

NIPISSING UNIVERSITY

Policy Category:	General
Policy Number:	1.2.2013.B
Policy Name:	Board Communications Protocol
Responsible Department:	University Secretary/President's Office
Original Approval Date:	February 2014
Approval Authority:	Board of Governors
Last Updated:	March 2021
Next Review Date:	2024

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to develop a communication protocol expressly for the Board of Governors outlining the parameters related to communication strategies and obligations.

B. SCOPE

It is important that the Board communicates only on issues within the scope or authority of the Board of Governors. This policy will be applicable to all 26 members of the Board (non-constituent and constituent members). It will delineate the lines of authority and responsibility for the dissemination of communication in consideration of the Board's responsibility to Nipissing University and its accountabilities to its stakeholders, including to the general public and government.

C. GENERAL

Communications by the Board may occur for a wide variety of purposes including:

- Informing or involving stakeholders;
- Responding to the media, lobbyists or other requests for information, compliance or reporting; and
- Promoting or representing the University.

It is important that the Board of Governors is guided by protocols to ensure that key stakeholders are informed about the Board's activities. Information flow between the Board and stakeholders should be two-way and ideally should include the Board receiving feedback from stakeholders regarding its stakeholder engagement and communication strategies.

As appropriate, Board members will be provided with relevant facts and talking points on significant issues as well as on news, announcements etc. to assist them in their role as University ambassadors.

The Vice-Presidents will communicate issues of reputational significance to the Board, at the earliest possible opportunity, through the President.

The University's Communications Team will work to provide advance copies of key announcements, internal stories and key messages as appropriate.

As with relationships between the Board and external parties, communication within the Board is also crucial for healthy relationships between members. Governors are encouraged to share their knowledge about the University and to articulate the views of the constituency that nominated them. However, members are expected to maintain an overriding loyalty to the University in its entirety rather than any constituency within it and thus are obliged to serve the University as a whole. When faced with the possibility of a conflict between the interests of the constituency that nominated them and the interests of the University, Governors are bound to act in the best interest of the University.

While Board members are not precluded from speaking about the proceedings held in public meetings (Open Session), they must declare that they are expressing their personal views and not those of the Board

D. THE POLICY

The University Secretary is the appropriate gatekeeper for communications from Nipissing University to the Board. Any request for information should be referred to the University Secretary, the President & Vice-Chancellor or the Board Chair.

The Board Chair is the only authorized spokesperson for the Board. This helps ensure a consistent message and encourages the Board to operate as a whole. A clear and united message is best delivered by the Board Chair. In the absence of the Board Chair, the Vice-Chair or Vice-Chair Pro Tem shall act as the spokesperson for the Board of Governors.

Public comment includes comment made in circumstances where it is reasonable to expect that the comment may reach the wider community. This may include both verbal and written comments made in public venues, in speeches, and in all forms of media (traditional, Internet or social).

Furthermore, it is the role of the Board Chair to act as the focal point for communication between the Board and the President.

The President & Vice-Chancellor is the chief spokesperson for the University and will lead communication with staff and employees. Board members should be encouraged to interact with employees; however, they should not directly approach employees for key information but, rather, make their requests through the University Secretary, the President & Vice-Chancellor or the Board Chair. Likewise, employees should approach the Board through the University Secretary or the President & Vice-Chancellor on matters relating to governance.

Communication directly between Board members and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, the Minister or the Minister's staff without first obtaining authorization from the President & Vice-Chancellor or the Board Chair is strictly discouraged. The Board Chair and the President & Vice-Chancellor are the communication channels to the Ministry.

Where appropriate, key messages will be provided to Board members so that they may comment to family, friends, colleagues and community members in support of University initiatives.

Calls or inquiries from the media should be referred to the Board Chair or President & Vice-Chancellor who may, in turn, consult with the University's Director, External Relations. The appropriate spokesperson (Board Chair, President & Vice-Chancellor or designate) will be identified and key messaging will be developed to ensure a strategic and consistent response to all media inquiries. In the event the call or inquiry from the media is in reference to an item for which Board members are provided advance notice, a designated contact may be identified in place of the Board Chair or the President & Vice-Chancellor (e.g. the Director, External Relations, the Manager, Communications, etc.).

Representing the University

Board members may be requested to represent the Board and the University in a public venue.

The following code of conduct applies:

Members should ensure that their behavior is consistent with the objectives of the Board, is ethical and demonstrates the level of probity expected in the public sector.

It is not appropriate for Board members to publicly share personal views, speculate on future directions, criticize any political party or continue debate on an issue after a decision has been made by the Board.

Members should refrain from providing information or advice without prior authorization from the Board Chair (or President & Vice-Chancellor, where relevant). As noted, key messages will be provided to Board members so that they may comment to family, friends, colleagues and community members in support of University initiatives.

Confidentiality

In consideration of confidentiality obligations, a clear protocol must exist that allows members to consult with their networks and to remain informed while not compromising their need to act in the interest for which the Board was formed rather than promoting the interests of the particular stakeholder group they represent.

Any private use of information obtained in an official capacity that is not already in the public domain is likely to be inappropriate since it has the potential to conflict with a member's official duties or to compromise confidentiality.

Caution should be exercised in the use of email and personal email accounts (for example, ensuring that confidential information from earlier email conversation strings is not forwarded unintentionally).

Governors are bound by the confidentiality of information discussed in Closed Session as well as standing committees and other committees established by the Board. They have the obligation to refrain from disclosing confidential information to the constituency that nominated them or anyone else. Materials provided and decisions made during Closed Session meetings are not public until the Chair of the Committee or the Board Chair so advise or until the report of the particular meeting is publicly released. When inquiries are made concerning such matters, Board members shall refer the questioner to the President & Vice-Chancellor or to the Board Chair without comment.

Raising Concerns

Board members should be aware that their communications may be subject to Ontario's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (1990) which provides public access to government documents subject to certain restrictions, thus promoting accountability and transparency.

Governors are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards and to be vigilant in ensuring that the University is being properly managed. Any significant concern or complaint should be related promptly to the Board Chair or to the President & Vice-Chancellor.

E. REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed at minimum every three (3) years to determine whether amendments are necessary.

Resolution 2014-02-03: Moved by G. Durnan, seconded by J. Zimbalatti that the Board of Governors accept the recommendation of the Advancement Committee that the Communications Protocol Policy (#1.2.2013B) be approved.

Revised March 11, 2021 – Resolution #2021-03-06