

## Council Policy

### 2.1 COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

#### PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide understanding and guidance for the appropriate use of communications tools, including verbal, printed, and online platforms, by Colac Otway Shire employees, Councillors and contractors while conducting Council business.

The Communications Policy is an important document to protect Council’s reputation by ensuring consistency and accuracy in the information Council places in the public realm.

#### SCOPE

This policy applies to elected Councillors, the Executive Management Team and employees including full-time, part-time, contract, casual, work experience and trainees, contractors, and volunteers of Colac Otway Shire. This policy may also apply to agencies and individuals who provide services to Council and may be included in relevant external supplier contracts.

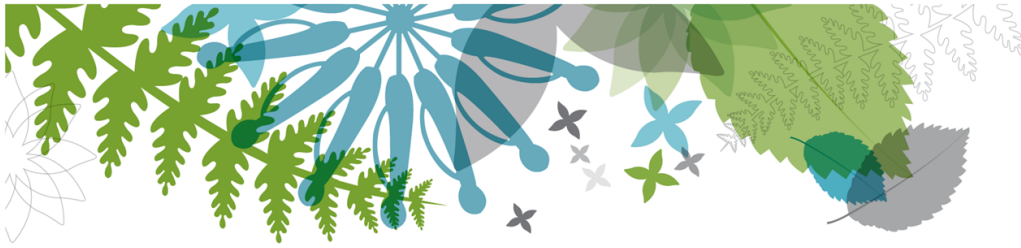
In all forms of communication, including verbal, printed or digital, Councillors, employees and contractors must adhere to the highest standards of ethical practice and professional competence. This policy should be read in conjunction with all related documents.

#### DEFINITIONS

<b>Council</b>	Colac Otway Shire Council being a body corporate constituted as a municipal Council under the Local Government Act 2020
<b>Councillors</b>	Individuals holding the office of a member of Colac Otway Shire Council
<b>Council Officer</b>	Chief Executive and staff of Council appointed by the Chief Executive
<b>Print media</b>	Printed publications including, but not limited to, newspapers and community newsletters
<b>Broadcast media</b>	Television, commercial radio, community radio
<b>Online</b>	Websites, social media and other digital platforms
<b>Social media</b>	The definition of social media continues to evolve as platforms and technologies develop. Overall, it refers to any web-based practices that can be used to share content. This includes, but is not limited to, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Blogs
<b>Email</b>	Electronic method of exchanging digital messages across the internet or other computer networks.

Uncontrolled when printed

CM reference	D21/263240	Date of adoption	24 November 2021
--------------	------------	------------------	------------------



---

## REFERENCES

Council Plan

Colac Otway Shire Councillor Code of Conduct

Colac Otway Shire Council Employee Code of Conduct

*Local Government Act 2020*

Colac Otway Shire Style Guide

*Copyright Act 1968 (Cth)*

*Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)*

*Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)*

*Public Records Act 1973 (Vic)*

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2 (WCAG 2.0)

---

## STATEMENT OF POLICY

Council recognises that the key to building positive and lasting partnerships with the community requires effective two-way communication. It is Colac Otway Shire Council's policy to communicate openly and honestly as a transparent organisation and to maximise public knowledge of our activities.

Council is committed to developing and implementing communication policies, practices and resources that:

- \* Inform the community of key Council decisions, services, programs and initiatives.
- \* Promote transparency and accountability of Council's decision-making processes.
- \* Promote opportunities for the community to participate in Council activities.
- \* Promote accessibility by the community to Councillors and Council officers.
- \* Build civic pride through a positive image of Colac Otway Shire Council.

Councillors and employees of Colac Otway Shire will demonstrate standards of conduct and behaviour that are consistent with relevant legislation, regulations and policies.

Council communicates with key stakeholders through a variety of channels to engage with their needs, concerns, ideas and aspirations to ensure Colac Otway Shire is delivering services in accordance with community needs and expectations.

**Uncontrolled when printed**

CM reference	D21/263240	Date of adoption	24 November 2021
--------------	------------	------------------	------------------



Council accepts the important role of the media to report on issues of interest to the community and its right to scrutinise Council activities. Council will strive to maintain positive and respectful relationships with media outlets.

Councillors and employees will adhere to the communications requirements of Colac Otway Shire's Election Period Policy during the Election Period, prior to Local Government elections.

## **KEY COMMUNICATION METHODS**

### **Media Releases & Statements**

The Mayor and Chief Executive Officer are Council's official spokespeople for all media enquiries/statements/releases in relation to Council decisions, policy, service levels or major issues.

The Communications Department is responsible for coordinating, approving and distributing all media releases, photo opportunities and media briefings following appropriate authorisation.

Council staff will not provide information directly to the media (either verbally or via a media release/statement) without authorisation and all media enquiries will be referred to the Communications Department.

The Chief Executive Officer, the Manager Governance & Communications or the Communications Coordinator can authorise an officer to speak where appropriate.

The Mayor may provide approval for another Councillor to comment on Council matters and/or decisions, where appropriate.

All statements and information will be provided to the Communications Department so they can be recorded and issued.

Media releases are distributed by the Communications Department to media outlets and posted on Council's website.

### **Websites**

Colac Otway Shire, COPACC, Great Ocean Road Visitor Information Centre & Bluewater websites provide a range of content specific to the services, events and programs offered by Colac Otway Shire; they also provide an avenue to distribute information to the community and media.

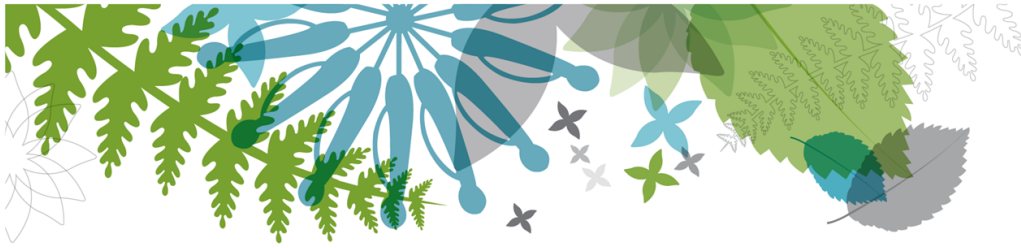
Content published on Council's websites aims to conform to Level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2 (WCAG 2.0).

All content must be approved by the Communications Department and relevant officers trained in the use of the website, through a work-flow process prior to it being published online.

The development of additional sub-sites, including social media pages, is discouraged, and all requests must be approved by the Communications Coordinator.

### **Uncontrolled when printed**

CM reference	D21/263240	Date of adoption	24 November 2021
--------------	------------	------------------	------------------



## Publications

The Communications Department prepares and issues communications – via online, broadcast and print publications. This may include advertising and editorial content, media releases, flyers and other printed materials. Privacy and anti-spamming legislation must be adhered to, including the ability for people to opt-in/unsubscribe to any database lists.

Council’s news and media section includes media releases the Communications Department has sent to the media. The public is able to subscribe to a news feed from this page on Council’s website to be alerted via email when a new media releases are available.

## SMS

SMS will be used at times to contact residents who consent to be listed on a database for the purpose of being contacted by Council.

It is vital that the wording in a text message is clear and concise and does not exceed 160 characters.

Abbreviations can be used if necessary; however, care must be taken to ensure that this is understood by a wide audience.

It must be identified in the text that the message is from Colac Otway Shire and provide some form of contact detail, whether that is an email address, physical address or a telephone number.

An opt-out system will be made available and people who request not to be contacted by SMS will be removed from the database.

## Social Media

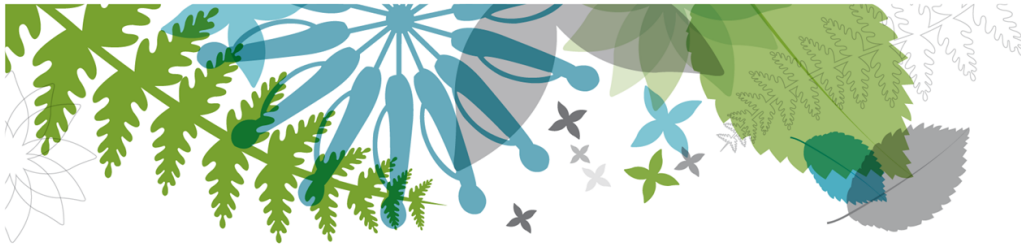
Colac Otway Shire Council recognises online communications are an effective way to engage with the community. Council creates specific content that captures the attention and meets the expectations of a target audience in each digital platform, and is in line with Colac Otway Shire’s Council Plan.

The Communications Coordinator and Officer are authorised to manage content and maintain dialogue with the community, posting only as Colac Otway Shire on each platform, and are permitted to authorise other officers to manage content and maintain dialogue.

COPACC, Bluewater and Tourism (VIC) Managers are authorised to manage content and maintain dialogue with the community, posting only as administrators through each platform, and are permitted to authorise other officers to manage content and maintain dialogue.

### Uncontrolled when printed

CM reference	D21/263240	Date of adoption	24 November 2021
--------------	------------	------------------	------------------



Administrators using social media will:

- Adhere to Colac Otway Shire Council codes of conduct, policies and procedures.
- Behave with caution, courtesy, honesty and respect.
- Comply with relevant laws and regulations.
- Reinforce the values of Colac Otway Shire Council.

The following content is not permitted on Council’s social media sites at any time:

- Abusive, offensive or sexually explicit material.
- Content which is false or misleading.
- Confidential information about Council or third parties.
- Copyright or Trademark protected materials.
- Discriminatory material on the grounds of race, gender or religion.
- Illegal material or materials designed to encourage law breaking.
- Material that could compromise council, employee or system safety.
- Material which would breach legislation.
- Material which would bring the Council into disrepute.
- Personal details or references to Councillors, Council staff or third parties, which may breach privacy laws.
- Spam, meaning the distribution of unsolicited bulk electronic messages.
- Statements which may be considered to be bullying or harassment.

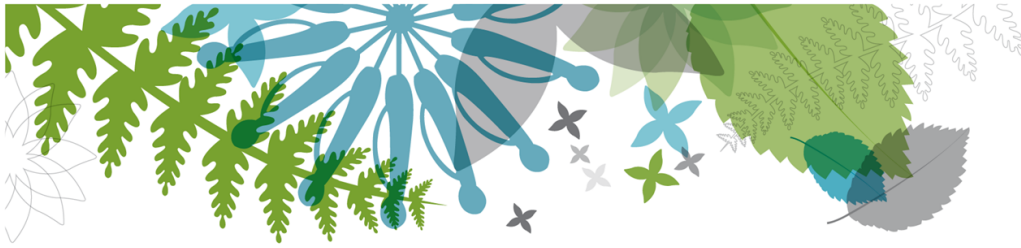
Councillors, employees and contractors will meet the same expectations as administrators listed above, when commenting on a Council matter on any social media post, and Council will not tag individual Councillors or employees in posts.

Councillors, employees and contractors posting on social media should be mindful of both the Councillor and Employee Codes of Conduct, and only post information that is not in breach of their responsibilities under the Codes, any Council or Operational Policies or relevant legislation.

Failure to adhere to the above guidelines may result in disciplinary action.

**Uncontrolled when printed**

CM reference	D21/263240	Date of adoption	24 November 2021
--------------	------------	------------------	------------------



All content published or communicated by or on behalf of Colac Otway Shire Council using social media will be monitored and recorded.

The Communications Department will monitor social media for relevant contributions that impact on the municipality, its operations and reputation.

Colac Otway Shire Council reserves the right to remove, where possible, content that violates this policy or any related policies. This policy will be published and promoted to Councillors, employees and contractors.

### **Advertising**

Council will advertise to communicate information and promote community engagement, events, activities and services to both the local community and beyond. Advertising is recognised as a key tool for marketing purposes.

Advertising will be placed within the channel most appropriate to reach the target audience with the relevant content and includes (but is not limited to):

- Commercial Radio
- Community Radio
- Print Media
- Community Newsletters.

All public advertisements must be authorised by the Communications Department and meet the Colac Otway Shire Style Guide requirements.

### **Branding Requirements**

The Communications Department is the custodian of the Colac Otway Shire brand and Style Guide; all representations of the brand must be authorised by the Communications Department prior to being distributed.

Third parties wishing to use the Colac Otway Shire branding in any form of promotional or advertising material must seek the relevant approvals from the Communications Department prior to printing.

### **Logo Usage**

Colac Otway Shire logos must appear on all Council communications including correspondence, publications, forms, advertisements, displays, signage, electronic communications and any other relevant communication platforms.

The Colac Otway Shire logo is to be used in line with Style Guide. Approval must be sought by the Communications Department prior to using a logo. Using a Council logo without permission is in breach of Council's copyright and intellectual property.

**Uncontrolled when printed**

CM reference	D21/263240	Date of adoption	24 November 2021
--------------	------------	------------------	------------------



## Signage

All Colac Otway Shire signs are to adhere to the standards outlined in the Colac Otway Shire Style Guide.

### RELATED DOCUMENTS

Information Privacy Policy

Confidential Information Policy

Community Engagement Policy

Election Period Policy

Public Transparency Policy

### DOCUMENT CONTROL

Policy owner	Governance and Communications Manager		Division	Governance and Communications
Adopted by council	24 November 2021		Policy Number	2.1
File Number	D21/263240		Review date	November 2025

**Uncontrolled when printed**

CM reference	D21/263240	Date of adoption	24 November 2021
--------------	------------	------------------	------------------