

TOWNSHIP OF NIPISSING POLICY			
Effective Date: April 3, 2024		Number: 2024-01	Revision: 1
Title: Communications Strategy			
Approved By: Resolution			Page: 1 of

Policy Statement and Strategic Plan Linkages:

The Township of Nipissing recognizes the importance of a Communications Strategy to support external and internal communication practices that are open, inclusive, transparent, effective and well managed (in accordance to the communications standards, accessibility policy and any other related policies and procedures) to meet the needs of the community and stakeholders.

This policy relates to the key area of focus of "Effective and Efficient Municipal Services" of the Strategic Plan.

While supporting the Townships Core Values of;

- Culture and excellent customer service
- Quality services for citizens and visitors
- Open and transparent governance
- Honesty and integrity
- Inclusion and diversity
- Fairness and equality
- Accountability to residents

Purpose:

The primary goal of the Communications Strategy is as follows:

- Communicate in an open, effective, efficient and professional manner;
- Be transparent and accountable;
- Provide excellent customer service;
- Share information proactively in an accurate and timely manner;
- Communicate in a variety of accessible formats using plain language;
- Value two-way communication to engage the community and gather public input.

Scope:

This policy shall apply to all municipal representatives.

This policy applies to all forms of communication to and from the municipality with the public, including but not limited to business owners, vendors and all other stakeholders within the municipality. The policy applies to electronic, printed and verbal communication.

Background:

The Township of Nipissing identified in the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan the need for a Communications Strategy to improve communications and access to municipal information within the community and all external stakeholders. The policy was developed by investigating other communication policies and communications strategies being utilized in other municipalities. The policies and plans were available on municipal websites and various AMCTO resources.

Desired Outcomes:

The main goal of the Communications Strategy Policy is to improve public communications, engage the community and access to municipal information. The policy aims to achieve several desired objectives:

- Provide the community and stakeholders with consistent, appropriate, relevant, efficient, effective, and timely information about its policies, programs, services, events and initiatives;
- Consistent approach to public engagement and utilize a variety of ways to communicate information;
- Enhance access to information;
- Strive to have proactive and planned communication;
- Encourage the community and stakeholders to attend and participate in public meetings and events; and
- Provide direction to staff and Council on how to share information of interest to the community and stakeholders, and how communications received from the public are handled.

Current Communication Tools and Initiatives:

Communication Method	Details
Letters	Sent as needed or requested by all departments to respond to various issues. Also used by Members of Council and the Municipal Administrator or designate to communicate with other levels of government and the public.
Emails	Issued as needed in response to information requests, complaints etc.

Newsletter	To be sent out 2-4 times a year. Newsletters are included in the interim and final tax bills and additional newsletters may be sent out throughout the year to provide updates on municipal events, projects, etc.
Municipal Website	The main source of information on municipal departments, services and programs. Including information on the Township's Museum, Community Partners and Cemeteries.
Social Media	Nipissing Township has 4 corporate Facebook pages (Township of Nipissing, Township of Nipissing Recreation Committee, Nipissing Township Fire Department, Nipissing Township Museum) and one Twitter X (Fire) account to communicate information in a timely manner to a wide population. Additional investigation into creating a corporate InstaGram account could further promote the Township, its events and engage the community. Developing a LinkedIn account for the Township to have a professional presence will promote the community to a broader population.
Contact at Municipal Office and Municipal Facilities	Daily in person contact by the public and other stakeholders.
Telephone Interactions	Daily interaction via mobile or office phone by all departments to provide information for a variety of purposes.
Onsite inspections, bylaw enforcement, meetings	The Chief Building Official, Operations Superintendent and Land Planning and Technology Administrator visit sites as requested/required to inspect and permit projects and/or for consultation and for the confirmation of information provided in applications. Public Works Department staff visit sites as request/required to perform work or maintenance or investigate a service request. Fire Chief, CEMC, Municipal Law Enforcement Officer (MLEO) visits residences and business to address complaints and complete inspections as authorized through legislation/bylaw. Meetings with the public, stakeholders, community groups and organizations by various staff members

	including but not limited to Municipal Administrator and Deputy Clerk.
Meetings of Council, Committees and Boards	All Council meetings and meetings of advisory committees and boards provide an opportunity for members of the public to speak with Council through delegation requests. Various committees involve staff and Council members. Committee/Board members engage with the public and staff. All meetings shall be open to the public and will be advertised on the municipal website and virtually utilizing the Zoom platform; and will be livestreamed to the Township of Nipissing YouTube channel.
Open houses (legislated public meetings excluding Council Meetings)	Open houses and other special meetings may be advertised on the municipal website and social media.
Public Notice Board at the Municipal Office and Public Notices Boards at Fire Station # 1 & 2	Township notices and local events posted on the bulletin board in the lobby of the municipal office. 2 mobile signs outside of the Fire Stations advising of upcoming events, public information and contact numbers.

External Communication Between Staff and the Public:

- Staff will strive to provide excellent customer service when interacting with internal and external customers;
- Staff will respond to telephone and email messages in a timely manner. Messages will be responded to within two (2) business days unless the staff member is away from the office due to illness, vacation or other leave. When there is a planned leave from the office staff will indicate their absence by a pre-recorded message on their voicemail and by setting automatic out of office replies through email. These messages should indicate who to contact during the staff’s absence if immediate assistance is required and when the staff member will be returning to the office;
- Staff will respond to written inquiries from members of the public within five (5) business days unless otherwise indicated by legislation, a municipal by-law, or other extenuating circumstances indicates otherwise. Staff will contact the member of public indicating the reason for the delay and when they can anticipate a response and the timeframe;
- The Administrative Assistant – Deputy Clerk and Office Assistant will respond to in person inquiries from the public at the counter, process tax payments, fitness centre memberships and more;

- All other office staff will respond to in-person inquiries when available and time permits. If a staff member is not able to meet with a member of the public when requested, staff will follow up with the member of the public by phone or email within two (2) business days.

External Communication Between Council Members and the Public:

The following are guidelines for communications between Members of Council and the community, businesses, and all other stakeholders.

- The corporate email for all members of Council will be listed on the municipal website and the public is encouraged to utilize this method of communication should they wish to communicate with a member of Council. A member of the public can phone the Township office and leave a message for a member of Council which will be forwarded to the member of Council;
- Council members will respond to public communications when they deem it appropriate;
- Any member of the public communicating verbally with any single member of Council is considered to be general in nature and will not receive a formal response from the Council member unless specifically requested in writing;
- Any member of the public communicating with any single member of Council in writing is considered to be general in nature and will not receive a formal response from the member of Council unless specifically requested in writing or unless the member of Council puts the matter before Council on a Council meeting agenda. In the latter case, the member of Council will communicate to the member of the public that the matter has been referred to Council or a Committee;
- Any member of the public that wishes to communicate in writing and be addressed formally by all of Council should send their communication to the Municipal Clerk's office addressed to all of Council and the matter will be put forward to Council on a Council meeting agenda. In this case, Council will address the matter at a Council meeting and the Municipal Clerk will communicate the results of the discussion with the member of the public within three (3) business days following the date of the Council meeting; and
- All requests for service (day-to-day municipal operational issues) or inquiries for information by any member of the public that require municipal staff or municipal department action shall be directed to the municipal office. Any member of the public communicating requests for service or inquiries for information that require municipal staff or municipal department action with any member of Council will be directed by the member of Council to contact the municipal office.

Requests for Service and Formal Complaints:

Requests for Services can be made in person, by phone or email to the Township office and will be dealt with according to priority by department.

Formal complaints will be treated in accordance with Township of Nipissing Complaint Policy.

Plain Language:

The Township of Nipissing will endeavor to use 'plain language' for its external communication wherever possible. 'Plain language' can be described as any writing designed to ensure the reader understands the message as quickly, easily and completely as possible. Plain language strives to be easy to read, understand and utilize. It avoids verbose, convoluted language, jargon and acronyms. It uses document structure and when required, visual aids (such as graphics, charts, and tables) to guide the reader.

Communication with the Media:

All request from the media shall be made to the Municipal Administrator or designate and the Head of Council.

Connections to Other Policies and By-laws:

Complaint Policy

Website and Social Media Policy

Accessibility Policy

Review:

The Communications Strategy will be reviewed once per term of Council or as requested by Council or the Municipal Administrator.