

CITY OF GRAND FORKS			
POLICY TITLE:	Communications Policy and Procedures	POLICY NO:	206
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Executive Summary

The City of Grand Forks recognizes the need to implement new policies, procedures and strategies to enhance communications in the community and within the organization.

Through the strategic and coordinated delivery of communications, the City can increase the effectiveness of its decision-making by informing and engaging the community, clearly and consistently, with timely and relevant information, reducing misinformation and ultimately saving time and resources and improving outcomes.

Strong communications is central to the success of the City of Grand Forks and the well-being of its citizens. The objective of the Communications Policy and Procedures is to effect information sharing. As a function of good governance, open and proactive communications is aimed at ensuring the public receives clear, relevant and timely information from the City. Information is the lever that people need to hold the City accountable and ensure transparency in participative and empowering processes.

Guiding Principles

Guiding principles are used to help guide decisions around communications. These principles speak to how the City will implement the communication policies of Council, improving communications with key stakeholders, including tax payers, community, Federal and Provincial government and others.

The following suggestions for guiding principles could be used to provide direction for decisions regarding the City’s communications.

- **Accountability:** Ensure the City’s messages are communicated in a clear, relevant and proactive manner that is consistent throughout the organization
- **Commitment/Accountability:** Every member of Council and staff has a role to play in assisting the City to listen to citizens, incorporate feedback and communicate its message.

- **Integrity:** Provide accurate, relevant and timely information to target select audiences with positive, open and honest information
- **Inclusiveness:** Offer opportunities for two-way communications and continuous dialogue to the mutual benefit of the City and its citizens and stakeholders
- **Transparency:** Be proactive in seeking opportunities to inform and engage key stakeholders, residents, businesses, community groups and the media, using a wide range of communication strategies, tools and channels
- **Commitment:** Increase awareness about the role of the City of Grand Forks and programs and services
- **Transparency:** Seek to build trust, increase understanding and reduce misinformation
- **Authenticity:** Ensure all communications, both internal and external, are respectful, recognizing, and seeking to understand different perspectives
- **Commitment:** Allocate the adequate and/or necessary resources, both financial and human, to implement communications as identified and approved.

1.1.1 COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION PLANNING

Communication planning will be incorporated into annual work and/or project plans in order to inform and engage key stakeholders and audiences such as residents, businesses, opinion leaders, community groups, service clubs and the media.

Communication plans will identify the level of desired consultation using levels of engagement, identified by the International Association of Public Participation Spectrum (i.e. inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower) for key target audiences and projects (www.iap2.com)

A variety of communication channels and communiqués will be used to meet the needs of the City's growing and diverse audience, and may include traditional print advertising as well as digital or online opportunities such as the City's existing Twitter profile and website.

1.2 AUDIENCES

Communication plans will identify audiences in order to ensure the right messages and right channels are used to inform and engage these groups. Key audiences for the City of Grand Forks may include but are not limited to:

- . Residents
- . Businesses
- . Business groups (i.e. Community Futures Boundary, Boundary Country Regional Chamber of Commerce)
- . Community groups
- . Service clubs
- . Schools
- . Post-secondary institutions
- . Associations
- . Regional District of Kootenay Boundary
- . Boundary Economic Development Committee
- . Provincial Government
- . Federal Government
- . First Nations
- . Other local governments
- . UBCM, LGMA
- . Other provincial or federal ministries or departments

Understanding the needs of the citizens and larger community, as well as the impacts of existing or changing programs, projects or services is important to the City of Grand Forks. It is important to identify appropriate audiences and to better understand audience knowledge or acceptance of an issue and increase awareness where deemed important and/or necessary.

1.3 MESSAGE CONTENT

In keeping with Council's Guiding Principles, messaging will be developed to provide clear, consistent and accurate information in plain language.

When representing the City, Council and staff will provide a consistent message about the City's projects, programs, services and decisions. Briefing notes including key points will be used as needed to assist in creating a consistent message.

1.4 MEDIA RELATIONS

The implementation of strategic media relations practices will be aimed at enriching media relationships, growing the City's brand and reputation and informing and engaging the community.

The City seeks to proactively engage the media to increase the publication of accurate, timely and relevant information, striving for balanced representation in the media on any issue. And, to leverage earned media coverage as a venue to reach the broader community.

The City will endeavor to respond promptly and accurately to media requests to increase coverage, build stronger relationships and be able to act as "experts" on City projects.

The City will seek to respond to published misinformation in a timely manner by providing the correct facts with a focus on the specific issue.

The Mayor or their designate will be the official spokesperson for the City. The Communications Officer and /or CAO may designate staff as the spokesperson for specific programs, projects or services.

1.5 EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

To provide accurate and timely information to the community about City activities, share accomplishments, manage inquiries and advertise key initiatives.

The City seeks to provide clear, relevant and timely information to its external audience. The Auditor General of British Columbia Guidelines for Public Participation: Principles and Best Practices for British Columbia, will be used as reference for best practices in

public consultation.

Each department is responsible for ensuring that pertinent information is communicated out in a timely and accurate manner.

Co-operation and co-ordination between departments is necessary in ensuring the City's guiding principles are reflected in information and messaging in communications to the public.

The City's web site www.grandforks.ca provides the main source of City information; however, it is important to use as many channels of communication as possible including email, direct mail, print and broadcast media and the internet.

Each department will be responsible for ensuring that timely and relevant information is made available externally, and that this information will be reviewed by the Communications Officer prior to distribution.

Council Communications

The City will ensure that Council priorities are met through regular dialogue, information exchange and by understanding communications needs as they relate to City strategic priorities.

Paid Advertising

The City recognizes that ensuring a consistent source of information is a key component to communicating with its citizens. Paid advertising will be used to promote decisions of Council, statutory requirements and ongoing programs, Request for Proposals, tenders, projects and services as necessary.

Personal and Community Contact

The City strives to provide a high level of customer-centered service that recognizes the importance of personal contact with its citizens. The City seeks to engage its community members through a variety of strategies, including personal contact of both Council and staff at community events, open houses, meetings, presentations and/or visits.

Promotional and Informational Materials

Ensuring clear and consistent visual representation of the City's message in a variety of formats is important to creating a positive and proactive message. Materials should be of high quality and appropriately written/produced to match the content. All promotional materials will be reviewed and approved by the Communications Officer and /or CAO.

Brand Guidelines

The City's logo is the official symbol of the community and to be used on all City materials in keeping with the City's adoption of the Brand Guidelines (2013).

1.6 INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

The City aims to establish effective internal communication practices that are integrated with external communications and branding. The internal communications objective is to build trust and demonstrate authenticity, transparency and accessibility.

Each department is responsible for ensuring that pertinent operational information is posted in first class.

Information that is to include Council will be posted to the Council folder by the Communications Officer, Corporate Officer or CAO.

1.7 ONLINE: WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The City will utilize social media and the city website to build the community's knowledge in order to enhance communications and engagement.

Meeting the needs of a diverse and growing population requires use of a wide range of communications channels and tools. The City supports the use of the website and social media such as Twitter for informing citizens as well as encouraging dialogue and input. Other forms of social media such as Facebook and/or You Tube may also be considered. Social media policies will be developed to govern the use of social media as required.

1.8 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The City will use various techniques and channels to encourage information sharing and dialogue.

The City recognizes that the decision-making process is improved by engaging citizens and other stakeholder groups when appropriate. Informing and involving those affected or interested in a decision is a priority of the City, leading to sustainable decisions by providing participants with the information they need to be involved in a meaningful way, early in the process and describes how citizen input affects the decision.

1.9 COMMITTEES

Council determines the committees of council and committee liaisons as part of a strategy to encourage strategic decision making, information sharing and dialogue amongst community groups.

1.10 RESOURCES

While communications takes time and energy up front, it can greatly benefit the City and its citizens by ensuring people have the opportunity to become informed, to provide input and take action as needed. Annual and/or project plans and/or action plans will identify the resources, financial and human, required to implement communications.

1.11 EVALUATION

Ensuring the best uses of communications resources is part of sustainable and prudent governance. Project plans will include evaluation indicators to determine the success of various programs, projects and services.

From time to time, the City may also seek to better understand the impact of various programs, projects and services and may engage in research such as an annual citizen survey or a specific communication survey.

2. COMMUNICATIONS PROCEDURES

The following describes suggested procedures relating to various aspects of the above communications policy.

2.1.1 COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION PLANNING

Communication plans are the responsibility of department managers and will be incorporated into existing and new project plans. Communications Plans will identify the following:

- Corporate and communications goals and objectives
- Desired level of consultation for specific key audiences using the IAP2 Spectrum (i.e. inform, consult, collaborate, etc.)
- Clearly identified audiences
- An internal and external assessment of impacts or sensitive issues (i.e. who will be impacted and how and/or a SWOT analysis) and any potential steps to mitigate the impact if/as required (i.e. identifying barriers and benefits and removing barriers if the ability exists)
- Key messages
- Communication tools and channels for dissemination
- Action plans and/or timelines for implementation
- Evaluation indicators

Project plans will also list the resources, financial and human, necessary to carry out the desired communications.

In addition, action plans may be developed for specific communications initiatives to assist in achieving City goals and objectives.

A Communications Calendar may be used to assist with annual planning and to ensure coordinated implementation.

2.2. AUDIENCES

Communication plans will identify key audiences and associated strategies. Audience research may be conducted to learn more about any perceived barriers or challenges and potential opportunities and benefits. This may include a variety of topics related to the City's overall operations and/or specific projects or questions. These may include:

- Exit surveys at events and open houses
- Annual citizen survey
- Feedback from frontline staff
- Monitoring emails, calls and other requests for information or comments

- Media analysis of number and tone/content of articles
- Mobile access to surveys on website
- Surveys in utility bills
- Peer research
- Mini focus groups
- Key informant interviews
- Testing of messages, strategies, tools, etc.
- Use of available data on demographics and psychographics such as census data and economic profiles.

2.3 MESSAGE CONTENT

Content for communications materials should be in keeping with Council's Policies and Guiding Principles and include information that is:

- Clear, easy-to-understand in plain language
- Respectful
- Positive
- Appealing
- Sensitive to the audience(s)
- Incorporates the use of stories, examples, stats, facts, etc. as required
- Uses testimonials from locals or others as warranted.

Briefing notes regarding **resolutions of Council** will be developed. Draft versions will be circulated to Council, managers and other team members as required to ensure the information is accurate and relevant to key audiences prior to public release. Final versions are to be shared with Council, managers and staff as required.

Briefing notes will be developed as a necessary part of approved projects plans. Draft versions will be circulated to managers and other team members as required to ensure the information is accurate and relevant to key audiences. Final versions are to be shared with Council, managers and staff as required.

2.4 MEDIA RELATIONS

2.4.1 Implement proactive media outreach practices

Strengthen relationships with local media

Encourage staff to send new contact information that may benefit from receiving some media releases to Communications.

Nurture relationships built on trust, transparency and reliability with local reporters.

Share information not only in response to inquiries but provide post-event photos etc.

Manage a regional media list

Pitch good news stories to local media

Ensure that project plans identify opportunities to proactively communicate with the media and leverage media coverage where possible. Action plans may include the use of:

- News releases, also available on the website
- Public service announcements (PSA)
- Media interview and photo opportunity invitations
- Backgrounders, links and other support materials
- Interviews
- Photo opportunities (e.g., events such as the Sneak Peek showing of City Hall after the fire)

2.4.2 Ensure staff and Council receive ongoing media relations and spokesperson training as needed.

Provide media counsel prior to media interviews for Council and Senior Management team.

Follow established protocols for approval processes, templates and statutory requirements.

Ensure that news releases, advertisements and other media correspondence are shared internally prior to external publication.

2.5 EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

2.5.1 Clearly define roles and responsibilities for communications within the organization

2.5.2 The Auditor General of British Columbia, Public Participation: Principles and Best Practices for British Columbia provides guidelines for putting the public participation guidelines into practice. This is a seven step process that was derived from existing best practices in the province's public sector, and in governments across Canada.

Seven Steps for designing a successful public participation

1. Determine who the decision maker is, what the pending decision is and who will be affected.
2. Decide if public participation should be used.
3. Determine the issues related to the decision for each of the affected parties.

4. Determine the level of public participation that the decision-maker needs and what to consult on.
5. Determine the public participation methods best suited to the needs of participants.
6. Determine how public participation is to support and link to the decision.
7. Determine how the results are to be used.

Refer to **The Auditor General of British Columbia, Public Participation: Principles and Best Practices for British Columbia**, pages 23-34.

2.5.3 Create a work environment that understands the value of communications

2.5.4 Review privacy and correspondence policies

- Utilize First Class email addresses for Mayor, Council and staff.
- Clarify procedures for tracking and responding to correspondence received by info@grandforks.ca , correspondence received directly by Mayor and Council, correspondence received through the regular mail system.

2.5.5 Event Management

- Communications Officer or Corporate Officer will write speaking notes for the Mayor
- Compile briefs prior to attendance by the Mayor to share event details in advance.

2.5.6 Correcting misinformation

Correcting misinformation is a sensitive issue and can detract from the City's objectives to provide clear, accurate, relevant and timely information. As such, decisions on how to handle this type of information in the media need to be both strategic and thoughtful.

Published misinformation, either in the mainstream media or online, is to be brought to the attention of the Communications Officer for future action which could include:

- . Personal contact
- . Request for correction
- . Request for new article on same/similar topic
- . Letter to the editor
- . Advertising
- . Or other measures as required.

2.5.7 City Website

The addition of a "For the Record" section will be added to the City website. "For the record" will be used to respond to questions, correspondence, inquiries and statements made by the public on social media forums such as Facebook, twitter and other social

media, as well as printed material such as letters to the editor in the local newspaper. The Communications Officer will be responsible for posting on “For the Record” and will seek input from department managers as needed.

2.5.8 Council Communications

- The development of monthly / bimonthly / quarterly City newsletters will be circulated through print media and the City website. There will be an inclusion of “From Council Chambers” which identifies Council news.
- Council will recognize that negative commentary in the public arena as it relates to staff performance counteracts the ability to meet objectives outlined in the Communications policy.
- Media training will be arranged for Council.
- Understand that access to information is the starting point for all forms of community engagement.
- Consider community engagement at the outset of policy and decision making process

Council may determine to establish a Council Communications Committee. This committee will be responsible for Input and approval of Council communications in respect to Council resolutions and not the operations of the City. Communications regarding Council resolutions, once approved by the Communications committee, will be posted in print media, social media and on the City website as necessary and by the Communications Officer.

2.5.9 Paid Advertising

The use of paid advertising will be identified in the work plan and may include:

- Newspapers
- Radio
- TV
- Web
- Online
- Social media
- Signage
- Other opportunities as identified.

Continued use of advertisements in the Grand Forks Gazette newspaper to broadcast decisions of Council, and ongoing or upcoming programs, projects and services as necessary. Advertising can also be used to ask survey questions or as a poster for placement at various community locations. The content will vary as required and identified in the action plan.

Advertising may be further leveraged with the use of a news release to announce projects.

2.5.10 Personal and Community Contact

Depending on the program, project or service, project plans may include a variety of outreach strategies to make personal contact. This may include:

- Presentations or visits to community groups, service clubs, business organizations and schools
- Hosting open house events, City hall or public meetings, tours or a combination
- Participating in or attending community events, trade shows and fairs

Contact email lists of community, service, business groups and other key contacts should be kept up-to-date and used to circulate information as identified. This could also include distribution of regular communiqués such as news releases, posters and newsletters as another way to leverage this informational piece.

Ensure Council and staff are prepared with any necessary information such as key messages, and/or promotional materials as required in advance.

2.5.11 Promotional and Informational Materials

Visual materials help promote the City's brand, providing clarity and consistency. These materials should be easy-to-read, appealing with a consistent look and colours which are similar to the City's logo. These materials may include:

- Newsletters/utility bill inserts both print and online
- Brochures, flyers, post cards
- Door hangers, shelf labels or tags
- Fact sheets, Frequently Asked Questions
- Posters
- Signage
- Open house panels
- Visuals for advertisements such as bus boards, transit shelters, theatre ads, grocery store dividers, etc. that can also be used as .jpgs for the website or other materials
- Items such as buttons, stickers, mugs, fridge magnets, seed packets, mascots, etc.

Materials should be of high quality, appealing and appropriately written/produced to match the content as outlined in the City's Brand Guidelines document. All materials will

be reviewed and approved by the Communications Officer.

2.5.12 Visual Identity Guidelines

The City's logo is the official symbol of the community. The logo may be used on other organization's publications with approval of the Communications Officer or their designate. The logo should be re-produced in the official colours or black and white (or grayscale). The logo's integrity should be maintained, in accordance with the Brand Guidelines and should always retain the same aspect (i.e. is should never be stretched or skewed as when one corner is dragged, creating a heightened or flattened version).

2.6 INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

The City aims to establish effective internal communication practices that are integrated with external communications and branding. The internal communications objective is to be consistent with messaging, build trust and demonstrate authenticity, transparency and accessibility.

Each department is responsible for ensuring that pertinent operational information is posted in first class. Each department will identify who in that department is responsible for current information updates.

Continually review and discuss within departments how internal communications can be improved.

Managers will communicate key issues, significant successes and major challenges related to their portfolios to the Communications Officer.

Communications updates will be provided and incorporated into management meetings. These updates will include sharing key news stories, recommendations for improving internal and external communications, crisis management issues and communications contributions to projects and events.

Fact sheets will be made available for front line staff and Council.

Communications plans will be developed for major events in order to ensure team members communicate the same messages and understand objectives and media outreach is proactive. The department manager in conjunction with the Communications Manager will write communications plans for major events held in Grand Forks such as Family Day and Christmas Light Up.

Information that is to include Council will be posted to the Council folder by the Communications Officer, Corporate Officer or CAO.

2.7 ONLINE: WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The City currently maintains a website and a Twitter profile. Content and use of these important communications tools are to be considered when developing project plans.

2.7.1 Social Media

The City does not currently maintain a Facebook page. Given that social media is one of the main information sharing tools today, it is important that the City consider monitoring Facebook and other social media sites in order to respond to comments and concerns in a proactive, accurate and timely manner. The Communications Manager will be responsible for monitoring and responding to social media sites and will defer to department managers when necessary.

The Communications Officer will provide information to community members in a professional forum that does not foster or tolerate disparaging commentary.

2.7.2 City website

The addition of a “For the Record” section will be added to the City website. “For the record” will be used to respond to questions, correspondence, inquiries and statements made by the public on social media forums such as Facebook, twitter and other social media, as well as printed material such as letters to the editor in the local newspaper. The Communications Manager will be responsible for posting on “For the Record” and will seek input from department managers as needed.

A social media policy will be developed by the Communications Manager that will include:

- . Key staff identified and trained to maintain site
- . Guidelines for Council, staff and public users
- . Posting
- . Responding
- . Advertising
- . Leveraging and coordinating with other communications tools
- . Consideration or criteria for further uses of social media such as Facebook and/or YouTube

2.8 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The City recognizes that the decision-making process is improved by engaging citizens and other stakeholder groups when appropriate.

Council's decision making will be balanced by a range of key considerations including: technical feasibility, financial viability and social acceptability.

The City's community engagement procedure achieves:

- Alignment with Council's strategic priorities and guiding principles
- Supports Council's decision making by providing information on citizens and stakeholder opinions
- Ensuring consistent and clear practices for involvement and/or information sharing
- Ensuring an appropriate level of engagement based on assessed community impact and benefit
- Identifies the parameters and resources for public engagement

The City will use various techniques and channels to encourage information sharing and dialogue based on eight public engagement and guiding principles, which outline what the community can expect from the City.

- **Accountability:** Elected officials and staff are accountable for ensuring meaningful public engagement
- **Inclusiveness:** Public dialogue and decision making processes, reach out to, and encourage participation of the community.
- **Transparency:** Public decision-making processes are accessible, honest and understandable.
- **Fiscally sustainable:** Ensure methods and resources for public notice and engagement reflect the magnitude and complexity of the initiative.
- **Early involvement:** Helps identify issues and look at opportunities and challenges during concept development, design and implementation of city policies, projects and initiatives.
- **Timely communications:** Ensure there is enough time within the engagement process to provide information to the community.
- **Clear and accessible information:** Ensures the use of plain language in a wide variety of formats and channels of communication.
- **Suitable process:** Design and implementation of public engagement processes and techniques that reflect the magnitude and complexity of the initiative. Processes adapt to changing needs and issues as the move forward.

Process

The strategies and methods that will be used to involve and inform those affected by a decision are based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Participation, an international standard. The Communications Officer will develop a community engagement template in order to support staff in delivering quality engagement practices in the community as outlined in

three phases:

Phase 1 - Assessing Community Impact

The term 'level of community impact' refers to the magnitude of change citizens may experience as a result of a project/issue or change in policy or service.

The assessment criteria has four levels of impact which range from:

- Level 1 - High impact city wide
- Level 2 – High impact on select area and/or defined groups
- Level 3 – Moderate impact city wide
- Level 4 – Moderate impact on select area and/or defined groups

Phase 2 - Identifying and Achieving Goal of Public Engagement, IAP2 Spectrum of Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower.

This phase outlines the commitment(s) made to citizens and stakeholders and examples of techniques and tools that align to each goal.

INFORM – GOAL: To provide balanced and objective information in a timely manner. “We will keep you informed.”

CONSULT – GOAL: To obtain feedback on analysis, issues, alternatives and decisions. “We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and preferences, and will provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.”

INVOLVE – GOAL: To work with the public to make sure concerns and aspirations are considered and understood. “We will work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations inform the outcome to the maximum extent possible.”

COLLABORATE – GOAL: To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision making. “We will look to you for advise and innovation and incorporate this in decisions as much as possible.”

EMPOWER – GOAL: To place final decision making in the hands of the public. “We will implement what you decide.”

2.9 COMMITTEES

Committees of Council include Standing Committees, Select Committees and Ad Hoc committees. Council may appoint members of Council to sit on committees of other boards, acting as the liaison between City Council and that board.

In an effort to provide current and relevant information to council a report out, on a consistent basis, from committees is required. Reporting out should be on a regular basis throughout the year, and through either a written report that is included in the council agenda or in person at a Committee of the Whole meeting, by the Chair of the

Board of a committee. A Council liaison may from time to time bring forward requests to Council, at a Council meeting, from committees. Proposed resolutions will be provided to the Corporate Officer prior to the agenda deadline.

2.10 RESOURCES

Project plans will identify the resources, financial and human, required to implement communications. This may include the following and will vary according to project:

- . Staff time
- . Resources required for project support (i.e. printing, events, etc.)
- . Contract services
- . Consulting services

Resources may also be identified in the annual budget process for the City's Communications for ongoing communications that may not be specifically related to a project. These may include projects such as the website, social media, media releases, annual reports and/or surveys, etc.

2.11 EVALUATION

Project plans will include evaluation indicators to determine the success of various programs, projects and services. Evaluation will at a minimum be based on the objectives for communications set out in the work plan and may also include information on outputs and outcomes. Ongoing monitoring of communications tools will also be used to determine effectiveness and address any issues as they arise.

From time to time, the City may also seek to better understand the impact of various programs, projects and services and may engage in research such as an annual citizen survey.

The true impact of this policy will be more apparent over an extended period of time, as tools, processes and procedures become utilized as a matter of habit and as a culture that recognizes the importance of solid internal and external communications is established. Tactics to measure long term success of the plan may include:

- Effectiveness in communicating key messages
- Tone of media coverage
- Tone and content of community and stakeholder engagement
- Number of media impressions
- Number of partnerships built
- Operating performance

- Opportunity to see key messages, brand representation, articles, photos used, quotes and testimonials
- Impact on other departments, including number and content of complaints and tone and content of feedback received
- Number of website hits

Ensuring Success

The success of this plan relies on the support and engagement of Council to effect change and foster constructive dialogue throughout the organization and City. This can only work to create an environment that encourages a spirit of community and positive action and discourse. Communications is, therefore, understood as a shared responsibility. It is the intent of this policy to build in steps to ensure its success. These include:

- A well-organized plan
- An achievable Action Plan
- Reasonable objectives that align with Council priorities
- Council and staff commitment

Management of the plan through diligent and knowledgeable execution, flexibility and measure of control (to avoid scope creep)