



qathet REGIONAL DISTRICT

SECTION 2	ADMINISTRATION POLICIES
POLICY	2.9
SUBJECT	PUBLIC COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT
ADOPTED	February 25, 2016
AMENDED	August 25, 2022

POLICY STATEMENT

The qathet Regional District recognizes that effective communication and public engagement underpins our democratic system of local government. It is the key to building informed citizens and a knowledgeable electorate. This policy ensures a responsive and proactive methodology for communicating and engaging with the public. This policy is intended to provide guidance and direction to Board members and staff on both external and internal communications to ensure the Regional District is consistent and responsive.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all Regional District Elected Officials, staff members, contractors volunteers and partners.

When an emergency occurs, the communications protocols contained within the Regional District's Emergency Plan and the *Emergency Act* apply.

AUTHORITY TO ACT

The Regional District is granted the authority and responsibility to provide local services and governance by the *Local Government Act* and *Community Charter*.

The Regional District collects and discloses personal information in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIPPA).

Engagement best practices outlined in the Engagement Framework and Communications and Engagement Procedures Manual are created in alignment International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

Administrative Policy No. 2.13: Social Media outlines the procedures for utilizing the Regional District's corporate social media sites.

PROCEDURES

This policy encompasses the key functional communications and engagement areas:

- 1) Correspondence
- 2) Information Requests
- 3) Corporate Identity
- 4) Directors Notifications
- 5) Statutory and Regulatory Communication
- 6) Media Relations
- 7) Media Releases
- 8) Advertising
- 9) Social Media
- 10) Website
- 11) Newsletters
- 12) Marketing, Sponsorship and Promotions
- 13) Public Engagement
- 14) Elections Advertising

1) Correspondence

Physical Mail / Courier Services:

1. Regional District staff are authorized to open all mail, except where clearly marked "Personal" or "Confidential."
2. All letter mail received will be date stamped at the front desk.
3. Once date stamped, it will be forwarded to the Manager of Administrative Services.
4. The Manager of Administrative Services will then make determinations and process the mail thusly:
 - a. All mail will be sorted for staff, Directors and Chair.
 - b. A quick scan of the mail content will determine if it is Regional District business related or personal in nature.
 - c. Personal mail (which may include but not be limited to subscriptions, marketing materials, professional discipline correspondence, reports, publications, etc.) will be forwarded immediately to whom it was addressed.

- d. Regional District business related mail addressed to staff will be forwarded to the intended recipient immediately for their respective assessment and any necessary follow-up or action.
- e. Regional District business related mail addressed to Directors or the Chair will be evaluated for relevancy to services, operations, question, query, request, advocacy, petition, bylaw enforcement, or complaint based.
- f. If the correspondence is addressed to one Director, it will be forwarded to that Director. If the correspondence is addressed to two or more Directors, including a “cc”, the Chair or the Board, it will appear under “Correspondence” on the next available agenda.
- g. Notwithstanding the above, an individual Director may request that correspondence addressed to them be added to an agenda for information or deliberation.
- h. If any mail received is of a complaint nature, the department manager will ensure that the issue is handled through the Regional District complaint process.
- i. Mail that requires a response from the Board will be signed by the Chair. The Chief Administrative Officer may direct staff to prepare the Chair’s response.
- j. All other mail requiring a response will be authored and signed by the respective department manager.
- k. Mail of a general nature that does not require any particular follow-up or action on behalf of a Standing Committee, the Board, or staff will be placed in the “For Your Information” section of the appropriate meeting agenda.
- l. Should it be the case that a Director receives any Regional District business related mail to their home address, it is recommended that they bring it to the office and the front desk will initiate it through the flow chart process previously described above.

E-Mail:

1. The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that where a record is not in the physical possession of a local government, it will still be under its control if these two questions are answered in the affirmative:
 - i) Do the contents of the document relate to a departmental matter?

- ii) Could the government institution reasonably expect to obtain a copy of the document upon request?
2. Regarding the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, this means that all Regional District business related e-mails received or sent from personal e-mail accounts are records under the public body's control.
3. Directors are encouraged to use the Regional District e-mail system and assigned e-mail accounts for work purposes.
4. Regional District staff are authorized to open all e-mail, except where clearly marked "Personal" or "Confidential."
5. All e-mail received through the Regional District general e-mail account will be forwarded to the Manager of Administrative Services.
6. The Manager of Administrative Services will then make determinations and process the e-mail thusly:
 - a. All e-mail will be sorted for staff, Directors and Chair.
 - b. A quick scan of the e-mail content will determine if it is Regional District business related or personal in nature.
 - c. Personal e-mail (which may include but not be limited to subscriptions, marketing materials, professional discipline correspondence, reports, publications, etc.) will be forwarded immediately to whom it was addressed.
 - d. Regional District business related e-mail addressed to staff will be forwarded to the intended recipient immediately for their respective assessment and any necessary follow-up or action.
 - e. Regional District business related mail addressed to Directors or the Chair will be evaluated for relevancy to services, operations, question, query, request, advocacy, petition, bylaw enforcement, or complaint based.
 - f. If the correspondence is addressed to one Director, it will be forwarded to that Director. If the correspondence is addressed to two or more Directors, including a "cc", the Chair or the Board, it will appear under "Correspondence" on the next available agenda.
 - g. Notwithstanding the above, an individual Director may request that correspondence addressed to them be added to an agenda for information or deliberation.

- h. If any e-mail received is of a complaint or bylaw enforcement nature, the department manager will ensure that the issue is handled through the Regional District complaint / bylaw enforcement process.
- i. E-mail that requires a response from the Board will be signed by the Chair. The Chief Administrative Officer may direct staff to prepare the Chair's response.
- j. All other e-mail requiring a response will be authored and signed by the respective department manager.
- k. E-mail of a general nature that does not require any particular follow-up or action on behalf of a Standing Committee, the Board, or staff will be placed in the "For Your Information" section of the appropriate meeting agenda.
- l. All e-mail received directly by staff through their Regional District assigned e-mail account will follow the flow chart process from "6 (h)" onward.
- m. Should it be the case that a Director receives any Regional District business related e-mail to their personal e-mail account, it is recommended that they forward it to the office and the front desk will initiate it through the flow chart process previously described above.
- n. Board Members who wish to respond to correspondence in addition to an official response from the organization, may do so but must do so using personal letterhead, and must clearly state that their views are independent and exclusive of the Regional District Board of Directors or the Regional District organization.

2) Information Requests

The Regional District distinguishes between routine information requests and Freedom of Information requests. Staff provide information regularly for routine requests like answering questions from the public, providing meeting agendas or minutes, or directing community members to bylaws, applications or other information on the website.

Under B.C.'s *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIPPA), some records may be, or must be, restricted from access by the general public. FOIPPA sets out requirements for access to public records, whenever possible, and protection of unauthorized collection, use or disclosure of personal information.

The Regional District may provide some information that is not routinely available to the public (e.g., records containing personal, confidential or third-party information) through a formal request for information.

3) Directors Notifications

Directors Notifications are an internal e-mail tool used to distribute information to Directors in a timely manner. Topics and content may vary, but the intent is to inform everyone at relatively the same time. Department managers use discretion when to use this medium. However, most often the rationale is that the matter is topical, emergent, or urgent. The e-mail is addressed to all Directors and all department Managers are carbon copied. The subject line is relevant to the topic of interest.

4) Advertising

Statutory and Regulatory Advertising:

The Regional District will faithfully adhere to communicating or engaging with the public where it is mandated. This will include but not be limited to annual operating and capital budgets, five-year financial plans, annual audited financial statements, statement of financial information, establishing service approvals, etc. The Regional District will follow the prescribed protocol as outlined through legislation and regulation.

Non-Statutory Advertising:

In addition to advertising as defined in *the Local Government Act* and *Community Charter* related to statutory obligations, the Regional District will utilize advertising including but not limited to special events, community awareness initiatives, procurement activities, and employment opportunities.

5) Media Relations

The Board Chair is the chief spokesperson for the Regional District. They speak on behalf of the Regional Board regarding the overall strategic direction of the Board, Board policy, Board agendas and decisions of record, partnerships with other organizations, government joint releases, and appointment of the Chief Administrative Officer. Where appropriate, interviews can be referred to the Chair of the relevant Committee or Commission at the discretion of the Board Chair. The Board Chair reserves the right to be a spokesperson on issues previously delegated to Committee Chairs as they see fit.

Committee Chairs are the spokespersons for the Regional District regarding committee agendas and decisions of record. Committee Chairs may speak on behalf of their committees as they undertake policy work and formation, and address items on committee agendas. Where appropriate, at the discretion of

the Board Chair, Committee Chairs may serve as the spokesperson for Board decisions of record related to the committee they chair.

Municipal Directors are the primary spokespersons for their municipality regarding current events, sub-regional services, partnerships with other Electoral Areas or other organizations and Board decisions affecting their municipality.

Regional District Electoral Area Directors are the primary spokespersons for their Electoral Areas regarding current events, sub-regional and local services, partnerships with other Electoral Areas and Board decisions affecting their respective Electoral Areas.

The Chief Administrative Officer is the chief staff spokesperson for the Regional District. They speak on behalf of the Regional District regarding administrative functions of the organization, cross departmental issues, staff recommendations to committees and the Board, intergovernmental issues and corporate policy. Where appropriate, interviews can be referred to the appropriate Manager at the discretion of the Chief Administrative Officer. The Chief Administrative Officer or designate may also approve variations in the scope of spokesperson authority or designate other spokespersons for specific functions or other events. The Chief Administrative Officer reserves the right to be a spokesperson on issues previously delegated to a Manager as they see fit.

Regional District Managers are the chief spokespersons for their departments. Managers are spokespersons on matters such as new initiatives, issues or programs that fall under the department they oversee and on issues or programs for which they are considered to be the subject matter or technical experts. Managers are required to stay informed on media issues as they develop and intervene if issues have cross department or interagency impact, ensuring that the appropriate internal and external partners are informed including the Chief Administrative Officer as required.

6) Media Releases

Media releases provide information to the media to encourage them to cover or announce a notable item. Media releases are used to explain the Regional District's position on a significant issue or event, or announce a new project or initiative. A media release generally contains a spokesperson quote and can contain links to additional resources or a Background document. When possible, media releases should be one page or less in length. Media releases are sent to the media release distribution list as managed by the Communications Advisor. They are also posted to the Regional District website.

7) Social Media

It is beneficial for the Regional District to integrate social media into its communications strategies, and to engage meaningfully in its channels, on a regular basis. If it is clear that the Regional District has the resources to appropriately manage this tool, it will be consistently utilized in accordance with Administrative Policy No. 2.13: Social Media and the Communications and Engagement Procedure Manual.

8) Website

The Regional District website is a virtual information hub, providing information for community members and opportunities for engagement. Staff will update the website regularly with comprehensive, timely, relevant, accurate and accessible information about the Regional District. The website will also be used to share emergency information and updates.

Items that will be routinely posted on the website include:

1. Agendas and Minutes
2. Strategic Plan
3. Annual Report
4. Statement of Financial Information
5. Five Year Financial Plan
6. Auditors' Report
7. Media Releases
8. Information on Regional District Projects and Initiatives
9. Bylaws and Policies
10. Calendar of Events

All website content is overseen by Regional District Communications staff. Draft website postings are reviewed by the Regional District Communications staff.

Routine updates to existing department webpages will be designated to staff in each department.

Regional District communications materials (e.g. ads and social media posts) will include links to additional information on the Regional District website.

9) Newsletters

A regional newsletter will be published as many times in a year as the Board desires and in correlation with the appropriate amount of funding available in the budget. It will be mailed to all households in the region and posted on the website.

A flyer, containing information about the Regional District budget, financial plan and taxes for each electoral area, will be inserted in the provincial tax notices sent to electoral area property owners.

10) Marketing, Sponsorship and Promotions

The Regional District may market amenities owned by the Regional District. These activities may be conducted through local, provincial or national media and specific mediums targeting core activities and strategic objectives. Discretion may be used to partner with other local governments and organizations to increase impact.

Marketing may also take the form of a commercial nature. The Regional District will allow its logo and name to be placed on marketing tools including but not limited to pens, glassware, active wear, etc. These will normally be used for promotion or resale.

From time to time, the Regional District may contribute funding to worthy causes, endorse community initiatives or promote second party activities. The promoters of these social, cultural, heritage and recreational activities will be allowed to use the Regional District or Regional Hospital District logo and name to demonstrate and acknowledge partnering and sponsorship.

11) Public Engagement

Public Engagement activities will be conducted and evaluated in accordance with the Regional District Public Engagement Framework and Communications and Engagement Procedure Manual.

12) Election Advertising

To maintain objectivity during General Elections and by-elections, and to avoid any perceptions of incumbent endorsement by staff, the Regional District will implement a project publication embargo effective the start of the election nomination period or 46 days before General Voting Day. The publication embargo will remain in effect until the publication of official election results.

The Regional District will continue to publish information pertinent to the General Election or by-election as required by the qathet Regional District Election Procedure Bylaw No. 420, and will continue engagement required in accordance with the *Local Government Act* and *Community Charter* to support general business operations.

During the election publication embargo, Regional District staff will not assist in the editing and publication of communications or promotional materials for Elected Officials.