

EXTERNAL AND MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS CHECKLIST

Effective and timely communications are vital during times of change. Besides ensuring people have access to information that is current, clear and accurate, quality communication will also encourage people to contribute to the process and have a say in what affects them.

During the transition process, people inside and outside of local government will be involved, with some directly affected by the changes. This may include ratepayers, volunteers, employees and their families, suppliers, contractors and the media. The audience is broad and effective communications will ensure that all stakeholders are well informed and have the opportunity to contribute.

Below is a checklist that outlines some key points for consideration when developing external communications and media relations strategies. It is not exhaustive.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS:

Existing strategies

- What communications strategies are in place now? Are they compatible?
- Can they be combined to form one new strategy?
- What are the differences?
- How can those differences be resolved?

Introducing the new strategy

- What is the background to the current position?
- What is happening in the change process?
- Are you clear on what the strategy is for?

Objectives

- What are the objectives for the communications strategy? What do you want to achieve?

Strategy

- What approach will be used to achieve the objectives? How are you going to get the best result?

Target audiences

- Who do you want to communicate with? Are there priority targets – primary and secondary?
- What do they want, need? What are the issues for each audience?

Key messages

- What are the key messages for the change program or activity?
- Are there particular messages from the local governments involved to be included?

Method

- What are the best ways to deliver the information?
- Does the information (printed and electronic) need particular branding? What should it look like?
- Who is the spokesperson? Who will be responsible for providing accurate information about the changes?
- Is that person readily available at any time to respond to media or other queries? Is there a back-up person who can be the authority when the spokesperson is not available?
- What arrangements are in place to provide timely, accurate responses to queries, acknowledge feedback? Who approves the information?
- What is the process for approvals, recording responses and ensuring they are provided within deadlines? Is the process practical if there is a tight deadline?
- What other tools can you use to distribute and receive information – e.g. intranet, web, newsletters, surveys, emails, face-to-face briefings, presentations, letters, media releases, notice boards?
- What content has to be included for each audience – key messages, technical information, other? Is the content correctly targeted for that audience?
- How much detail is needed, what do people need to know, want to know?

- How can stakeholders (internal and external) contribute to the change program? What tools can they use for this?
- Is there a dedicated, easy-to-reach contact point for stakeholders (web, telephone number, email)? How will the contact points be promoted? What is the process for responses – approvals, deadlines?
- How will you show stakeholders their suggestions and feedback have been considered and acted on where possible?

Timing

- What is the best timing for each activity? Are there any conflicts with other activities?
- What are the key milestones? When will they happen?
- Are the milestones and timelines public?
- Will there be a celebration to mark each milestone reached? How will you promote the milestone success – internally, externally?

Budget

- How much will it cost to implement the strategy?
- Can it be done in-house? Will contractors be needed? What other costs are there?

Evaluation

- How and when will the strategy be evaluated? Is there flexibility to change?

MEDIA:

In addition to the points above, emphasis should be given to ensuring media inquiries are dealt with quickly and effectively. Remember the key messages, be honest and accurate. Ensure information is consistent. In particular:

- Is there are single contact point for media enquiries?
- Who will develop the responses and make sure they are provided within the deadline?
- Who can speak to media? Who is the authorised spokesperson?
- What is the approval process?
- Should media queries be dealt with only in writing (email)?
- Is the spokesperson (or the person authorising responses) readily available – during and after business hours.
- What is the journalist's name, media represented, contact phone number and email?
- What is their deadline? When do they plan to run the report?
- What about TV or radio interviews? Who can do those?
- Are copies of media queries and responses kept as a record?
- Is the information being provided consistent with all other communications?
- Do all staff and councillors know the media policy? Do they know what they have to do if a journalist contacts them?