

Advocacy Policy

Biosphere Institute of the Bow Valley

Approved by the Board on 19 April 2022

The following policy document is designed to provide the BIBV Board and staff with guidance regarding advocacy and external communications.

We define advocacy as “Public support for, or recommendation of, a particular cause or policy.”

BIBV is a pro-environment organization, and we telegraph this as we propose solutions to environmental problems.

In our work, generally speaking, it is appropriate and acceptable to advocate for actions that help deliver on our mission and vision.

Our advocacy style

Our advocacy style will be informed by all our Roles and Guiding Principles, including the following, which we’ll use to help us craft our messages:

We are evidence-based, ensuring that our work is informed by the latest science and social science research and best practices. We strive for validity and accuracy in our communications.

We seek multi-solving solutions: even as we champion the environment we embrace holistic and equitable “Yes, and” solutions that address and solve multiple and interwoven problems in the environmental, social, and economic realms.

We seek ways to frame our advocacy in the positive:, we choose to speak in favour of pro environment solutions, as opposed to taking a negative or oppositional tone. We do not use ‘shaming’ tactics.

We likewise refrain from using a confrontational or unduly aggressive tone, as befits our solution-seeking mentality approach.

We are strategic in our advocacy work, and cognizant of perspectives of other groups. BIBV has its own unique value proposition - not only are we not driven to replicate the message of other environmental groups, but it can be strategically advantageous in a number of ways to differentiate ourselves.

Internal vs External Communications

External communications are any written or verbal communications designed for audiences outside the channels used by Board and staff to communicate with one another. These are outward facing communications that tend to be a matter of public record. Common vehicles include but are not limited to our website, emails, social media and newsletters, media interviews or releases, speeches, comments made at meetings, etc.

Internal communications are private communications that are not typically a matter of public record. Examples include one on one personal conversations or confidential emails.

The Board understands and appreciates that internal communications may enjoy more degrees of freedom than external communications when it comes to advocacy.

All external communications will be aligned with our vision, mission, core values, roles, and guiding principles, as well as any other statutory documents or policies. BIBV can refer to the work of any group, be they environmental, activist, or political individuals, groups or organizations. We will strive to educate our audiences, encouraging them to consider factual information provided by various stakeholders.

The Board supports advocacy that follows these guidelines and the advocacy style outlined above, as it helps us deliver on mission. The Executive Director is at liberty to engage in external communication around relevant emerging issues, in consultation with the Board Chair; and the Board Chair is likewise at liberty to do so, in consultation with the Board. For example, in the case of a local proposed development, our representation could focus on best development practices vis-a-vis energy efficiency, habitat protection, wildlife movement, etc., encouraging the developer to embrace these best practices.

The Executive Director or their designate will review all key communication material, excluding social media, leaving BIBV. The decision to write or create any material, including letters in response to a specific issue, can be made solely by the Executive Director, or in consultation with the Chair or Board (individually or collectively).

Only the Executive Director or the Chair may sign a letter on BIBV letterhead, unless they delegate that responsibility to other staff or to a Board member.

Decision-making by Board and Staff

The Board recognizes that specific instances may come up, or that the local context may change, such that more guidance than this policy may be necessary.

If any member of staff feels uncertain about how to proceed, they should ask the Executive Director, who can either provide a suitable response or in turn ask the Board Chair for guidance. The Chair can either provide a suitable response or in turn put the matter before the entire Board, asking for a speedy resolution.

In general, unless empowered to do so by the Board or Board chair, no member of the Board shall speak on behalf of the Biosphere Institute.

Speaking as an Individual

Any member of staff, or any individual Board member, who wishes to take a public advocacy position on environmental matters **as an individual** may do so, provided that they clearly state they are speaking as an individual and not as a representative of the Biosphere Institute. The sole exception to this is the Executive Director, who is far more likely to be viewed publicly as the Biosphere Institute's representative. The Executive Director will therefore abstain from taking a public advocacy position on environmental matters as an individual, unless they have the express permission of the Board chair to do so.

What Charities can and cannot do

BIBV is a Canadian charity, and the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) has well-defined regulations for charities, dividing activities into three classes:

Political Activities: A charity may take part in political activities provided that these activities are non-partisan and connected and subordinate to the charity's purpose. Such political activities could include:

- An explicit call to political action (encouraging the public to contact elected officials).
- Communication to the public that the law, policy, or decision of any level of government in Canada or a foreign country should be retained, opposed, or changed.
- Any activity or materials that seek to put pressure on an elected representative or public official to retain, oppose or change law, policy or decisions of any level of government in Canada or a foreign country.

Charitable Activities: Direct representation to public or elected officials. This includes meetings to which those officials have been invited, even if they are not present. The representation can advocate that the law or policy be changed but IT MUST relate to an issue that is connected to the charity's purposes, be well-reasoned, and not contain false, inaccurate or misleading information.

- Posting complete text of these representations is considered to be a charitable activity if there is no call to political action.
- General public awareness activities must be fact-based and well-reasoned, and cannot promote a point of view as the sole main activity.
- Advertisements need to include contact information.

Prohibited Activities: A charity may NOT take part in an illegal activity or a partisan political activity.

Specifics regarding the Town of Canmore

The Town of Canmore founded our organization, provides us with significant core funding, and is a key partner in many collaborative projects. Our staff enjoy and benefit from many points of contact with town administration in our collaborative work, and our bylaws require that the Town be represented by the Canmore Mayor or their designate. The Town's current Council and its staff currently manifest a high level of environmental values and execute on a number of important environmental initiatives.

Given this it is still appropriate to advocate to the Town of Canmore just as it would other municipalities in the Bow Valley. However, in light of the relationship and history, BIBV should position itself as a key advisor to the Town of Canmore that encourages environmental best practices while supporting what Council determines to be in the best interests of the community as a whole. The BIBV recognizes that all municipalities are governed by provincial statute and that municipalities cannot mandate matters beyond their jurisdictional scope, e.g. the Province sets the building code and a municipality cannot enact requirements more stringent than the building code.