

Media Relations Policy

POLICY GOAL

As part of its mission to protect the public interest, the Real Estate Council of BC (Council) responds to requests for information and gives statements to the media on topics relating to the regulation of real estate licensees in BC.

This Media Relations Policy outlines processes for providing information to the news media, in order to provide journalists with the most accurate information possible while reflecting the Council's mandate to protect the public, and while respecting the legislative framework within which the Council's work is conducted, including duties of confidentiality and protection of personal information.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the Council:

- provides accurate and timely information in response to media requests;
- works collaboratively across the organization to ensure information is provided to media;
- considers the range of communication tools available and uses those most appropriate;
- respects the access to information, confidentiality and privacy rights of employees, licensees and citizens;
- strives to achieve a culture of two-way communication with media stakeholders; and
- conducts media relations in an open, professional, and transparent manner that is in accordance with the Council's mandate, the requirements of the *Real Estate Services Act*, the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, and any other applicable legislation.

The ultimate goal of the Council's *Media Relations Policy* is to ensure that the information contained in all communication with media is disclosable, consistent, accurate, fair and timely.

This policy aligns with several recommendations in the Final Report of the Independent Advisory Group including:

- The Real Estate Council significantly increase and improve its public education and awareness efforts.
- The Real Estate Council improve the transparency of its complaints and disciplinary process, and the resulting outcomes.

POLICY STATEMENT

The Council appreciates that openness and accountability to the public are critical to regulation and the rule of law. The Council also recognizes the support our media stakeholders may offer in sharing important information that furthers our mandate to protect the public interest. However, these interests must also be balanced with the privacy rights of licensees and third parties and legislated duties of confidentiality.

In dealing with media requests, the Council will:

- handle media requests promptly and professionally;
- be as open and transparent as possible with information provided to the media;
- ensure messages and responses are clear and easy to understand;
- where possible, include references in responses to relevant sections of the legislation, Council material or other background resources; and
- act in accordance with the requirements of the *Real Estate Services Act*, *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, and any relevant Council policies or applicable legislation.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all Real Estate Council of BC members and staff including full-time, part-time, casual and temporary employees, volunteers and co-op placements.

PROCEDURE

Council spokesperson

Unless otherwise authorized, the three designated spokespersons for the Council are the Chair, the Vice Chair and the Executive Officer.

When appropriate, the Chair or Executive Officer may designate another spokesperson due to their knowledge, experience and expertise, and when the designated spokesperson is adequately prepared to undertake this responsibility.

Designated spokespersons:

- must discuss only factual information;
- must not discuss matters that are currently under investigation or matters that are currently or will be under consideration by a hearing panel or the courts;

- must not discuss matters that could jeopardize the integrity of any investigation or release information that could be in breach of applicable privacy legislation.

Designated spokespersons should contact Communications for support and advice in preparation for media interviews.

Spokespersons Media Training

Communications staff, with the help of external consultants, will arrange or provide media training and support to spokespersons.

Non-spokespersons

Individual employees may speak to the media as private citizens; however they are not authorized to make statements to the media on behalf of the Real Estate Council of BC, and should make it clear they are not speaking on Council's behalf, unless explicitly designated by the Executive Officer.

Employees who are not designated spokespersons must refer media inquires to Communications staff, so that proper action can be taken and accurate responses made by the appropriate representative of the Council.

Council members should refrain from expressing personal opinions on Council related matters or Council decisions to media. Council members must keep an open mind about any matter before Council and must "speak with one voice" regarding any decision made by Council.

Communications Staff Responsibility

Communications staff are able to answer media enquiries by phone, email, letter or in person in order to:

- provide background information;
- provide print or electronic written statements attributed to the Real Estate Council of BC;
- facilitate and arrange interviews with the media;
- gather information for designated spokespersons ahead of media interviews;
- provide publicly available material from the Council's website to media;
- provide links to Council material on the website; and
- re-direct media to other organizations.

Release of Information

The Council will consider each media request on a case-by-case basis. In doing so it will be guided by the following considerations:

- the extent to which the media request is likely to contribute directly to informing consumers and industry stakeholders of information that is in the public interest;

- the internal and external resources and time required to gather and interpret the required information; and
- whether the Council is legally permitted to release the information.

Where media coverage resulting from a request to the Council contains inaccuracies, the Council may comment in public, using factual information to correct misleading reporting.

Declining to Release Information

The Council's investigations are confidential. Generally, the Council will not confirm or deny whether there may be an investigation underway into the actions of any individual licensee or brokerage, or whether a complaint has been received concerning any licensee or brokerage, unless and until a date has been set for a Discipline Hearing. In circumstances where the refusal to confirm or deny an investigation could undermine public confidence in the regulation of the real estate industry, the Council will make an exception to this policy. Such exceptions will be determined on a case-by-case basis, and will be subject to the approval of the Executive Officer or his/her designate.

When a matter is due to come before a hearing committee, the Council will not comment on the matter until a final decision has been issued.

The Council does not comment on specific cases beyond what is stated in the published decisions. Other comments concerning hearings will be limited to general explanations, in order to promote a better understanding of the Council's hearing processes.

The Council may issue a media release and/or paid advertisement in the appropriate media outlet when it determines that it would be in the public interest to do so, in accordance with the provisions of the Publication Policy.

The Council also reserves the right to decline to respond to media requests where a response would conflict with the confidentiality requirements of the *Real Estate Services Act*, *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, the Council's Publication Policy, or any other applicable law or policy..

The Council does not monitor and cannot comment on real estate market conditions or market trends or other matters outside its mandate.

Response Time

The Council responds to media requests as promptly as possible: a communications staff member will make efforts to respond to factual requests within 24 hours. When due to the complexity or scope of information requested this is not possible, the Council will inform the journalist of the additional time required to respond.

Unless in conflict with the operational requirements of the Council, media deadlines are to be respected wherever possible.

Interviews are granted subject to the availability of a spokesperson and adequacy of preparation time.

News Releases

Communications staff are responsible for the creation and dissemination of all official news releases and advisories as required by the Council.

News releases will be issued as soon as practicable via a news wire service, as well as being posted on the Council's website or wherever else the Manager of Communications deems appropriate.

News releases must be approved by the Manager of Communications, and, as appropriate, one or more of the Executive Officer and the Director of Legal Services.

Anonymous media requests

The Council reserves the right to refuse anonymous media requests.

Annual Review of Policy

The Council will review and update, if necessary, this policy on an annual basis or as needed to ensure compliance with changing regulatory requirements.

MEDIA REQUESTS

Interview requests and enquiries from the media should be directed to:

Communications
604-683-9664
mediacontact@recbc.ca