, press releases and newsletters are produced, Directors, employees and specified contractors are responsible to ensure that:

- the privacy of members of the public, District employees and elected officials are respected to the extent required by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. If there is any question about what material is routinely releasable, staff should make contact with the Manager of Legislative Services prior to releasing the information.
- the interests of the District are not jeopardized;
- the information provided is factual and free of personal opinions that may embarrass the District, Chair, individual Directors and other District employees;
- the issues discussed are directly relating to the areas of responsibility of the employee who is providing the information to the media;
- questions relating to other Departments are referred to the relevant Department Head for comments;
- they do not respond to media questions if they are not sure of the answers;
- they will refrain from speculation on an individual Director's or the Board's position on District issues; and,
- the confidential nature of sensitive issues is respected.

## **Handling Information Releases**

Department staff are responsible for preparing Information Releases in accordance with the appropriate Administrative Directive.

Information Releases containing information pertaining to Regional Board matters of decisions, potential litigation, controversial issues of involving Regional District personnel shall be routed to the Manager of Legislative Services for approval by the Chairperson of the Regional Board or their designate prior to public release.

Information Releases containing routine or public information, including advisories, meeting notices and agendas shall be routed to the Manager of Legislative Services for release in accordance with delegation from the Chair.

## **Handling General Requests**

All staff are responsible for communicating basic and routine information to the public in relation to specific job duties as outlined in the RDOS Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Corporate Guide.

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Information outside of the scope of an individual's job duties should be routed to a supervisor or manager. Requests for or questions about private data should be routed to the Manager of Legislative Services for disposition.

### **Handling Media Requests**

With the exception of routine events and basic information that is readily available to the public, all requests for interviews from the media are to be routed through the applicable Manager.

Media requests include anything intended to be published or viewable to others in some form, including television, radio, newspaper, newsletters, and websites. When responding to media requests, employees should follow these steps:

- If the request is for routine or public information (such as a meeting time or agenda) provide the information.
- If the request is regarding information about Regional District personnel, potential litigation, controversial issues, an opinion on a Regional District matter, or if you are unsure if it is a "routine" question, forward the request to the Manager of Human Resources for matters related to personnel or the Manager of Legislative Services for all other matters.

### **Internal Communications**

The Regional District recognizes that open, two-way communication among Managers and Employees is vital to the effective operation of the Corporation and to achieve its Vision, Mission and Goals. Internal communication is an integral part of the annual Corporate Communications Plan.

### **Corporate Advertising**

Corporate Advertising plays an integral role in the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen's brand management and corporate communication efforts. Advertising can be a key instrument in building the corporate image, name-awareness and providing information to stakeholders.

An Administrative Directive shall be developed and maintained to effectively administer corporate advertising at the Regional District.

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen will:

- Provide information that is timely, accurate, clear, accessible and responsive;
- Respect the access to information and privacy rights of citizens and employees;
- Support opportunities for engagement to inform public policy;
- Strive to achieve a culture of two-way communication and communications excellence practices.