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2022



MODEL MEDIA POLICY

2022

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Introduction

Media – opportunities and challenges

The Model Media Policy has been developed to provide a framework to assist councils when dealing with the media and to ensure that media engagement by councillors and staff is consistent, accurate and professional and enhances the council's reputation.

Effective media engagement can assist councils to keep their community informed, explain decisions and to promote community confidence in the council and its decisions.

The term "media" used in this policy means print, broadcast and online media used for communicating information to the public, including, but not limited to, newspapers, magazines, internet publishers, radio, and television broadcasters.

The advancement of technology and the development of non-traditional media means that the media now has unprecedented reach and accessibility. Anyone with a computer or hand-held device can access media platforms and actively engage in content which has the potential to be viewed and shared by hundreds of millions of people worldwide.

How a council is portrayed in the media impacts greatly on how the organisation is perceived. Media can be an effective tool to promote council programs, events, and initiatives. In addition, media can be invaluable in times of crisis or emergency when information needs to be communicated to the public.

Despite its obvious benefits, media also presents a variety of challenges and risks. These include:

- maintaining the accuracy, reliability, and integrity of information
- ensuring confidential information is managed appropriately, and
- the increased exposure and risk to reputation where information is not managed appropriately

The development and intent of this policy

The Model Media Policy has been developed by the Office of Local Government (OLG) in consultation with councils. It is applicable to councils, county councils and joint organisations.

The Model Media Policy sets out an exemplar approach by incorporating examples of best practice from the media policies of a diverse range of NSW councils, as well as from Commonwealth and State Government agencies.

The Model Media Policy provides councils, county councils and joint organisations with a robust framework for the administration and management of their interactions with the media. It also sets standards of conduct for all council officials who are required to interact with media in their official capacity.

The Model Media Policy recognises that councils interact with media differently depending on factors such as a council's size and resources and the demographics of a local government area. For these reasons, the Model Media Policy ensures a degree of flexibility by including optional and adjustable provisions which enables each council to tailor the policy to suit its own unique circumstances.

Content of the Model Media Policy

At the heart of the Model Media Policy are the four 'principles' of media engagement. These are:

- Openness
- Consistency
- Accuracy
- Timeliness

These principles, which are expanded upon in Part 1, should underpin every aspect of a council's media engagement and all councils and council officials should commit to upholding them.

This policy applies to engagement between council officials and the media. It does not

apply to social media use. OLG has developed a separate model policy for social media use.

The Model Media Policy is structured as follows:

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|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Part 1 | Sets out the principles of media engagement for councils |
| Part 2 | Contains two administrative models that councils can adopt in relation to the management of media enquiries and dealing with the media. Upper Lachlan Shire Council has elected to use Option 2 - the Media Coordinator led model. |
| Part 3 | Details the council's authorised spokespersons when engaging with the media |
| Part 4 | Prescribes the standards of conduct expected of council officials when engaging with the media in an official capacity or in connection with their role as a council official |
| Part 5 | Prescribes who will be the spokesperson to the media during emergencies |
| Part 6 | Prescribes how councillors should engage with the media in the lead up to an election |
| Part 7 | Contains information about records management requirements relating to media |
| Part 8 | Definitions |

Adoption

While not mandatory, the Model Media Policy reflects best practice and all councils, county councils and joint organisations are encouraged to adopt it. In doing so, they are free to adapt the policy to suit their local circumstances and operating environments or to supplement it with their own provisions.

Optional and adjustable provisions are marked in **red**.

Note: In adopting the Model Media Policy, joint organisations should adapt it to substitute the terms "board" for "council", "chairperson" for "mayor", "voting

representative" for "councillor" and "executive officer" for "general manager".

Note: In adopting the Model Media Policy, county councils should adapt it to substitute the term "chairperson" for "mayor" and "member" for "councillor".

Enforcement

Clause 3.1(b) of the *Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW* provides that council officials must not conduct themselves in a manner that is contrary to a council's policies. If adopted by a council, a breach of the policy will be a breach of the council's code of conduct.

Concerns or complaints about the administration of a council's engagement with media should be made to the council official responsible for media management in the first instance and is to be addressed to Council's Chief Executive Officer.

Acknowledgements

The Office of Local Government wishes to thank the councils involved in drafting this Policy for their invaluable assistance.

Model Media Policy

Part 1 – Principles

1.1 We, the councillors, staff, and other officials of Upper Lachlan Shire Council, are committed to upholding and promoting the following principles of media engagement:

Openness	We will ensure that we promote an open exchange of information between our council and the media.
Consistency	We will ensure consistency by all councillors and staff when communicating with the media.
Accuracy	The information we share with the media will be a source of truth for our council and community and we will prioritise the need to correct inaccuracies when they occur.
Timeliness	We will ensure that we respond to media enquiries in a timely manner.

Part 2 – Administrative framework for engagement with the media

Option 2 –The Media Coordinator led model

Appointment and role of the Media Coordinator

- 1.2 The Chief Executive Officer will appoint a member of council staff to be the Council's Media Coordinator. The Media Coordinator should be a suitably qualified member of staff.
- 1.3 The Chief Executive Officer may appoint more than one Media Coordinator.
- 1.4 The Media Coordinator's role is to:
 - a) be the lead point of contact for all media enquiries, requests for interviews, requests to film or photograph council staff, facilities or events for news and current affairs purposes
 - b) be responsible for preparing all media statements prior to their release
 - c) liaise with relevant staff members within the organisation where appropriate.
 - d) ensure that all media statements are approved by the Mayor and/or Chief Executive Officer prior to their release
 - e) develop and/or approve media training and/or induction to be provided to relevant staff and/or councillors as approved by the Chief Executive Officer

- f) maintain a record of all media enquiries and responses
- g) ensure that media organisations and their representatives are treated professionally, equally and without bias
- h) ensure that media enquiries are dealt with promptly
- i) provide guidance to councillors approached by the media for comment to avoid communication of misinformation, and
- j) ensure that all media releases are published on the Council's website.

Part 3 – Who can engage with the media

The Chief Executive Officer

- 1.5 The Chief Executive Officer is the official spokesperson for the Council on operational and administrative matters.
- 1.6 The Chief Executive Officer may delegate to other council staff to speak on their behalf where appropriate, (for example, where the delegated staff member has professional expertise regarding the subject matter, or the Chief Executive Officer is unavailable). For the purposes of this Policy, the delegated officers are Departmental Director's.

The Mayor

- 1.7 The Mayor is the principal member and spokesperson of the governing body of the Council, including representing the views of the Council as to its local priorities (section 226(c) of the Local Government Act 1993).
- 1.8 If the Mayor is unavailable, the Deputy Mayor may act as the Council's spokesperson.
- 1.9 The Mayor may delegate their role as spokesperson to other councillors where appropriate, (for example, where another councillor is best placed to comment, because the issue is of particular interest to them, or it is within their particular area of expertise).

Councillors

- 3.1 As a member of the governing body and as a representative of the community, councillors are free to express their personal views to the media, subject to the following subclauses and subject to adherence to Part 4 – Standards of conduct when engaging with the media;

3.2 When engaging with the media councillors:

- must not purport to speak for the Council unless authorised to do so
- must clarify when speaking to the media that they are expressing their personal views as an individual councillor and that they are not speaking for the Council (unless authorised to do so)
- must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council
- must not disclose council information unless authorised to do so, and
- must seek information and guidance from the Chief Executive Officer/ Media Coordinator where appropriate before providing comment to the media to ensure they have the most up-to-date and relevant information and have considered reputational or other risks

3.3 In the interests of promoting a positive, safe and harmonious organisational culture, councillors should endeavour to resolve personal differences privately and must not prosecute them publicly through the media.

3.4 Where councillors (including the Mayor) become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the Chief Executive Officer/Media Coordinator.

Council Staff

3.5 Council staff must not speak to the media about matters relating to the Council unless authorised by the Chief Executive Officer/Media Coordinator to do so.

3.6 If Council staff receive a media enquiry or they are invited to comment to the media on a matter relating to the Council, they

must refer the enquiry to the Chief Executive Officer/Media Coordinator.

3.7 Council staff are free to express their personal views to the media on matters that do not relate to the Council, but in doing so, must not make comments that reflect badly on the Council or that bring it into disrepute.

3.8 If authorised to speak to the media, Council staff:

- must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council
- must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so by the Chief Executive Officer/Media Coordinator, and
- must seek information and guidance from the Chief Executive Officer/ Media Coordinator where appropriate before providing comment to the media to ensure they have the most up-to-date and relevant information and have considered reputational or other risks

3.9 Where Council staff become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the Chief Executive Officer /Media Coordinator.

Tone

3.10 All media engagement by council officials must be conducted in a professional, timely and respectful manner.

Induction and training

3.11 The Council must provide training to Council officials who engage or are authorised to engage with the media.

3.12 Media engagement training will be provided to councillors as part of their induction or refresher training or as part

of their ongoing professional development program.

Councillors' questions about media engagement

- 3.13 Councillors must direct any questions about their obligations under this policy to the Chief Executive Officer.

Media Release Proforma

- 3.14 All written media releases will be approved via the use of the Council's proforma media release template, which includes the signature of the approving delegate prior to the release of the information.

Part 4 – Standards of conduct when engaging with the media

- 4.1 Council officials must comply with the Council's code of conduct when engaging with the media in an official capacity or in connection with their role as a council official.
- 4.2 Council officials must not share information or make comments to the media through either direct or indirect mechanisms that:
- a) are defamatory, offensive, humiliating, threatening, or intimidating to other council officials or members of the public
 - b) contains profane language or is sexual in nature
 - c) constitutes harassment and/or bullying within the meaning of the *Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW*, or is unlawfully discriminatory
 - d) is contrary to their duties under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* and their responsibilities under any policies or procedures adopted by the Council to ensure workplace health and safety
 - e) contains content about the Council, council officials or members of the public that is misleading or deceptive
 - f) divulges confidential Council information
 - g) breaches the privacy of other council officials or members of the public
 - h) contains allegations of suspected breaches of the Council's code of conduct or information about the

consideration of a matter under the *Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW*

- i) could be perceived to be an official comment on behalf of the Council where they have not been authorised to make such comment
- j) commits the Council to any action
- k) violates an order made by a court
- l) breaches copyright
- m) advertises, endorses, or solicits commercial products or business.

Part 5 – Use of media during emergencies

- 5.1 During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health incidents and pandemics, the Mayor, the Chief Executive Officer and the Local Emergency Management Officer (LEMO) will be responsible for coordinating media releases and statements on behalf of the Council.
- 5.2 Councillors, Council staff and other Council officials must not provide comment or information to the media that is inconsistent with official advice issued by the Council and any other agency coordinating the emergency response.
- 5.3 Training on media engagement during emergencies will be provided to councillors and relevant staff and other Council officials.
- 5.4 Council will ensure that all media releases issued during an emergency will be accurate and timely and the media releases will be distributed by the Mayor to all councillors.
- 5.5 During emergencies, information about the emergency is managed via a Local Emergency Operations Controller and is managed on a confidential basis due to the sensitive nature of the communications.
- 5.6 During emergencies, internal communication with councilors and staff regarding the emergency will be managed in accordance with the Southern Ranges Upper Lachlan Local Emergency Management Plan (May 2023) and other relevant protocols that may be proscribed by relevant authorities.

Part 6 – Media engagement in the lead up to elections

- 6.1 This policy does not prevent the mayor or councillors who are candidates at a council or any other election from providing comment to the media in their capacity as candidates at the election.
- 6.2 Any media comment provided by the mayor or councillors who are candidates at a council or another election must not be provided in an advertisement, newspaper column, or a radio or television broadcast paid for by the council or produced by the council or with council resources.

Part 7 – Records management requirements

- 7.1 Media content created and received by council officials (including councillors) acting in their official capacity is a council record and may be subject to information access applications made under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*. These records must also be managed in accordance with the requirements of the *State Records Act 1998* and the Council's approved records management policies and practices.

Part 8 – Definitions

In this Model Media Policy, the following terms have the following meanings:

council official	<p>in the case of a council – means councillors, members of staff and delegates of the council (including members of committees that are delegates of the council);</p> <p>in the case of a county council – means members, members of staff and delegates of the council (including members of committees that are delegates of the council);</p> <p>in the case of a joint organisation – means voting representatives, members of staff and delegates of the joint organisation (including members of committees that are delegates of the joint organisation)</p>
Media Coordinator	means a person appointed under clause 1.3 of this policy, which for Upper Lachlan Shire Council is the Communications Officer
media	means print, broadcast and online media used for communicating information to the public, including, but not limited to, newspapers, magazines, internet publishers, radio, and television broadcasters
personal information	means information or an opinion (including information or an opinion forming part of a database and whether or not recorded in a material form) about an individual whose identity is apparent or can reasonably be ascertained from the information or opinion
social media	means online platforms and applications, such as but not limited to social networking sites, wikis, blogs, microblogs, video and audio sharing sites, and message boards, that allow people to easily publish, share and discuss content. Examples of social media platforms include, but are not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Yammer, YouTube, Instagram, Flickr and Wikipedia

Part 9 – Variation

Council reserves the right to vary or revoke this policy.

Part 10 – Associated documents

The following legislation and Council policies that are relevant to this Policy include:-

- Access to Information Policy;
- Anti Discrimination Act 1977;
- Code of Business Practice;
- Complaints Management Policy;
- Code of Conduct;
- Code of Meeting Practice;
- Customer Service Charter;
- Digital Information Security Policy;
- Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009;
- Government Information (Public Access) Policy;

- Government Information (Public Access) Regulation 2018;
- Interaction between Councillors and Staff Policy;
- Internal Reporting – Public Interest Disclosures Policy;
- Local Government Act 1993;
- Local Government (General) Regulation 2021;
- Performance and Misconduct Policy;
- Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998;
- Privacy Management Plan;
- Records Management Policy;
- Section 355 Committee Policy;
- Social Media Policy;
- State Records Act 1998;
- Upper Lachlan Shire Council Community Strategic Plan;
- Upper Lachlan Shire Council Delivery Program and Operational Plan;
- Work Health and Safety Policy;
- Work Health and Safety Act 2011;
- Work Health and Safety Regulations 2017.

Any other relevant legislation and guidelines as applicable.

