

Thames Valley Trail Association

Communications Policy - Version 2

Adopted by TVTA Board on November 6, 2017

Summary

This document outlines the Thames Valley Trail Association communications policy. The policy is governed by the following principles:

1. **Accountability** - Who is responsible for communication, what they are responsible for communicating and how communication activities are completed.
2. **Conformance** - This is aligned with TVTA's mission and goals as outlined in the constitution.
3. **Consistency** - Content and format of message(s) delivered to membership and public audiences.
4. **Compliance** - With the Personal information and privacy rules of Ontario and federal privacy laws related to the collection and use of personal information.

The intent is to have the appropriate Director(s) communicate TVTA message(s) using appropriate medium(s) to member(s) and/or the public (non-members) at the right time.

Policy details:

1. Public Spokesperson

- a. The President is recognized as the public spokesperson for the TVTA. This includes all forms of public media including newspaper, radio, television, internet, etc.
- b. The President, Board of Directors or Communications Committee may approve the delegation of the responsibility of spokesperson to other TVTA Directors or Volunteers.

2. Communications Committee

- a. The Communications Committee is responsible for ensuring that all public communications conform to the goals of the TVTA, as outlined in the constitution, and adhere to the principles outlined in this policy statement.
- b. The Communications Committee is comprised of three individuals, two of which must be TVTA Directors and one of which may be a volunteer TVTA member. The Public Relations Director should lead this sub-committee as the activities align with the Public Relations role.
- c. Members of the Communications Committee must be approved by the Board of Directors.
- d. The communications committee will do its best to respond to approval requests (ie from Trekker editor, Comings and Goings Editor, etc.) within 48 hours.

3. Standards for Communication

All communications activity should:

- a. Reflect a commitment to using plain English.
- b. Be open and honest.
- c. Be relevant, accurate, sensitive and timely.
- d. Enable meaningful engagement with stakeholders.
- e. Recognize the importance and value of engaging with members and volunteers.
- f. Ensure that TVTA listens to members, acts on information received when appropriate and provides feedback.
- g. Reflect the principles of confidentiality, data protection, privacy and other relevant legislation.

4. Policy on Member Privacy, Usage and Protection of Personal Information

- a. TVTA members provide personal information, such as address, phone number, email address, etc., as part of their membership application. The TVTA will comply with the Privacy Legislation requirements for non-profits/charities as outlined by the federal Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, which establishes the principles governing the collection, safeguarding, retention and disclosure of member's personal information.
- b. Member information will be stored in a secure membership database by the Membership Director.
- c. Access to the membership database will be restricted to the Membership Director, backup membership director, and technical consultant and President.
- d. The Membership Director will apply best practices for safeguarding the membership database to ensure protection and continuity of access including an appropriate backup frequency, storage of backups in a secondary location, provision of alternative encryption key holders, etc.
- e. The Membership Director will generate reports to aid the other Directors in the execution of their duties, as outlined in the TVTA Communications Quick Reference Guide. For example, generate email distribution lists for the Trail Maintenance Director for people who indicated on their membership application form that they are interested in assisting with trail maintenance.
- f. The Membership Director may be called upon by the Board to periodically generate ad hoc reports from the Membership Database.
- g. All reports providing any personal information about members, regardless of content, quantity, or format (email or paper-based) will be destroyed immediately after being used. Paper-based reports should NOT be recycled; they must be shredded and/or burned.
- h. The TVTA will not sell or share personal member information to any other organization regardless of their affiliation with the TVTA or hiking. All membership information is for internal TVTA usage only.

- i. The TVTA will not provide personal member information to any other member of the TVTA, except where such disclosure is required for a Director in the execution of their duties.
- j. A member who is no longer in the role of responsibility either as a director or as an officer shall have their permissions rescinded after they leave the position.
- k. The TVTA policy on the protection of personal information will be published on the TVTA web site and appear on the TVTA membership application form as an opt-in/out selection box.

5. Electronic Communication(s) Standards

An email or electronic message sent by a charity or a nonprofit qualifies as a Commercial Electronic Message (CEM) if it seeks to promote a commercial activity; a commercial activity is anything that involves a payment of money or an exchange of something of value. It is possible that a simple membership renewal or donation request may qualify, although activities to fundraise by charities has a special exemption (existing non-business relationship) as long as they are members and for two years after the end of their membership.

- a. The TVTA will communicate with members in compliance with Canada's Anti-Spam Law (CASL). This includes:
 - Disclosure in every email or electronic message of the identity and contact information of the sender;
 - Inclusion within an email of a readily-accessible unsubscribe mechanism; and
 - Consent of the recipient to receive the email.
- b. After July 1, 2017 (date which CASL began full force) the TVTA will seek express consent from new members during the membership application process to ensure members opt-in or out to TVTA communication(s).
- c. Where TVTA communications allow members and members of the general public to interact, comment or share information on particular topics relevant to TVTA electronically such as on social media (commenting, likes or sharing), on social networking sites like Meetup (commenting), website blog (commenting) or otherwise; the TVTA aims and encourages individual responsibility for exercising good judgement and common sense when commenting, corresponding. The TVTA reserves the right to moderate and ensure comments submitted to its social media presence through social media or social networking sites meets the standards outlined in the organizational constitution and goals of the organization, is respectful and also meets the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety, a set of voluntary guidelines, tools and resources intended to guide organizations in promoting mental health and preventing psychological harm (bullying, harassment, etc.).

Comments of the following nature (and others deemed inappropriate will be removed): trolling, spamming, or postings that are of a commercial nature; material copied from other sources (exceptions include the use of brief quotes and/or articles where the source is acknowledged); personal attacks and name calling; inappropriate comments, including any that are threatening, obscene, profane or that contain hate speech, degrade others or are abusive; discriminatory comments that refer to race, age, gender,

sexual orientation, religion, political persuasion, body type, physical or mental health and/or access issues; libelous statements, such as allegations of criminal activity or comments that unfairly harm a person's reputation; use of an offensive username or of foul language.

If a complaint is brought before the board, it must be impartially investigated in a timely manner to determine the facts of the case and decide on what corrective actions, if any, need to be taken. The investigation will be initiated by the President and any members or non-members that the President asks to assist with the investigation.

- d. The TVTA policy on Electronic Communications Standards will be published on the TVTA web site, social media, and appear on the TVTA membership application form as an opt-in/out selection box.
- e. The TVTA does not participate in SMS activities to communicate with members.
- f. Volunteers are personally responsible for what they communicate in social media (as part of their role or on personal sites).
- g. The Public Relations Director and his/her committee will be responsible to review the CASL checklist annually and ensure it is published to the tvta.ca web site.

6. Photography and Image Consent

- a. The TVTA will request an image publicity consent upon membership application for the purpose of photographs taken during TVTA activities for the purpose to share among membership and the general public (newsletter, social media, social networking). Any photographer taking images will also request verbal consent prior to taking images of TVTA membership and ensure that if any member declines to be photographed that their image is not collected.
- b. It is the responsibility of each individual member or the member responsible for vulnerable adult(s) or anyone under the age of 18 to decline participating in photography if they do not consent to their image being shared among membership or the general public through TVTA communication(s), for example newsletters or social media.
- c. A verbal publicity image consent must be obtained by any photographer prior to posting images or text (name of member) in member or public communications, including social media).
- d. The TVTA policy on Photography and Image Consent will be published on the TVTA web site, social media, and appear on the TVTA membership application form as an opt-in/out selection box.

7. Types of TVTA Communications:

a. Email

Email may be used by Directors to communicate with members or a subset of members for the following purposes:

- To remind members of upcoming membership renewal.

- To solicit involvement in activities that members indicated that they would like to volunteer for on their membership application form.
- To promote important news that would otherwise arrive too late or may go unnoticed through other media, such as the newsletter or web site.

All emails to general membership should be reviewed by the Communications Committee for consistency of message, content and formatting to receive approval before being sent.

The Membership Director will maintain the email addresses of members in the Membership Database and update the email list in Mail Chimp. The Membership Director will be responsible for providing email distribution lists to other Directors, upon request. A new distribution list can be requested by Directors and generated by the Membership Director for each new email to be sent as members and membership preferences constantly change.

All emails sent on behalf of the TVTA to membership as a whole should be distributed by a single individual on the Board of Directors to ensure the security of membership data and to reduce the likelihood of mistakes that might expose email addresses.

Personal email addresses of members will be protected (hidden) in all public email communications through the use of the Blind Carbon Copy (BCC) mechanism or through the third part provider Mail Chimp (marketing automation platform) used by the TVTA to manage email subscription for membership). The only exception to this is if there is a need for a very small subset of members to engage in multilateral communications. Example scenarios:

- General communication from the TVTA Board to all membership - use Mail Chimp
- Solicitation by any Director for volunteers who have indicated that they would like to assist with various TVTA activities - Use BCC.
- Provision of details to a group of people who have signed up for a specific activity, such as trail maintenance or bridge building outing on a specific date - Use BCC.
- Board members or sub-committee coordinating events or discussing options/solutions - Use CC so that people know who received a response and so that feedback can be provided to everyone.
- TVTA Directors have access to TVTA specific emails to undertake board activities. For example, info@tvta.ca, pr@tvta.ca, activities@tvta.ca, membership@tvta.ca, etc. Directors will use these email addresses to communicate with membership appropriately.

NOTE: For small groups, there still may be value in sharing information on who is participating. This may be accomplished by treating the email like a letter and including a CC line at the bottom. Email addresses would still be protected by using a BCC, but allow people to know who they are working with.

The Subject line of all official TVTA email communications should appear to be official, clear and explicitly indicate that it is for the TVTA. For example:

- TVTA: Volunteers needed
- TVTA: Annual General Meeting reminder
- TVTA: Call for nominations

All emails must include an unsubscribe mechanism according to CASL (detailed under section 4. Electronic Communication).

Members opt-in or out to receiving TVTA Communication when they sign up as a member (express consent) through a selection box on the membership application.

Excessive use of email communications should be avoided. When possible, all email communications that are to be sent within any given month by members of the Board of Directors should be collected and submitted as a single communication by the Public Relations Director and/ or the email newsletter Editor.

b. Web site

The TVTA web site (tvta.ca) exclusively represents the TVTA's presence on the internet. All information published through the web site must be vetted with the Communications Committee to ensure conformance with the principles of the TVTA's communications policy and, more importantly, with the goals of the TVTA.

c. TVTA Newsletters

The Trekker is a publication for communications with TVTA members and is published 3-4 times per year. The email newsletter will be sent out up to once per month via email.

All information published through newsletters must be vetted with the Communications Committee to ensure conformance with the principles of the TVTA's communications policy and, more importantly, with the goals of the TVTA.

d. Mail

Present members who do not have access to the internet or electronic communications will receive TVTA Newsletter (The Trekker) by mail.

New members will be able to access it online.

e. Phone

Traditionally the Phone Committee disseminates information to members that could not be satisfied by the quarterly or other TVTA Communication(s) activities. It has been largely replaced by the Communications Officer/Ambassador to welcome new members.

The Membership Director is responsible for generating reports (names, email addresses, and phone numbers for the purpose of welcoming new members. These reports should be secured and destroyed according to the best practices outlined above.

TVTA does not participate in automated phone calls otherwise known as “robot calls”.

f. TVTA Social Media and Social Networking

TVTA communicates with the general public through Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to promote the organization. TVTA also participates on the Meetup Social Networking website to promote activities.

TVTA encourages the responsible use of social media and networking, individuals are responsible for their security and privacy settings on social media and networking web sites in accordance with the Usage (section 3), electronic communication (section 4), consent (section 5), and standards for TVTA communication tools (sections 6 - 11). Moderators may remove any post that they consider inappropriate.

8. Advertising

- a. Internal to members: Ads can be accepted and included in the Trekker or Comings and Goings at the Communication Committee’s discretion.
- b. External: Advertisements can be placed by the TVTA from time to time in suitable agreed publications aimed at an appropriate audience for the organization and goal of the ad (AGM promotion, Saturday morning hikes, etc.).
- c. Information specific about promoting hikes can be found in the TVTA policy on ‘Advertising for Hikes’.

9. Copyright and Fair Use

- a. TVTA adheres to Canadian Copyright Laws that govern the legally enforceable rights to creative and artistic works under the laws of Canada.
- b. TVTA logo is copyright material of TVTA and should only be used with the Public Relations Director’s permission and only reproduced in the colours of green and white or alternate black and white. Permission can be requested by contacting pr@tvta.ca.
- c. TVTA owns the intellectual property rights in TVTA Communication(s) in the underlying HTML, text, audio or video clips, images or any other forms, or has obtained the permission of the owner of the intellectual property in such content to use the content in communications.
- d. TVTA members and members of the general public by using or accessing TVTA materials (web site, newsletter or otherwise), agree not to reuse communications material from the TVTA. In particular, to copy, distribute, republish, upload, post, transmit

of any materials is not permitted unless you obtain the Public Relations written consent first.

10. TVTA Member Code of Conduct

- a. All interactions (whether it be face-to-face, phone, email, social media, etc.) between members of the TVTA (including Directors) will be polite and respectful.
- b. All interactions with the general public in the official capacity as a TVTA Director, volunteer or member will be polite and respectful.
- c. Failure to act in accordance to the above or the above Standards for Communications (section 3) may be sufficient cause to revoke directorship and/or membership.

11. Exceptions and Exemptions

- a. The need for exceptions to and exemptions from the policy may arise. For example:
 - It may take time to close the gaps between the current and target states.
 - There may be a need to grandfather some procedures or member services.
 - Unique circumstances may require innovative actions.
- b. When the need for an exemption or exception occurs, approval must be provided by the Board.
- c. All exceptions and exemptions will have a time limit.
- d. All exceptions and exemptions will be reviewed by the Board upon their expiry and either their time limit extended or the exception or exemption revoked.

12. Accessibility

All communications activities will be accessible to all in accordance with TVTA's commitment to the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the Customer Service Standard for charitable and non-profit organizations in the Province of Ontario.

13. Miscellaneous

- a. All Directors will familiarize themselves with the TVTA constitution with emphasis on the goals of the organization. These goals serve as a guideline regarding the types of messages that are appropriate for the Directors and organization to convey.
- b. All Directors will familiarize themselves with the TVTA Communications Policy.

14. General Flow of Communications - The TVTA Communications Quick Reference Guide

- a. There is an accepted pattern of input, review, approval, and distribution of information. For example, the solicitation of articles for the Trekker (input), editing the articles (review), acceptance of the content by the Communications Committee (approval) and publication of the newsletter (distribution). The responsibilities and interactions of various TVTA roles are captured in a condensed format in the TVTA Communications Quick Reference Guide otherwise known as TVTA Information: A to Z.

Revised October 2017 - Alex Vanderkam, Barb Doney, Mike Robertson