



Corporate Policy

Corporate Service Standards: Communication Channels

Policy Number: CS.1-01
Sub-Topic: Customer Service
Topic: Corporate Standards
Applies to: All Employees

Policy Statement and Strategic Plan Linkages

The Town of Newmarket supports policies that reflect sound governance and accountability through a focus on service excellence. In a hybrid work environment, setting corporate service standards for various communication channels will positively impact our internal and external customer's experiences and service satisfaction levels through service efficiency, speed, and convenience.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set out clearly defined standards for employees when handling phone calls, emails, and other employee communication and collaboration software programs employed by the corporation, such as Microsoft Teams.

Employee availability and workplace presence notifications helps to communicate and set reasonable expectations for a response.

This Policy replaces the Telephone Service Standards (#CI.1-01) and e-Mail Service Standards (#CI.1-02) Policies.

Provisions

Phone

Phone communication continues to be one of the top preferred methods customers use to interact with government agencies. Customers will use this method to reach employees because of its speed and convenience. When corporate phone systems are used well, customer satisfaction levels are high.

STANDARD 1: Callers have the option of a live response during business hours (8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday).

Employees' voice mail greetings must provide the caller with options of how to reach an employee to speak to including:

- option to press '0' to speak to an employee
- an alternate employee's name and extension or cell phone number as appropriate.

Employees should avoid having each other named as alternates to avoid "voice mail circles" in the event that both employees are unavailable simultaneously.

STANDARD 2: All voice mail greetings are updated when an employee is unavailable.

If an employee will not be present at their workplace for one or more business days, their voice mail greeting must be updated to include the employee's:

- status (not available, out-of-office, on vacation, off-site)
- anticipated return date
- when the caller may expect a return call
- an alternate employee to contact in their absence.

STANDARD 3: Telephones should be forwarded to voice mail when away from the workstation, including during non-business hours.

By forwarding telephones to voice mail the caller will go directly to voice mail without delay.

STANDARD 4: All calls should be returned within one business day with, at minimum, an acknowledgement of the call.

Timeliness is an important driver in customer satisfaction and all staff must strive to meet this level of service. Senior management staff may employ administrative assistants to monitor and acknowledge calls on their behalf to meet this standard.

Email

Email continues to trend upwards as a preferred communication channel used by customers when accessing municipal services and information. Email continues to be widely used as a preferred internal communication channel amongst employees. While written and email correspondence is similar, there is an expectation that e-mail correspondence will be responded to within a shorter period of time.

STANDARD 1: All emails are to be acknowledged within 2 business days.

Staff must strive to acknowledge email correspondence within 2 business days. Senior management staff may employ administrative assistants to monitor and acknowledge emails on their behalf to meet this standard. A full response should be provided within 5 business days or some other period of time as appropriate. This timeframe should be communicated to the customer so they are aware as to when to expect a full response.

If a shorter timeframe for response is required by law or for other reasons, staff must meet that shorter timeframe.

STANDARD 2: If an employee expects to be absent for 2 or more business days, the “out of office” notification is to be set up on their individual email system. The notification should advise the sender of the email message of the employee’s anticipated return date as well as identify who to contact in their absence. Employees should proactively advise those they deal with on a regular basis (internal and external) that they expect to be out of the office for an extended period of time.

By setting up an “out of office” notification, internal customers will be made aware that the employee they are dealing with is not available and provided with the option of contacting an alternate employee within their work area for assistance. By sending an e-mail notification to the appropriate contacts before an anticipated absence, employees will reduce dissatisfaction when a response is delayed. Alternatively, allowing another employee to either access your email account or to receive any incoming emails during your absence will also avoid dissatisfaction when a response is delayed. It is recognized that there may be times when employees are unable to activate their “out of office” notification, such as when they are away unexpectedly.

STANDARD 3: The Town of Newmarket utilizes a standardized email signature program.

The purpose of the Town’s standardized email program is to ensure all employees have a cohesive email signature that includes all the necessary contact information for internal and external stakeholders. Signatures will include an employee’s preferred name, title, department, phone number, and if desired, pronouns and designations. Employees who would like to add or modify pronouns, designations or their preferred name may contact the IT Department. Occasionally, email signatures may be modified to include promotion of specific campaigns, subject to approval by the Communications Department (eg. Elections).

Microsoft Teams

The Future Forward Workplace Policy acknowledges that employees may participate in various work arrangements which may result in employees working asynchronously (at different locations and times), subject to approval by management. Given the variety in work schedules and locations, it is important that employees are able to identify when colleagues are available to collaborate. By using the Microsoft (MS) Teams platform, employees can indicate their availability at a glance.

STANDARD 1: Employees are responsible to set their employee status daily through MS Teams to indicate to other employees their location and availability.

At the beginning of their work day, employees must set their location (office or remote) and status (available, busy, do not disturb, be right back, appear away, appear offline) in MS Teams. Care should be taken to ensure that employee status is current. Information contained in the Outlook calendar will be automatically applied to the MS Teams status, reducing the frequency for which updates are required (eg. “in a meeting” status and automatic reply email responses).

Cross-References

Corporate Procedure

Corporate Service Standards Procedure #CS.1-01-001

Corporate Policy

Disconnecting from Work Policy #HR.2-08

Future Forward Program – Work Arrangements Policy

Internet & e-Mail Acceptable Use Policy #IT.1-01

Other Government Legislation

Working for Workers Act, 2021

Contact

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Details

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