



CARPENTARIA SHIRE
Outback by the Sea®

Communications Strategy

2024 - 2028

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Carpentaria Shire Council would like to respectfully acknowledge the Gkuthaarn, Kukatj and Kurtijar peoples as the traditional owners of the lands and waters that form the Region. Council pays its respect to elders' past, present and emerging and welcomes the ongoing role that indigenous people play within the Carpentaria community.



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Introduction

This Communications Strategy sets a framework for how Carpentaria Shire Council will engage with its key stakeholders to maintain effective relationships with the community.

Carpentaria Shire Council is committed to maintaining open, honest, and transparent communication and being accountable to the community. Engaging in two-way communication to understand and meet the community's diverse needs plays an important role in this commitment.

The aim of this strategy is to outline how Council will deliver accurate, timely, and consistent information through the most effective channels to deliver its communication objectives for the next four years. The associated Communication Action Plan provides clear detail on how the strategy will be implemented to achieve this.

Background and Research

Carpentaria Shire Council prides itself on supporting and delivering for its community and being open and honest with stakeholders. The small population size and unique demographic of townships in the Shire create both opportunities and challenges in meeting communication targets.

The primary method of distributing information to the community is via public notices, electronic messages (email), Radio, Facebook, and the website. Council also works to maintain positive relationships through face-to-face engagement, at public meetings and social interactions within the community.

A monthly community newsletter has been produced in-house and is released via Australia Post, and is a major tool used to distribute information to local audiences and keep the community informed of what is happening at Council.

Council is utilising Facebook as the main method of distributing information via social media, however additional social media channels (Twitter, LinkedIn, and You Tube) are yet to be fully utilised.

Council works hard to engage at a face-to-face level within the community and is heavily invested in organising and attending community events. Engagement also occurs with stakeholders to share information and assist in making decisions about large council projects and initiatives. This is done via public notices/mail drops, feedback forms and public meetings. Council started to hold community consultation meetings in Normanton and Karumba, and these are proving to be popular and useful initiatives.

Stakeholders seeking information from Council or those lodging enquiries or complaints can do so via the phone, website enquiries form or via email. Enquiries and complaints are directed to the appropriate area for response, with complaints handled in accordance with Council's Complaints Management Policy.



Audiences

Council's stakeholders can be divided into primary and secondary audiences:

Primary Audiences	Secondary Audiences
Residents and ratepayers	Other government authorities (local, state, and federal)
Key government departments and agencies	Queensland Tourism and Regional Tourism bodies (incl. Tourism Tropical North Queensland {TTNQ} and Outback Queensland Tourism Association {OQTA})
Council staff and their families	Local and state media
Visitors to the Carpentaria Region	
State and Federal Government Members of Parliament	
Community groups and progress associations	
Local business, developers, and investors	
Professional associations and peak bodies (e.g. Gulf Savannah Development)	
Interest groups (cycling groups, conservation groups)	
Council-controlled entities	

Objectives (KPIs)

The key communication objectives have been identified as follows:

- To improve Council's media reputation and image by responding to 90% of media interviews, enquiries, and requests over a 12-month period.
- To increase awareness of Council's decisions, milestones, and events, using print, electronic and social media, to reach 85% of the community over a 12-month period.
- To provide information to the community about Council news, tenders, decisions, and milestones by producing a monthly newsletter.
- To create openness and transparency within the community about Council decisions by engaging with stakeholders on 95% of key infrastructure projects and development initiatives over a 12-month period.
- To build on the existing relationships between council and the community by ensuring Council attendance at 95% of major community meetings and events.



- To boost Council's image outside of the Carpentaria Region by promoting current achievements at marketing events held by professional organisations (e.g., Gulf Savannah Development) at least twice a year.
- To enhance Council's reputation as a strong communicating body by providing communication and media training and support to the Mayor, Councillors, and relevant staff at least once during the term of Council.

Branding and Identity

Corporate branding and visual identity, or a consistent 'look' to Council's information, products, activities, and services, are critical to enhance and maintain a positive image within the community.

At times it is also a government requirement for correct branding and identity to be in place, for example media advertising and promoting projects delivered under funding programs.

The following strategies are to be implemented to maintain Council's visual identity and reaffirm Council's brand.

- All written communication materials produced, including but not limited to letters, emails, reports, forms, public notices, posters, newsletters, media statements and advertisements, should be formatted on the appropriate template with logos and in Council's corporate style (see Style Guide).
- A consistent wording style (plain English) should be adopted and used for all written correspondence produced across all divisions.
- Key messaging is to be developed and used in relation to specific projects and/or initiatives and utilised in all written communication and media interviews, statements, and responses.
- All information published on Council's website and social media should be produced in keeping with Council's written style and formats appropriate for web media.
- All display materials produced for events and engagement activities must be produced and formatted using the correct templates and feature Council logos in accordance with corporate style.
- All promotion and marketing materials produced for external events, workshops, forums and symposiums are to include correct use of logo and wording, in accordance with corporate style.
- External organisation logos are to be appropriately used when advertising projects and/or initiatives delivered in conjunction with other agencies; with consent and prior approval of the agency.
- Council logo and wording is to be used appropriately and consistently on all signage and vehicles.



- Preferred supplier arrangements are to be established for publication and/or graphic design services for consistent, cost-effective, and seamless production of materials.
- Development and maintenance of a Corporate Image Library is necessary to retain Council's photographic history and assist in preparing communication material.
- All materials produced should gain the relevant Council approvals where required.

Media

This section aims to outline Council's media policy and guidelines for engaging with the media.

For the purposes of this policy, the 'media' includes newspapers, radio programs, magazines, print journals, bulletins, television programs and electronic media such as online news websites, journals, social media sites, and podcasts.

The media has extraordinary power in shaping events and influencing opinions. It is important that Council embrace opportunities to engage with the media and proactively pursue media opportunities. Utilised correctly, the media is an excellent means to inform the community, promote the initiatives and business of Council and enhance reputation.

Guidelines for engaging with the media

Council's elected representatives (Mayor and Councillors) and the Chief Executive Officer are responsible for speaking to the media. The mayor is the Official Spokesperson for Council. Council employees are not permitted to speak to or approach the media without prior approval of the CEO.

All media enquiries or requests should be directed immediately to the Governance, Projects, and Communications Officer for response. A single or limited point of contact within the organisation assists to develop relationships with media.

Staff dealing with the media should develop positive, respectful relationships with journalists and media staff. A good working relationship gives you the best opportunity for your story to be heard above others and promote Council's business. Good networks and relationships with journalists can also help during times of crisis, for example disasters and major incidents.

Deadlines are set by journalists to allow them time to complete a story before editing and publication. They should always be met as a matter of courtesy and to uphold Council's reputation. If a deadline can't be met for a legitimate reason, negotiate with the journalist for more time (as a last resort).

Key Messages

Key messages are broad umbrella statements used in all verbal and written communications to provide direction, consistency and meaning to your statements.

They are the core messages that you want your audience to hear, providing consistency through repetition. They are generally limited to three per communication, supported by facts and examples.

Key messages and supporting statements should be prepared beforehand and used in all Council media to present information consistently. All media statements and releases should be written in an appropriate style and in a way that promotes Council in a positive light.



Always give an answer when approached by the media. “No comment” should never be used to answer an enquiry or during an interview. It is not good for Council’s reputation and gives the audience the impression there is something to hide. There is always a way to provide a comment to a question, even in legal or confidential circumstances.

Example key messages are listed in the Communications Action Plan.

Elected representatives

It is important that all elected representatives engage appropriately with the media. This will ensure Council’s reputation remains intact, as well as the Councillors’ own personal integrity and reputation. Their responsibility for engaging with the media should include:

- support Council’s official release of information and act as a spokesperson on the issue once material has been issued, rather than speaking independently beforehand
- ensure private and confidential information contained in briefs, reports or classified meetings is not disclosed to the media
- refrain from using personal comments or commenting about other Councillors, staff, or Council operations in such a way that could undermine public confidence in Council.

Media events

Council’s elected representatives are authorised to speak to the media at events, alternatively the CEO or a staff member authorised by the CEO.

Speech notes and talking points, including key messaging, are to be prepared for the speaker to ensure consistent, accurate responses. Media alerts are to be prepared prior to holding a media event or an official event where media are invited. They should be issued to media outlets with sufficient time to maximise attendance and coverage of the event, particularly if travel to remote areas is required.

Social Media

The use of social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube) as a communication tool has increased greatly in recent years, as a cost-effective means of instantly reaching audiences.

There is now an increasing acceptance of social media as a key communication tool in Regional Queensland, with many local governments now utilising social media; primarily Facebook and now Twitter.

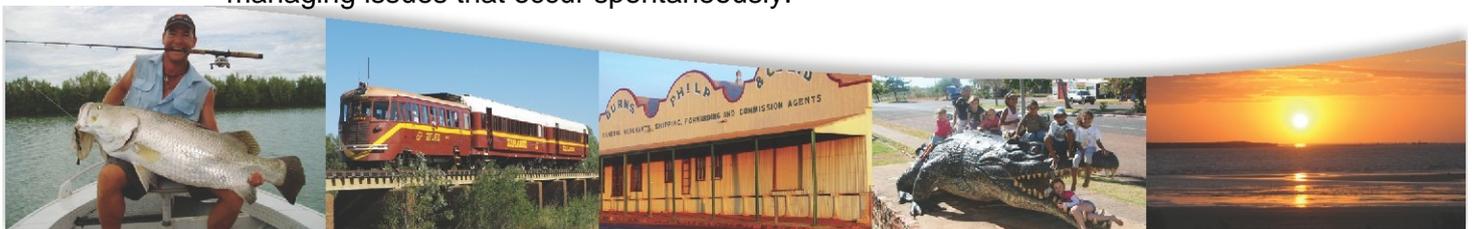
Council’s existing Facebook page has a solid following and is linked to the website to increase audience numbers. The addition of a Twitter page as a supplementary communication tool has been set up and may assist with reaching additional audience numbers when disseminating information and promoting achievements.

Guidelines for communicating via social media can be found within the Social Media Policy and associated Guidelines.

Risk and Issues management

Successful management of issues is essential to mitigating risk and issues and maintaining Council’s image and reputation. This includes:

- taking a proactive approach
- identifying issues before they arise
- managing issues that occur spontaneously.



Appropriate strategies should be developed to manage issues under direction of the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer. Strategies should include approaches to media (media statement, holding statement, interviews) and communication with stakeholders. To assist in this process a Briefing Note and / or Communication Plan will be prepared to assist Councillors and the Executive Leadership Team.

Responses to incidents and disasters should be handled in accordance with Council's Disaster Management Policy.

Management of enquiries and complaints

All enquiries and complaints should be handled appropriately in accordance with Council's Complaints Management Policy.

Tools and implementation

Council currently uses a wide range of communication tools to disseminate information to stakeholders, including:

- Monthly Newsletter
- Media statements and interviews
- Website
- Facebook page
- You Tube
- LinkedIn
- Public notices
- Letters (postal mail and electronic)
- Advertisements
- Posters
- Consultation
- Survey and Feedback

The Communication Action Plan outlines what tools are to be used to communicate with audiences to meet Council's communication objectives.

Evaluation

Evaluation is critical to the success of any communication strategy. Regular monitoring and review will ensure Council is heading in the right direction towards achieving its goals, while measured evaluation will determine if Council is meeting communication targets.

Both qualitative and quantitative data should be used to measure performance of the objectives. It will be gathered by:

- media monitoring, website, and social media data
- feedback forms, surveys
- meeting and event attendance and
- general feedback captured during stakeholder communications and engagement.

Full evaluation should be carried out annually in accordance with the Communications Action Plan.

