

Telling the City's Stories: Engaging with External Parties

Date: November 16, 2021

To: General Government and Licensing Committee

From: City Manager

Wards: Wards All

SUMMARY

The Strategic Public and Employee Communications Division (SPEC) leads communications for all key City priorities, policies, services and programs. The Division brings a unified voice to a diverse City and provides expert advice and services to clearly communicate to the public, City Council, employees, media, and national and international audiences. Delivering effective and strategic communications builds trust and confidence in municipal government by ensuring that messages to the public are clear, consistent and support civic participation and understanding of Council priorities, emerging issues and City policies, programs and services.

With one of the world's most diverse populations, Toronto residents, businesses and visitors now consume information from a more diverse media landscape. The information and media landscape has evolved dramatically over the past twenty years and now, people no longer rely solely on print newspapers, TV and radio. In fact many people now consume news and information from a variety of sources such as the internet, social media, podcasts, features, documentaries, infotainment and investigative journalism. According to Global Web Index (Q3 2020 –Q2 2021), 30 per cent of Canadians spend at least 30 minutes daily with online press compared to only 18 per cent who read print press at least 30 minutes each day, and one-third of Canadians use social media as a news source.

To help strengthen and modernize how SPEC tells the City's stories, the City Manager is recommending delegated authority be given to the Chief Communications Officer to enter into agreements with third parties interested in telling City stories in a variety of media. Through this delegated authority, the Chief Communications Officer will be empowered to seek out, respond to and build on City storytelling to enable greater public understanding and engagement with City services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Manager recommends that:

Telling the City's stories

1. City Council delegate authority to the Chief Communications Officer to negotiate and enter into on behalf of the City agreements with third parties who develop and distribute content for commercial or non-commercial purposes ("Content Producers") for the City's participation in the production of media content in such form as appropriate in the opinion of the Chief Communications Officer, including the use of City resources and intellectual property by the Content Producer on an in-kind basis, where the Chief Communications Officer is satisfied that there is a sufficient benefit to the City from the production, including the indirect benefit to the City of providing information to the public about City operations, on terms and conditions satisfactory to the Chief Communications Officer, and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor.
2. City Council authorize the Chief Communications Officer, and Division Heads, in consultation with the City Manager, and the City Clerk, as applicable, to take such actions in respect of City operations and the Content Producer's use of City resources and intellectual property as may be required to implement an agreement under Recommendation 1 and comply with any legislative requirements (e.g. privacy) imposed on the City.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact resulting from the adoption of the recommendations in this report.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

RECONCILIATION AND EQUITY IMPACT

Providing equitable access to City information is a cornerstone of the Strategic Public and Employee Communications function. Delivering information and telling the City's stories through more modern and varied channels can help to expand the reach of City messages and help Torontonians in every part of the city, regardless of background, age, access or preference, to hear the City's stories and connect and engage with the City of Toronto, how and where they want, in their language and through the medium of their choice.

DECISION HISTORY

GM23.11 Delegation of Authority to the City Manager Regarding the City's Intellectual Property, City Council on May 25, 26 and 27, 2009

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2009.GM23.11>

Municipal Code Chapter 459, Filming:

https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/municode/1184_459.pdf

COMMENTS

The SPEC division, under the leadership of the Chief Communications Officer, are the City's storytellers - the champions of Toronto, shaping and sharing the City's story. SPEC inspires human connections, empowers people and partners, and celebrates the diversity and everyday experiences of the city, helping Toronto thrive.

Every day, SPEC engages directly with the media, including conducting media interviews, shares information on the City's website and social media channels, purchases and places advertising across multiple radio, TV, print, outdoor, online and social media outlets, and through each activity, evaluates, documents and mitigates any risks associated with communications.

Agreements with third parties

This delegated authority would permit the Chief Communications Officer to authorize agreements with third party Content Producers for the City's participation in the production of content in a variety of media to help tell City stories. Examples of these types of agreements would be with production companies of documentaries, docuseries, podcasts and reality television produced for a variety of media, including broadcast television and digital platforms.

This delegation of authority would not encompass scenarios where the City provides funding to any third parties, although resources could include staff time to participate and oversee projects, primarily staff in SPEC as part of their regular work. Since most media outlets/channels are for-profit enterprises, this delegated authority would allow SPEC to enter in these agreements, with discretion, after assessing the benefits and mitigating any risks to the City. Ultimately, the goal is to tell City stories, with the City benefiting from a broader audience reached through new, innovative and varied communications methods.

Telling the City's story: Strategic Public and Employee Communications

As the City's storytellers, SPEC's professional staff promote and protect the City's reputation, building trust and confidence among employees, residents, visitors, businesses and other stakeholders. Every day, communications activities engage and educate key audiences to drive understanding and change behaviour, ensuring people have the right information on their terms.

In 2020, staff issued approximately 700 news releases and media advisories, provided more than 6,000 responses to members of the media, booked and placed more than 900 advertisements, uploaded 245 public videos to YouTube, and issued 7,440 tweets, 4,214 Facebook posts and 356 Instagram posts – all to reach broad and diverse audiences across Toronto.

SPEC constantly seeks out new channels and ways to reach the City's many and diverse audiences. Through this delegated authority, the Chief Communications Officer will be more empowered to seek out, respond to and work with content producers and expand how and where the City tells its stories.

Impact on City Operations and Legislative Obligations

Third party Content Producers engaging with the City to enter into an agreement for the City to allow the Content Producers to film City operations, including the public's interaction with the City, for the Content Producers' purposes may result in a change to the City's operations, if required.

Whereas prior to such an engagement, all records and information collected by the City were solely for the City's specific municipal operations, upon engagement with the Content Producer, additional notice may be required to identify the additional purpose or use of the information collected.

The City is subject to legislative requirements under multiple statutes (including but not limited to *City of Toronto Act, 2006*; *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*; and *Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004*) that require the City to ensure that no parties other than those who require the content for City operations can access the information contained within any records. Disclosure to the Content Producers can only happen with the advance notice and consent of the affected individuals, and other stakeholders, where required.

As a result, the City's day-to-day operations may need to be modified so as to ensure compliance with the obligations to protect the privacy of individuals and maintain reliable, secure, accessible records of City operations. This may require new forms to be issued and utilized, additional notices to be posted; or the re-assignment of City resources.

Modifications, if needed, may require specific notices to individuals to be put into place to obtain advance consent to the disclosure, prior to the Content Producer obtaining access; as well as control and removal of all records from workplaces to which the Content Producer would have access where consent of the affected individual is not provided.

The Chief Communications Officer and the relevant Division Heads may need the authority to direct and modify the day-to-day functions of City operation as to allow for the engagement with the Content Producer to implement any agreement and proceed in a manner that would not cause the City to be in violation of its statutory obligations to the public, as may be required. These modifications to day-to-day operations could include modifications to workplace policies, operational procedures, and information management processes.

Existing authority

Authority exists in the City already for the issuance of permits for location-based filming and film productions. The existing program is operated by the Film, Television and Digital Media Office in the Economic Development and Culture Division, who issues the permits for filming in the city. SPEC would require any agreements with Content Producers to include full compliance with all existing City permit requirements and other City policies and processes; in addition to the additional requirements to be imposed by the Chief Communications Officer in the agreements with individual Content Producers.

CONTACT

Brad Ross, Chief Communications Officer

SIGNATURE

Chris Murray
City Manager

ATTACHMENTS
