



CORPORATION OF THE DISTRICT OF MAPLE RIDGE

TITLE: *COMMUNICATION*

POLICY NO. *5.41*

APPROVAL DATE: *March 24, 1998*

The following policy statements represent the standards our organization recognizes with respect to communication practices. Communication will be governed by and be consistent with our mission and value statements.

Information on principles and responsibilities are attached as a separate document, which provide further details on each policy statement.

POLICY STATEMENTS:

Communication Objective

The District of Maple Ridge will take the initiative in being a reliable source of credible information to its internal and external customers, consistent with the District's mission and value statements.

Planning

A communications plan will be considered and reviewed with respect to decision-making or work plans that have a significant or potential impact on the organization and/or our customers.

Approvals

Appropriate approvals will be obtained in a timely manner in order that we can provide effective and accurate communication.

Disclosure

Forthright communications with our internal and external customers is expected.

Extent of disclosure shall be determined by the District's ability, resources and legislative constraints.

Internal Communication

There shall be a free flow of information throughout the organization to make sure that all staff are kept well informed about the organization and its activities.

External Communication

The District's objective is to be a reliable source of credible information, consistent to our mission and value statements.

News Releases

In preparing news releases, it is necessary to balance the District's interest in presenting information in a positive manner with the news media's interest in serving the needs of readers, listeners and viewers.

Credibility

Whenever practical, the person having responsibility, authority or the most knowledge about the subject will serve as the spokesperson.

Erroneous Information

With respect for the viewpoints of others, we will promptly correct erroneous information conveyed on matters of importance to the District.

Language and Style

Every effort will be made to keep the language of our communications simple and the format of our documentation consistent.

Litigation

Litigation will not be a reason for silence on matters of importance to the District and its customers. Communicators will be sensitive to the legalities in communicating and will review all releases with the CAO.



Communication Policy Working Document

Containing Principles, Responsibilities and Guidelines

The following statements describe the District's Communication Policy by addressing information relating to principles, responsibilities and guidelines. This document is intended to be a working document for the organization.

POLICY STATEMENT:

Communication Objective

The District of Maple Ridge will take the initiative in being a reliable source of credible information to its internal and external customers, consistent with the District's mission and value statements.

Principle: ***Success in any organization is contingent upon the practice of effective, timely and accurate communication.***

Responsibilities: It is the responsibility of the CAO and Council for determining integral communication for the organization.

General Managers are responsible for advising on communication strategies and providing effective methods of communication support services and technology to Divisions throughout the organization.

The Director of Personnel acts for the District in promoting corporate support on human resource issues, resolving conflicts in the communication process between labor and management.

All Directors and Managers are responsible for the standard and effectiveness of communications within their own departments, not only via receipt, understanding and delivery of corporate information, but through good listening techniques and upward communication.

All employees have a responsibility to be well informed, to be a source of credible information and support to each other and to our customers.

POLICY STATEMENT:

Planning

A communications plan will be considered and reviewed with respect to decision-making or work plans that have a significant or potential impact on the organization and/or our customers.

Principle

Effective communication depends on good planning

Responsibilities:

Managers are responsible for communication planning, and for ensuring that plans will achieve the level of communication required.

General Managers, Directors and other key individuals will assist in developing formal communication plans and provide expert advice on the planning process.

Guidelines:

1. An information communication plan can be as simple as a verbal agreement among parties on how communications are to be carried out. Informal plans are appropriate in cases of limited need for communication or where the communication process is well established.
2. A formal communication plan should be in written form and should address issues of audience, media, timing and responsibility for preparation of materials and delivery of messages.
3. A good communication plan should begin with a listing of the audience which may be affected by or have an interest in the goal or decision.
4. If the plan involves broad corporate audiences, both internal and external, the manager should contact the Division General Manager for assistance and discussion of the plan.
5. The best method of communication should be chosen to deliver the message to the audience it is meant for.
6. All Divisions or Departments involved with the release of communication, should be informed prior to the public announcement

POLICY STATEMENT:

Approvals

Appropriate approvals will be obtained in a timely manner in order that we can provide effective and accurate communication.

Principle: ***Accuracy, completeness, clarity and timelines are crucial communication objectives.***

Responsibilities: Staff are responsible for seeking review and approval at appropriate levels on all corporate communications, except where authority has been delegated.

Guidelines

1. Make an effort to gather the approvers together for joint reviews, avoiding costly and time-consuming "back and forth" discussions.
2. Assure that materials reviewed from within a department will not be in conflict with the views of the department head or the organization.
3. One contact within a department may be designated responsible for gathering input from staff.

POLICY STATEMENT:

Disclosure

Forthright communications with our internal and external customers is expected.

Extent of disclosure shall be determined by the District's ability, resources and legislative constraints.

Principle: ***Achieve credibility through professional approach to information delivery. If people believe information is being withheld, they won't consider the source to be credible.***

Responsibilities: Ultimate authority on disclosure matters will rest with the CAO and Council, except where legislation dictates otherwise.

Guidelines:

1. Prompt disclosure of information that may be considered important by our internal and external customers is essential to the District's credibility.
2. Very few of our organization's actions or activities should be considered inappropriate for public disclosure. Freedom of Information guidelines and requirements apply.

POLICY STATEMENT:

Internal Communication

There shall be a free flow of information throughout the organization to make sure that all staff are kept well informed about the organization and its activities.

Principle: ***The success of an organization is dependent upon people and a purpose. Communication is the medium used to bring people and the purpose together.***

Responsibilities: All employees have a responsibility to be well informed about significant matters affecting the District.

Responsibility for effective internal communications largely rests with directors, managers and supervisors, for they are the resources available to employees and are the most credible representation level.

The CAO and General Managers have overall responsibility for advising management on internal communication matters and for revising communication strategies and processes.

- Guidelines:**
1. Whenever possible, information about the District, issues, policies, programs and people, should be communicated to employees in a timely manner, in advance of communication to external customers.
 2. Employees want to know about such topics as benefits, their jobs, wages, opportunities and the policies that shape their positions, training and educational opportunities. Employees have shown a keen interest in these areas.
 3. Directors and managers are encouraged to develop their own internal communications programs, making best use of technology, as well as meeting face to face with employees on a regular basis.
 4. While communication through the supervisory chain is preferred and often is the most effective, other communications such as bulletin boards, e-mail, voice mail, newsletters, etc., are also important to an effective internal communication program.

POLICY STATEMENT:

External Communication

The District's objective is to be a reliable source of credible information, consistent to our mission and value statements.

Principle: ***An organization that acts in the public's interest will have the trust and confidence of an informed public.***

Responsibilities: All staff and elected officials are responsible for earning the trust and confidence of the public.

Every manager has a responsibility to assure timely availability of information to staff in order that employees can communicate accurately to the public.

Responsibility for initiating the District's formal communications with external sources is assigned to each individual department, with more formal communications being conducted by the Director of Community and Business Relations.

POLICY STATEMENT:***News Releases***

In preparing news releases, it is necessary to balance the District's interest in presenting information in a positive manner with the news media's interest in serving the needs of readers, listeners and viewers.

Principle: *A good news release answers more questions than it raises.*

Responsibilities: The CAO, senior management or designate will prepare all corporate news releases and, when necessary, shall serve in an "advocacy role" to make sure that the media's interests are represented in content, style and emphasis.

Guidelines: Every effort is made to prepare news releases that are complete, accurate and timely.

POLICY STATEMENT:

Credibility

Whenever practical, the person having responsibility, authority or the most knowledge about the subject will serve as the spokesperson.

Principle: *The most credible person to communicate information is the one who represents the highest level of responsibility and knowledge about the subject.*

Responsibilities: Council or senior management will recommend individuals to serve as spokesperson on specific projects.

POLICY STATEMENT:

Erroneous Information

With respect for the viewpoints of others, we will promptly correct erroneous information conveyed on matters of importance to the District.

Principle: ***Silence can be interpreted as confirmation; erroneous information, to the extent that it is practical to do so, should not go unchallenged.***

Responsibilities: All managers and staff should be alert to situations in which responses might be in order, and bringing them to the attention of the appropriate Division Manager, or on matters of organizational-wide interest, to the CAO.

Guidelines: The decision on when to correct erroneous information is a judgement call. Generally speaking, the District should set the record straight when:

- a. The organization or any of its employees are falsely accused of wrongdoing.
- b. Erroneous information will damage the District's reputation.
- c. Public understanding of an issue in which the District is directly involved is likely to have been seriously jeopardized.

POLICY STATEMENT:

Language and Style

Every effort will be made to keep the language of our communications simple and the format of our documentation consistent.

Principle: ***Simplicity of language and consistency of style help us communicate more effectively and earn the trust and respect of our customers.***

Responsibilities: Every employee who communicates a message is responsible for communicating clearly and effectively.

Guidelines: 1. Utilize visual aids and descriptions wherever possible.

 2. Refer to policies, which may cover the communication delivery, such as public relations policy, legislation and council decisions.

POLICY STATEMENT:

Litigation

Litigation will not be a reason for silence on matters of importance to the District and its customers. Communicators will be sensitive to the legalities in communicating and will review all releases with the CAO.

Principle: ***Non-communication with interested audiences on matters being litigated can be more harmful to the District's position than timely communications based on what is already public knowledge.***

Responsibilities: The manager, in concert with the CAO, MIA or corporate counsel, shall prepare informational materials on litigated issues which could be of interest to the press or the public.

Guidelines: 1. All litigation matters will be referred to the CAO.

 2. Any litigation settlement that becomes part of the public record, available to the news media and deemed newsworthy by the attorney and/or the communicator shall be communicated on a timely basis wherever appropriate.

 3. Evaluation of placement of non-disclosure stipulations in settlement agreements will be reviewed with the CAO and MIA. Our decision on no-disclosure should be communicated to all parties so they are aware of our intentions and the suitability to withhold information.