GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

**government
communications**

Department:
Government Communication and Information System
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGY (GCS)

January

– Cabinet Lekgotla
- Presentation of DG cluster plans to the Cabinet Lekgotla
- Presentation of strategic guidelines for the Government Communication Strategy (GCS) to the Cabinet Lekgotla
- First revision of draft cluster communication strategies
- First revision of draft departmental communication strategies.

February

– Opening of Parliament
- Delivery of the SoNA
- Parliamentary media briefings

– GCF
- Presentation of the GCS
- Second revision of the draft cluster strategies in view of the SoNA, Parliamentary briefings & GCS
- Second revision of the draft deptartmental strategies in view of the SoNA, Parliamentary briefings & GCS
- Finalisation of departmental communication strategies.

March

– DG cluster meeting
– Cabinet Committee meeting
- Departments submit strategies to GCIS
- Presentation of the final draft cluster strategies to the DG clusters
- Presentation of the final draft cluster strategies to the Cabinet committees.

October

– Pre-Cabinet Lekgotla
- DGs prepare for the Cabinet Lekgotla
- Clusters and departments review existing cluster and departmental strategies and their implementation
- Departments submit reports to The Presidency
- First draft of cluster strategies and GCS developed
- Departments develop first draft of communication strategy.

New communication cycle
- October marks the beginning of the new communication cycle.
- Communicators should begin with their first drafts of strategies.
- The final copy of the strategies should be completed by mid-March and submitted to GCIS by the end of the same month.
- April - implementation begins.
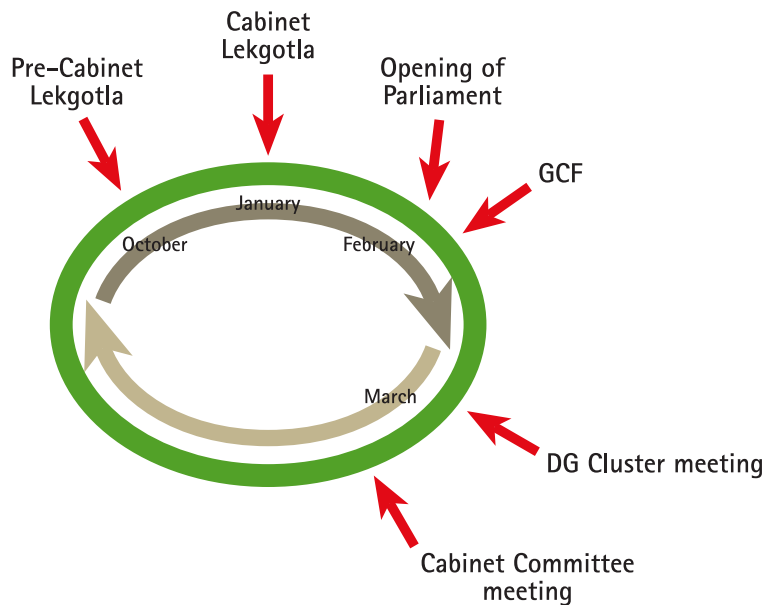
The GCS sets the framework for government communication each year and is based on government's PoA. Taking account of key programmes, departments are expected to follow this framework in formulating their communication strategies and plans.

Towards the end of each calendar year, departmental reports are consolidated for input into the Cabinet Lekgotla. The lekgotla deliberates on the broad programmes and strategic priorities of government. The President announces the PoA in the SoNA at the beginning of each calendar year. On the basis of this programme, the GCIS finalises the GCS.

GCIS presents the strategy to the GCF for discussion and noting. The strategy guides the work of a government communicator for that particular year.

HoCs are expected to submit, departmental communication strategies and programmes that are developed in line with the overall GCS to GCIS.

5.1 GENERIC FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY – A PROCESS OUTLINE

Why strategise for communication?

A thousand voices speaking without a common message and single purpose will in the end just make an indistinct noise that few will hear.

We must, therefore, speak with a shared purpose and clarity of message. Our actions must be informed by an understanding of the environment in which we are working, of who we are trying to reach, what they are thinking, and how they are best reached.

We must strategise for communication, translating our ideas into a concrete programme that promotes our objectives.

The strategising process

There are many ways of approaching this function. What follows is a process that has emerged out of GCIS' own experience in strategising for communication and entails 10 steps. However, this is not a mechanical process that yields automatic results. It needs hard work and lots of thought.

These steps are the elements of developing and implementing a communication strategy. Each step is of critical importance and is interlinked. However, there is a logical order. We need, early on, to give critical attention to two elements – objective and message – to ensure that our work will not be undermined. Strategising is about how to achieve objectives but if we are unclear about our objective or get it wrong, then all the rest will be of little or no value. We also need to correctly define what we want to say.

The communication strategising process entails the following core elements:
1. background
2. objectives
3. environment
4. communication challenges
5. messages and themes
6. messengers, target audiences and channels
7. types of events
8. communication programme (phased or not phased)
9. structures and processes
10. action plan.

Background

Outlines what has led to the need for the communication strategy to ensure that we are on the right track.

Setting objectives

Clarify intended outcomes and purpose of the campaign. It may be to educate, reassure people, receive feedback about a departmental programme, change a perception, etc.

Environmental analysis

This will define the terrain and environment in which you communicate. It should deal with issues like the public mood, the media agenda, concerns and attitudes of varying sectors and forces, potential for improving the communication environment, etc.

It is important to understand the environment before implementing the communication strategy. In fact, the exercise of scanning the environment contributes greatly to the effective development of a communication programme. Such a scan may require a number of areas not clearly understood by the public and therefore needs further research.

Communication challenges

Having considered broad objectives in the context of a defined environment will lead you to identify specific communication challenges which have to be met successfully to achieve the objectives.

Once challenges are clarified, it will be possible to know exactly what it is we must communicate and how that should be done.

Messages and themes

It is critical to indicate the themes and concepts that are associated with the communication effort being undertaken. A distinction can be drawn between core themes and subthemes.

Once this has been done effectively, it will be possible to formulate a core message.

The core message must be integrated with the Government's core message for the year.

The Government's core message is particularly important because it communicates the central message adopted by the Cabinet in the GCS.

Messengers, audience and channels

A campaign should always have its own voice: Who speaks for it, to whom, in what way and through which channels?

Phased communication programme

This consists of two parts: phasing of a campaign and the broad outline of a communication programme.

Very rarely is there just one stage to a campaign. One may move from a first phase of education and awareness, to a second of mobilising for action. Each phase has different needs and challenges.

Structures and processes

Implementing the communication strategy requires consultation with various structures. It has to be well-articulated who the partners in the programme are and what their role will be.

Communication strategy document and action plan

A well-written communication strategy document is critical for a good campaign. The document will be the guide for all future action, the standard against which the success or failure of communication is measured and the most critical means for keeping the campaign on track.

It needs to be clear and concise, and well-written in a form that is easily understood and persuasive, not as a series of bullet points but as a logical presentation of the thinking behind the strategising session, crisply articulating the core message and themes.

To put into practice the ideas resulting from strategising requires an action plan that spells out in detail what is to be done for each event in the programme, who is responsible for doing it, what the specific targets and objectives are, budgets, and so on. This will also serve as a strategic management and co-ordination instrument to ensure objectives are met. An action plan is best set out in tabular format.

Element/Task	Date	Responsibility	Remarks
Phase 1:			
Phase 2:			
Phase 3:			
An example of a table format to develop an action plan for a communication strategy			

A critical part of the action plan is to identify other supporting plans needed, for example:

- A media liaison strategy consisting of a detailed plan of interviews, press briefings, media/journalists to be targeted, opinion pieces, etc. Most importantly, a statement of key messages (see document on how to develop good key messages) and frequently asked questions (FAQs) and answers, should be developed for use by communicators and writers, especially for campaigns whose objectives are to educate and inform, and have a medium-term to long-term duration. There is a need for a positioning strategy related to the objective, challenges and messages.
- A distribution strategy citing a detailed plan on how the various products/services will be disseminated to the identified target audiences.

5.2 HOW TO COMPILE KEY MESSAGES

Key messages are simply key messages and not something else
- Key messages are not statements. They are also not briefings or comprehensive statements of information.
- They articulate the essentials of government's position on critical issues.
- They should inform all communication on the issue: interviews, statements, articles, posters, pamphlets, etc.

The 4X4 format reflects their character:
- four propositions, encapsulating government's position which any spokesperson should get across, whatever else they say
- for each of the four, another four to elaborate and explain and use in response to further questions.

Key messages generate and develop a government discourse
- Key messages over time generate a body of discourse that consistently reflects government's position.
- Consistency of style and terminology is therefore critical.
- Consistency of positions is critical - drafters should always check previous messages on related topics.
- Consistency in formulation on key issues helps communication – but formulations should also be sensitive to the current environment.

Key messages communicate strategic directions
- Key messages are informed by the strategic directions of government policy.
- Therefore, when drafting them, don't rely on desk research only – we need the guidance of those informed with strategic perspectives.
- While HoCs should be informed accordingly, other senior officials and policy-makers are often best placed – behind every successful drafter is a good network.
- Drafts will always reflect the brief given – a good drafter must be a good briefer.

Key messages are time bound
- Good communication is on time: a proactive step ahead or an instant response.
- Therefore, key messages must be available without delay.

5.3 GUIDELINES ON PUTTING TOGETHER A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

1. Check external perceptions of your centre/programme among potential target audiences before you start. Think about how you fit into the external horizon. This will help you develop a communication strategy that gives you a distinct and credible voice.
2. Begin with a statement of your objectives in communicating the project; don't simply restate the objectives of the project itself. Make the objectives clear, simple and measurable.
3. Be clear on the principles underpinning your strategy. Some may be self-evident, like producing honest, succinct, credible and cost-effective communication.
4. Develop some simple messages and model how these might work in different contexts – a press release, report, newspaper article, website page, etc. Make sure your project is branded in line with your communication objectives.
5. Be clear about your target audiences and user groups and prioritise them according to importance and influence relative to your objectives. Don't just only think about the 'usual' ones that are known by all.
6. Think about both the actual and preferred channels your target audiences might use and challenge yourself about whether you are planning to use the right ones for maximum impact.
7. Include a full list of all the relevant communication activities, developed into a working project plan with deadlines and responsibilities.
8. Keep the communication programme simple and include key deadlines, milestones and review points.
9. Communication should be allocated enough budgetary resources to carry out its activities. At least five percent of the total funded budget in the department should be allocated for communication.
10. Evaluate the implementation and impact of the strategy and that the implementation process has taken place.

POLITICS AND
THE COMMUNICATOR

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6

POLITICS AND THE GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATOR

If there is one area of governance which fully represents the political and administrative interface, it is the task of communication. The communicator straddles the relationship of political and administrative operations and harmonises the varying emphasis of these two fraternities to emerge with messages which reflect their unity of purpose. It is a government communicator who must package messages in a manner which harmonises the administrative and political arms of government. The elements of the administrative and political interface are represented by individual ministers on the one hand, and the departmental head on the other.

Indirectly, the work of the communicator is likely to be related to party political expression as they communicate policy positions most of which, if not all, are associated with a ruling party. To this extent, a government communicator presents policies, positions and information which may be counter to those of opposition parties.

We need to make the fine distinction between communicating government policies and improperly using one's position to promote or prejudice the interests of a political party. Government communicators are public servants, whose operational code includes impartiality and professionalism as encapsulated in the Public Service regulations. Section 36(c) of the Public Service Act, 1994 (Act 103 of 1994), states that public servants are prohibited from acting in a manner that is intended to promote or prejudice any political party. It reads as follows: 'an officer or employee may not draft up or publish any writing or deliver a public speech to promote or prejudice the interests of any political party'.

It must also be noted that communication tends to be an embodiment of the politics of a ruling party and government administration with messages emerging from the administrative-political melting pot. The following guidelines regarding the conduct of government communicators should be followed during an election period:

6.1 GUIDELINES ON GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION DURING AN ELECTION PERIOD

The period before elections is usually a testing time for government communicators as it requires them to identify the fine line between party political and government communication. It is normal practice in most democracies that, during an election period, particular attention is paid to ensuring that government communication structures and officials do not act in a way that advantages or disadvantages participants in the electoral contest.

17

Prior to the 1999 national elections, the GCIS developed Guidelines on Government Communication during the Formal Election Period.

On 31 March 1999, Cabinet decided on a possible framework to be formulated to regulate against the dissemination of government information during election periods in a way that is to the advantage of one political party and to the disadvantage of others. It adopted the guidelines on 28 April 1999.

The guidelines, also adopted during the local government elections in 2000, remain relevant. They assist government communicators and other relevant public servants in determining the specific parameters within which they should conduct their work during an election period.

Scope of application

According to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), an election period is the period during which the IEC's Code of Conduct and the Independent Communication Authority of South Africa's regulations apply. This period is determined once the date for the election has been announced, party lists are submitted and participating parties and candidates confirmed. The period ends when election results are certified and announced.

The regulations state that during an election period, state-financed media shall not be used for the purpose of promoting or prejudicing the interests of any political party. State-financed media means any newspaper, book, periodical, pamphlet, poster, media release or other printed matter, or statement, or any audio and video material, or any information in electronic format such as CD-ROM, Internet or e-mail which is produced and disseminated to the public, and which is financed by, and directly under the control of government. Examples of state-financed media include BuaNews Online, internal and external government newsletters and magazines.

These regulations apply only to communicators and other relevant public servants. Ministers, other political representatives, contractual workers and employees in role-playing posts in government are regulated by the *Ministerial Handbook*.

Public Service Act, 1994

In terms of the Public Service Act, 1994, public servants are prohibited from acting in a manner that is intended to promote or prejudice any political party. In particular, Section 36(c) of the Act reads: 'an officer or employee may not draw up or publish any writing or deliver a public speech to promote or prejudice the interests of any political party'.

According to Section 20(g) of the Act, 'an officer, other than a member of the services or an educator or a member of the National Intelligence Services, shall be guilty of misconduct and may be dealt with in accordance with public service regulations if he or

she makes use of his or her position in the Public Service to promote or to prejudice the interests of any political party'. This includes the use of government resources.

During an election period, these and other provisions of the Act continue to apply to all public servants. Communication agencies and components of government and their employees have to exercise special care to ensure that their media products, statements and public events do not promote or prejudice any political party.

Constitutional rights and obligations

Government communicators and their departments should continue meeting the obligation of government to provide information to the people. They should continue exercising their responsibility to articulate, promote and defend the policies, programmes and actions of government. Like all other South Africans, communication officers have freedom of association. Subject to the provisions of the Public Service Act, 1994 and public service regulations, they may belong to any political party of their choice.

6.2 UNDERSTANDING GOVERNMENT POLICY

It is imperative for government communicators to have a firm grasp of government policies to be able to articulate government's position confidently and explain how it impacts on the lives of the people.

6.3 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING

Communication in government is pursued to fulfil the mandate and duty to inform the public. We must understand the chain of events in the government communication system and should be able to examine all conditions that characterise the environment.

Government communication takes place in an environment that must be improved, sustained or encouraged. The illustration suggests that a communicator pursues the function of communication to alter the environment to promote fulfilment of government's mandate. It is, therefore, of paramount importance that government communicators should make serious attempts to analyse the environment in which government messages would be communicated.

| Government communication | to effect | Change | in the | Environment | to be | Favourable |
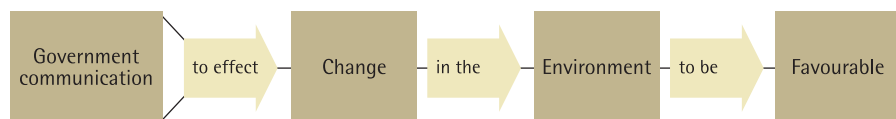
The function of government communication is directly linked to the function of meeting the information needs of society. Therefore, every communicator must seek to execute their function with the knowledge that the messages are to satisfy public expectations.

Various media may also mediate these messages. The challenge for a government communicator arises because these mediators might interpret the message in a way inconsistent with what government intends.
A communicator must understand these dynamics within the environment. The next challenge for a government communicator is to understand the journey taken by the messages to be communicated, and what and who deals with these messages before they reach the target audience.

It is important that we understand that the messages we communicate may reach the target audience through the interpretation of those who are mediating them. Hence, the communication strategy must take this into account. The key issue to deal with is the possible changes in the message and how to minimise distortions to the content of the message.

It is critical to understand the following key components of communication.
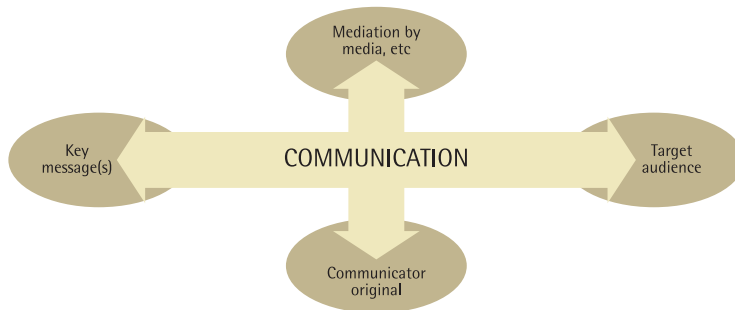
The illustration suggests that the communicator pursues the function of communication to alter certain environments to promote fulfilment of government's mandate. It is therefore of paramount importance that government communicators make serious attempts to analyse the communication and political environment in which messages would be communicated and which could affect how they are interpreted.

The next challenge for the political communicator is to understand the journey taken by the messages to be communicated and what and who deals with these messages before they reach those they are intended for. More often, those who communicate tend to lose sight of the intended receiver of the message. Before messages are disseminated communicators must analyse the probable line of message from its exit point to the target audience. In this way, they will understand possible distortions and mediations and their effect on the original message.

DEALING WITH
THE MEDIA

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GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

7.1 MEDIA PERCEPTIONS AUDIT OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

In 2005, GCIS commissioned research into the media perceptions of government communication to improve government's services to the media. The research consisted of 67 in-depth interviews with prominent journalists between August and October 2005. It was done by Kuper Research and the Media Observatory, a project of the University of the Witwatersrand's Journalism Programme.

Research revealed that although most senior journalists believed there had been improvements in government communication in recent years, they felt that still more advancement was needed.

Key recommendations:

Avoid an adversarial relationship
There needs to be an alignment of government communication and the media behind common objectives. A 'them' and 'us' mentality is counterproductive. The culture needs to be one of information-sharing, trust and respect.

Understand the needs of the different media types
Part of the professional standards required from government communicators is that they need to know the different platforms they can harness to deliver a message.

Understand the importance of journalists' deadlines
Be accommodating and assist in meeting the deadlines. Understand the immediacy of daily newspaper, radio and television news deadlines.

Be accessible
Government communicators have to be accessible to the media to share information and for them to meet their deadlines. Ministers and decision-makers should be more available to the media.

Consistent professional standards
Government communicators should consistently reflect professional standards in their work.

Don't be 'over-bureaucratised'
Government communicators should try to 'de-bureaucratise' the process through frequent and structured interactions between their principals and the media.

Government spokespersons are not bodyguards
It is not the job of government communicators to protect their principals but to rather be their 'voice'.

Media are not a 'loudhailer/echo' for government
Government communicators need to understand that the media are not loudhailers or there to echo government messages. They are also not 'vultures waiting to disseminate negative news'.

Contact and recognition
The media want more contact and recognition at the senior level of government.

Truthful vs economical
Government communication is not seen as untruthful but rather 'economical' with the relevant information

7.2 WHAT MUST A GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATOR DO?

Government communicators can contribute to the building of healthy government-media relations in the following ways:
•   Know the policy positions of your department.
•   Bear in mind that South Africa is a democracy. This means that the public's access to government information through the mass media is an important right.
•   Be professional, efficient and enthusiastic.
•   Know the journalists who work in your field and avoid limiting your relationship to that of a voice over the telephone.
•   Develop an understanding of the different kinds of media and customise your service to journalists to suit each medium.
•   Make time to visit newsrooms to understand the news process and how decisions about what is newsworthy are made.
•   Find out about deadlines since each newspaper, radio station or television station has its own deadlines. As a general rule, print media will have longer deadlines than broadcast and online media. This means that a radio journalist will be working on hourly or even half-hourly deadlines compared with the print journalist who may have a day or longer to write an article.

A journalist's nightmare

What government communicators must not do:
- be unaware of what your department is doing
- lie to the media
- make promises you know you cannot keep
- be pompous and rude with journalists
- show a lack of respect for media deadlines
- make sexual advances towards journalists
- do not alert the journalist about a press release you have sent, especially if it was via e-mail
- keep sending long press statements and treat the media as the PR wing of your department
- be constantly unavailable
- send inaccurate information
- make inconsistent statements.

7.3 MEDIA STATEMENTS, ADVISORIES AND FACT SHEETS

Whether times are good or bad, you will issue a media statement or media release at some point.

- We write media statements to publicise our programmes, inform the public and put something on record.
- On an average news day, our media statements compete with hundreds of other stories.
- Most media statements feed the rubbish bins of the newsrooms they are sent to. In this day of e-mail, most media statements enjoy the status of junk mail.

10 points to remember!

1. Your writing must be accessible, clear and direct.
2. Your first paragraph must be punchy but avoid going over the top.
3. Talk to the journalist before you fax or e-mail the statement.
4. You should seek to inform and arouse the interest of both the editor and the journalist who is going to write the story.
5. Your statements must be newsworthy. Check this with the journalist because what is newsworthy to you may not be as exciting to a journalist.
6. Give your statement a title, not a headline.
7. Your typing should allow space for editing. Statements typed in double spacing are preferred.
8. Never print on both sides of the page.

9. Provide all your contact details and where additional information can be obtained, e.g. website address.
10. In terms of lay-out, try to put all the information on one page and any variation of the following structure:
- subject
- name of the department
- the information you are communicating
- in the case of events, state the venue or place
- give the date
- indicate the benefits of your programme or project
- identify the beneficiaries
- contact person.

Media advisories

In most instances, advisories are issued (as the name suggests) to inform media of an upcoming event or announcement on which a communicator/ministry would like coverage. They are designed to entice media to an event/ announcement by simply stating the date, time, venue etc. of such and event or announcement.

Nonetheless, such a communiqué should cover the conventions of the media release. Include a date/contact names/ telephone numbers/ e-mail addresses/ fax numbers and so on for the purpose of queries to be directed to a communicator.

Although an advisory should not be longer than a page in length, the tail should also include the term '-end-' to indicate that the communiqué does not continue.

Facts sheets

The facts sheet is often the written equivalent of the background briefing. In terms of circulation, it should go to media before any briefing, but can be sent out as a stand-alone which serves to 'set the record' or 'to set the record straight' depending on the context.

- A fact sheet should capture facts and figures, but not be release with a media release as it is a background document. Media should be familiar with the contents before any briefing, thus making response to simple, established information a straightforward process. Often, however, such information may be the preserve of government officials and taken for granted.

- The fact sheet rearticulates on record the responses to complex issues and, (preferably) addresses responses to what might be looming matters. However, this should not be done in a polemical style.

- These are usually long and often complex documents and should therefore be clearly marked as 'Fact Sheet' or 'Background Document' and conform to the convention of larger documents described above. Although not necessarily for media release, they should indicate if an embargo does or does not apply.

7.4 MESSAGE PRESENTATION STRATEGIES

REMEMBER!
Government communication exists to ensure that the public is constantly informed about service delivery and the challenges facing government. In the process, government communicators are delivering a service that is as important as the delivery of houses, water or electricity. It is therefore important that government messages are constructed in a way that would capture the public's attention.

A badly constructed message can be as bad as denying citizens their right to information

How can I avoid badly constructed messages?
- organise a brainstorming session with the communication team and relevant officials
- identify key messages
- identify target audiences
- identify appropriate media and journalists.

7.5 HANDLING A COMMUNICATION CRISIS

Since we may not be able to prevent crises all the time, there are a few things we can do once it has arisen:
- do not lie
- do not issue statements if your department has not made decisions about what to say
- if the crisis is going to impact on government as a whole, develop an inter-departmental or government-wide approach
- do this while approaching members of GCIS to co-ordinate the process
- have a central point from which statements will be issued and co-ordinated
- develop a parallel process for managing the parties who will be directly affected by the process.

7.6 MORE OPTIONS

Although the GCIS regularly arranges media briefings on behalf of clusters or departments, communicators are often required to respond to issues raised by the media

or in response to requests by principals. Depending on the nature of the issue being addressed, communicators may have to decide on the best way to respond. Some of the options at the disposal of the communicator are:

Letters to the editor: This could appear on the letters' page in the name of the political principal, senior official or the communicator. A stronger response can be achieved if the corrective information is put in the public domain in the name of a third party not seen to be in government. It is advisable that communicators cultivate contact with third-party endorsers who can be requested to respond to certain issues. There is generally a strong likelihood that such a letter will be published as the letters' page is a media institution recognised as the columns through which the public has its say on current affairs. Such letters do, however, have to conform to laws governing libel, defamation, etc. before being considered for publication.

Opinion-editorial (op-ed) pieces: An op-ed piece is perhaps the strongest response a communicator can use in correcting inaccurate reporting. As the name implies, the content of such a piece is a combination of both opinion and editorial and does not conform to the conventions of the 'objective hard news' report. Space in newspapers for such pieces cannot be booked and involves negotiations with editors.

Editors subject such pieces to a number of tests to decide whether they are worth publishing, including the test of newsworthiness. The op-ed allows a communicator to develop a reasoned response to an issue or a new development to explain it to the public more clearly. Although some of the suggestions in this section of the handbook are based on a reactive response to messages in the public domain, the op-ed allows government to be proactive in placing new issues on the media agenda before they enter the communication environment.

Communicators can invoke a media convention known as the 'right to reply' to ensure publication of such a piece. On the other hand, if the media made unsuccessful attempts to elicit government response because of a slowness to respond to media queries or evasiveness on the part of the communicator, the likelihood of such a piece being placed diminishes.

Advertisements: Often used by government to respond to issues or to bring new issues to the public domain, this is the weakest tool at the disposal of the communicator because of the high cost of advertising in both broadcast and print media. Secondly, the credibility of information in an advert is often treated with scepticism by the public. Finally, it indicates that the communicator was not successful in packaging the information in a manner newsworthy enough to attract the attention of a journalist. Although a weak option, there are times where communication in the form of adverts can be used, but this should be seen as necessary only when required as part of a broader communication strategy or a last resort.

Advertorials: Like an advertisement, an advertorial (advertisement + editorial = advertorial) is a paid-for media space. The difference, however, is that it appears to the reader as news copy, although branded as 'advertorial'. Although creating the effect of greater credibility, advertorials still carry a high cost factor and, where they are detected, an image of low credibility.

While the above represents some of the tools in the communicator's toolbox, one of the most effective ways of dealing with the media is through direct contact. Direct contact can be structured in a number of ways:

- **One-on-one briefings with journalists:** These often arise as a result of requests from media, but can be effectively used for proactive communication. As the media are driven by the psychology of the scoop or the exclusive story, this can be very effective in certain issues, particularly where communicators have strong relationships with individual journalists covering their beat. This can also work well where a particular journalist has been consistently incorrect or off-message on an issue.

- **Beat briefings:** Although government is generally covered by political journalists, it might often be required that certain beat journalists be targeted for special briefings. These could be from health, transport, finance, agriculture, etc. Such briefings are important as these specialist journalists have a finer (and sometimes more troublesome) understanding of a particular area. Keeping them constantly aware of developments on their beats is vital to government.

- **General briefings:** GCIS frequently arranges media briefings on specific issues and some that affect government in general. Departments and clusters also conduct briefings from time to time and these have had the effect of reducing uninformed speculative reporting around some issues as pertinent information has been placed on record for the media.

- **Parliamentary Press Gallery Association (PGA) briefings:** The PGA comprises reporters whose dedicated beat is Parliament. Located in Cape Town, briefings with the PGA are regularly organised by GCIS. The most frequent briefings with the PGA take place following Cabinet meetings, during the Parliamentary media briefing weeks following the opening of Parliament and cluster media briefings.

- **Lock-up briefings:** Most frequently conducted by the National Treasury, the lock-up briefing is based on the idea that complex information requires assistance from the media with interpretation. The release of statistics or complex results of studies might require a lock-up style briefing during which principals explain the information and field questions on information presented to manage the manner in which it enters the public domain. Usually, information presented during such a lock-up is embargoed until the end of the lock-up. The GCIS can assist line-function departments in the protocols required for such a briefing.

- **Foreign Correspondence Association (FCA) briefings:** Some foreign correspondents based in South Africa are members of the FCA. Through the analysis of stories in international media and requests from the FCA, the GCIS regularly arranges media briefings for FCA members and line-function departments. Because not all foreign reporters are members of the FCA, GCIS maintains a database of foreign reporters in South Africa to facilitate contact with all foreign media working in South Africa.

Formats for briefings: Briefings of the kind described above can take many formats. Communicators need to decide on the format in consultation with the principals leading a briefing prior to its commencement. The chair of a briefing should then announce the format before the briefing begins. The formats are:

- **On-the-record briefings:** As the term suggests, all information at such briefings is for broadcast, is printable and is attributable. In other words, the person(s) leading the briefing can be quoted by name by the media in attendance and all the information is considered a matter of public record.

  Although this might be obvious, it needs to be clarified at the start that such a briefing is on the record and attributable by name and designation to the principal(s) conducting it. This format need not be announced in advisories to the media as it is generally assumed that briefings are on record.

- **On-the-record, but not-for attribution:** This is a trickier briefing to conduct and manage. The media need to be given a clear indication that the information being discussed can be used in coverage, but the source cannot be named. A clear indication needs to be made on whether the source can be referred to as 'a senior

government official' (i.e. anonymously) or not at all. These are sometimes referred to as 'background briefings' and the format and terms of the briefing must be announced both in the advisory (as a background briefing) and at the briefing itself.

- **Off-the-record and not-for attribution:** As the term suggests, this is intended to be a background briefing for the information of the media. The material can neither be used, nor can any reference be made to the source by name, by designation or anonymously. The format and terms of such a briefing must be made clear, both in the advisory and prior to the start of a briefing. These are sometimes called 'deep background briefings'. The advisory sent to media can describe it as a 'deep background briefing', but might want to omit the name of the principal conducting the briefing. Such briefings require high levels of trust and are best done on a one-on-one basis.

- **On-the-record and for anonymous attribution:** It is often necessary to prepare the communication environment for certain important developments. In such instances, it might be useful to brief the media on the record but not have a principal quoted by name. The media should be given an indication on whether the source of the information can be described in general terms or more specifically within the idea of anonymous attribution. For example, would the attribution 'senior official in the Department of Foreign Affairs' or 'a representative from the Ministry of Health', speaking on condition of anonymity lends more credence to a particular story than 'government official' or 'senior ministerial official'?

The statement 'speaking on condition of anonymity' is usually associated with negative or leaked information and communicators must ensure that such briefings do not lend themselves to such a description of principals. This format needs to be announced at the briefing and should not form part of the advisory.

As the above formats make clear, there are some rules of engagement with the media that make the task of communicators a little clearer. One of the most frequently made errors in briefings is the failure to announce the format of a briefing before it begins.

This confuses the media and sometimes leads to the unintended publication of sensitive information. It is therefore vital that formats are announced, both where necessary in the advisory and prior to the commencement of a briefing. Another frequently made error is the tendency to move between on-the record and off-the-record formats. Briefings should be consistent with the stated format or constructed in such a manner that principals are clear, within the timeframe of a single briefing, on where on-the-record ends and off-the record begins. Erratic

skipping between the two increases the likelihood of damaging communication appearing in the public domain and the consequent erosion of trust between government and the media.

As a rule, some principals do not make off-the-record statements that are not defensible in an on-the record context. Others, who have strong relations of trust with the media, comfortably impart information in an off-the-record, not-for-attribution context. It is the task of communicators to establish the preference of their principals and the specifics of the content on which media are to be briefed.

7.7 TECHNIQUES: HOW TO HANDLE AN INTERVIEW

How should you behave?

The first thing you need to do is to **look/sound** as if you want to be there! As uncomfortable as the situation might be, as nervous as you may be feeling, cultivate 'coolth'. Look as if you have no problem being on the spot because you have nothing to hide and will answer all difficult questions.

Don't contradict aggressively - there is a way of looking mildly appalled at the rudeness of the interviewer and holding up your hand indicating that you need to speak but speak as you are doing this. Correct them with excruciating politeness. It will make them look as if they have not done their homework.

No surprises - the only way to do this is to have your 'ducks in a row'. This will mean some serious advance planning and research. You don't want any surprises. YOU must be in control of the interview.

What to say and what not to say

Anticipate - if there has been a problem in the department or you have had a personal crisis and you know you will be grilled about it... **bring up the subject first**. If it is appropriate, express dismay at what has happened and move right along to what has been **done**.

If the interviewer challenges the rate at which the problem is being tackled, jump right in and list the reasons why caution is necessary and that the outcome will be communicated immediately. **Take charge but do not take over!** You will annoy the interviewer!

Do not volunteer **too much** information. You can come across as 'too clever by half'. Indicate you know more than they do. This is a game of opportunity and playing 'poker'. Often, just a facial expression is enough to communicate disbelief and mild amazement.

Never reveal future plans that your colleagues or peers have discussed in confidence because **you** feel pressurised to say something during a period of 'silence'. Interviewers use these hanging silences to play on your nerves and to force you into saying more than you should. Wait politely for them to continue.

If the question is tough and you are a bit taken aback, don't ask the interviewer to repeat the question. If the audience have understood it, you should have too, and your request will just look like a delaying tactic. Buy time. Ask them to clarify points so you can marshal your thoughts.
Do not keep using the interviewer's name! E.g. 'Les, I'm glad you asked that question. Les, let me tell you…' Also, don't thank them for asking the question. It is 'old hat' and a time waster.

Body language

If the interviewer says: 'You are reported as saying…' to put you on the spot, listen carefully. DO NOT NOD, it will be taken immediately as an affirmative. **You** may be nodding to indicate that he or she should go on and you will eventually correct them but it doesn't come across that way.

Listen quietly and sit still. Tilt your head as if you are quizzical about the source. Correct elements of the accusation and speak about the context. Admit, if you have to, to some of the facts. Do not be defensive.

Concentrate and keep some eye contact. If you look down or up to the right, you will look as if you are avoiding being untruthful. Project warmth and smile gently whenever possible. **Concentrate** as if he or she is giving you instructions on how to land a plane when you have no idea how to fly!

Don't cross your arms while you listen. Practise keeping them folded quietly in your lap, hands unclenched. The camera often focuses here, giving the interviewer a visual clue as to your state of mind. If you have a pen in your hand, don't fiddle with it either. All these movements are a dead giveaway to your inner turmoil! The close-ups can reveal a sweaty upper lip and brow. Remember, studio lights are hot. Try and be as cool as possible in your choice of clothing.

BUANEWS

government
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Department:
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BUANEWS

1. What is BuaNews?

BuaNews is an online South African government news service, published by GCIS. It provides quick and easy access to articles and stories to the media, aimed at keeping the public informed about the work of government.

BuaNews provides the latest information to the media – community media, mainstream media and international media – on government-related information. BuaNews profiles the work that government does to improve the lives of the people.

5. Utility of BuaNews

Given the appreciation of the quality of BuaNews stories, the service is being utilised by many newspapers in the mainstream, community and international media.

6. Newsfiles

Government communicators in all three spheres can send statements, speeches, advisories, alerts and releases to *newsfiles@gcis.gov.za* to ensure that these are picked up by BuaNews journalists.

7. *www.buanews.gov.za*

Visit the BuaNews website at *www.buanews.gov.za* or call 012 314 2449

MEDIA MONITORING
AND RAPID RESPONSE

**government
communications**

Department:
Government Communication and Information System
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

9

MEDIA MONITORING AND RAPID RESPONSE

Rapid Response Unit

GCIS, The Presidency, the Department of Foreign Affairs and the International Marketing Council's Communications Resource Centre (CRC) assess and analyse the daily domestic and international media environment via daily rapid response teleconferences.

The CRC convenes the daily rapid response teleconferences and is responsible for compiling the agendas. These generally consist of issues covered in domestic and international media and form the basis of mid-morning teleconference discussions. During the teleconference, the team assesses media coverage to determine whether it provides a balanced picture of the country, the various initiatives, and activities of the respective government departments as well as other public and private entities.

The Rapid Response Unit alerts government communicators to both positive and challenging issues covered by international and domestic media. These daily analytical assessments of media coverage also play a vital role in the assistance offered to communicators for the development of communication approaches.

An added benefit for communicators is that the Rapid Response Unit provides an ideal environment where new and emerging issues in the domestic and international media are tracked as they arise, thereby enabling the relevant spokespersons to respond timeously. Communicators may be invited to participate in the teleconferences to provide the Rapid Response Unit with expert departmental-specific advice on issues covered. Within this context, the Rapid Response Unit's participants are able to offer suggestions to communicators that could be useful in streamlining communication and the effective targeting of activities.

Reports

The CRC compiles a range of analytical reports of media coverage relating to South Africa. These reports aim to provide guidance and support to communicators in the planning, execution and amendment of communication strategies.

Regular monthly reports cover issues relating to the South African economy, foreign relations, justice, crime prevention and security as well as tourism. In addition to these, the CRC produces ad hoc reports based on emerging issues or when requested by communicators.

These reports offer communicators the opportunity to track international media coverage on South Africa, gain some insight into which publications and journalists regularly provide coverage as well as the tone of reportage.

UNMEDIATED
COMMUNICATION

government
communications

Department:
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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION AND IMBIZO

10.1 DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

What is development communication?

'Development communication is the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater social equality and the larger fulfilment of the human potential.' - (Nora Quebral; Quoted in *Development Communication - Rhetoric and Reality* by Pete Habermann and Guy de Fontagalland.)

Development communication is the provision of information to the people that can be used to improve their socio-economic well-being.

The development communication approach is aimed at making public programmes and policies real, meaningful and sustainable.

Information must be applied as part of community-development efforts and must address information needs identified by communities, including various structures and groups within communities. Most importantly, the information should take into consideration the diversity of culture and language and different literacy levels. The intended outcome is to make a difference in the quality of life of individuals and communities.

For more information about development communication, visit the website: *www.gcis.gov.za/mpcc* or visit the Development Communication Learning Network on the GCF website.

The development–communication approach

It is responsive
This means that communication between government and the community must be responsive to the needs of the community within the context of government's mandated programme to improve the lives of all South Africans.

It relies on feedback
It is a two-way communication process that involves consultation with the recipients of information and provides them with answers to their queries. This process similarly gives government an opportunity to listen to the ideas and experiences of communities, especially about programmes and services aimed at improving their lives.

It must be creative and innovative

The message must clearly show how information can better the lives of recipients. The message must promote hope and trust among its recipients, as well as encourage them to be interested in its content and to become a part thereof.

It is about continuity and sustainability

It is not about government dumping communication material on communities and not making sure that they understand its content. Follow-up workshops can be arranged to emphasise the importance and necessity of the information. The community must therefore use it continually and in a sustained way to enrich their lives. It must be available continuously when there is a need.

Community participation

Development communication is about planning with communities and identifying their information needs. It is also about working with communities in disseminating information, and inviting government officials to explain how programmes work and how they can be accessed.

Use of resource material

Various forms of resource material can be used to promote development communication. This resource material can be used for awareness purposes and to mobilise the community to attend workshops, roadshows, dramas, izimbizo, etc.

Loud hailing

A loudspeaker can be used to mobilise a particular community to attend an event at a stadium or community hall. It is used preferably in deep rural areas to mobilise communities.

Word of mouth

This entails the 'each-person teaches-another' principle, whereby information is spread through friends, families, neighbours, etc. It is also preferred in deep rural areas were everyone knows each other.

Posters

A well-designed and printed poster can be put up in community halls and public places such as schools, clinics, post offices, local businesses, etc. to disseminate a particular message. The culture of having community notice boards at Thusong Service Centres (previously multi-purpose community centres) should be developed.

Promotional material

Products like T-shirts, caps, keyholders, etc. can be used in big projects

Flyer
This entails a small and simplified version of the key concepts and messages that is quick to read and easily understand.

Thusong Service Centres: vehicles for integrated service delivery
The most useful innovation in this process of communication for development has been government's programme of rolling out Thusong Service Centres, primarily in rural areas.

These centres are designed as places of a more permanent or semi-permanent point of contact between communities and government, and from which a number of programmes and projects can be run. No less than six government services are offered at Thusong Service Centres. A further development has been GCIS' commitment to the location of a government information centre in each of the district municipalities.

GCIS communication officers have a significant role to play in expediting the notion of development communication. This is largely as they interact directly with communities on a regular basis, monitoring and evaluating the impact of the work done through Thusong Service Centres and how this has improved the quality of communities' lives.

Local liaison and information management
All development-communication programmes and projects should be aligned to the Integrated Development Plan (IDP). The IDP is an essential management tool for local government, whereby communities are encouraged to participate in local-level decision-making and planning for service delivery in an integrated manner. Municipalities, and in particular wards, are key entry points for the development-communication practitioner.

The Ward Information Management System (Wims) is an online resource in the form of a database for district-based communication officers. It provides access to community profiles (including literacy levels, languages, local organisations and stakeholders) at ward level. While this is currently only an internal GCIS operational system, government communicators are encouraged to request profiles of areas where campaigns are to be implemented.

Government Communications' regional distribution network
GCIS has established more than 3 000 distribution centres across the country. These centres may be utilised by departments for distribution of their communication products and dissemination of messages. Each of the nine GCIS regional offices has an information resource centre (IRC) where material can be sent for distribution.

The GCIS also has two additional IRCs, one at head office in Pretoria and one at the Parliamentary Office in Cape Town. The centres can be contacted at 012 314 2134 (Pretoria) and 021 461 0070 (Cape Town).

How can I make use of Government Communications' distribution network?
To properly manage distribution support, several key principles have been put in place.

The process outlined below is tailored specifically for a partnership with the GCIS regional offices and district offices. The complete development of a distribution strategy for a campaign, which includes marketing and media buying, is handled by the Directorate: Marketing, Advertising and Distribution of the GCIS. Usually, such a strategy would have formed part of an overall communication strategy development process, which would in such cases be directed to the GCIS Project Desk.

1. If material has to be distributed through the regional and district networks of the GCIS, the client department needs to have a manageable size of resource material (few thousand and not millions as such large volumes require procurement processes).
2. A rule of thumb is about 10 000 per province as print runs of 90 000 to 100 000 are manageable. The GCIS regional offices and partners do not have the capacity to handle bulk distribution.
3. The client department needs to approach the Directorate: LLIM with the request and indicate the development-communication content of the material and the programme it is intended to support.
4. A language profile for each province/region will be provided to guide the client on the quantities and languages to be send to each specific province/region.
5. The database of all disability groups/organisations around the country assists clients to also reach disability groups and to cater for their needs. It assesses the quantities of, for example, Braille material, which can be managed.
6. Contact details of organisations which cater for these special needs are also available on request, so that clients can outsource their services to these organisations, if the need arises.
7. Only once a clear agreement has been reached between the client department and the Directorate: LLIM, is a detailed brief sent to each GCIS regional manager with the details of the quantities to expect, delivery dates and who the primary target groups are.
8. Once this brief has been agreed to, the client will post material at their own cost to regional offices, based on an address list provided by the Directorate: LLIM.
9. Material must reach GCIS regional offices during the very first or last week of a month. During the first week of a month, all district-based communication officers meet at the regional offices for their monthly staff meeting. The information secretaries in the IRCs will divide your material into district-based distribution groups. Upon leaving for their regions, our communication officers will take the material with them and start the distribution process, using the following principles:

a. GCIS does not handle short-notice distribution – this is where the material is dated and has to be distributed within a limited timeline. We only handle education and information products which have a longer shelf life and where your need is to extend the reach and access of your products, especially to rural communities.

b. Clients will be provided with a distribution profile indicating where the material was distributed and to which primary groups.

10. Any resource material sent directly to the GCIS regional offices, without the written approval of the Directorate: LLIM, will not be distributed.

10.2 IMBIZO

Over the past few years, imbizo has become a popular and trusted platform for unmediated communication between government and the public to advance participatory implementation of government programmes to create a better life for all.

By April 2005, the focus weeks had grown to about 500 events nationally, where in the latter half of 2005 imbizo became more closely integrated with Project Consolidate, which focused on local government municipal processes.

The alignment of the Municipal Imbizo Programme with Project Consolidate, especially the district izimbizo of the President and Deputy President, which included visits to over 100 municipalities, brought a new orientation towards mobilising officials and elected representatives in councils and ward committees for practical solutions to problems. A measure of broader interaction with communities was maintained through local municipal izimbizo by ministers and deputy ministers.

The Imbizo Focus Week which was held from 6 to 13 April 2006 came shortly after the formation of the new local government, accompanied by an increased mandate from the people of the country. Imbizo therefore provides an opportunity for political leaders in all three spheres to intensify interactive communication around local programmes of action to promote effective and speedy implementation of the Accelerated Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa, as well as other government programmes.

It will be an important platform for promoting the call that all of us should act together in a national effort do everything possible to use this 'Age of Hope' to continue the progress made and address concerns that citizens have, so that we achieve the objective of a better life for all.

Strategising for imbizo communication

An imbizo communication programme has to be based on a defined communication strategy. The strategy must clearly outline the objectives of undertaking such an imbizo and must contain all the elements of the communication strategy as outlined in the generic framework for developing a GCS. The communication strategy must also be

accompanied by a phased action plan to facilitate monitoring of the implementation of the communication strategy.

Planning
Effective planning is a critical aspect of any successful campaign. This embodies initial conceptualisation of how the imbizo will take place, using the communication strategy as a guide. At this stage, role-players must be identified and the necessary steps and processes specified in a work breakdown structure and action plan.

At the time of the Imbizo Week, the role-players would be the respective departments (service-delivery departments) and GCIS. This team's task would be to source from various departments' programmes where ministers and deputy ministers can be deployed. The various departments will send their programmes through the database developed by GCIS and the State Information Technology Agency (Sita). All departments have access to the database by using a username and password assigned to the person responsible for izimbizo in the department. GCIS accesses the database to view the programmes.

Establishing a national task team
A national task team should be established and charged with the overall responsibility of overseeing the implementation of the imbizo. The task team normally consists of the following:
- GCIS
- The Presidency
- service-delivery government departments
- representatives from protocol and security, especially in the event of the Presidential imbizo
- a senior person (normally the HoC in the Premier's Office) who will be the link with the provincial department of the executive council and others as may be deemed fit.

The participation of communicators in the task team ensures that the communication objectives of the imbizo are strictly maintained. Protocol and security have to be taken on board at all times as their understanding of the imbizo is crucial to its success. Neglecting to brief them thoroughly may result in the imbizo's failure, as they are critical and responsible for the movements of the principal on the ground. Personnel from the province are also important in the process of implementing izimbizo. Preferably, it has to be someone with direct access to the premier, the entire executive council or the relevant Member of the Executive Council (MEC) in the province, depending on the nature of the imbizo.

The task team must have a designated project leader to oversee the overall work of the task team.

Role clarification

Once the national co-ordinating task team has been established, the roles of the various role-players should be clarified to ensure smooth implementation of the imbizo. This must be as detailed as possible and should clearly indicate who will be responsible for which tasks.

The national task team's responsibilities include:

- Programme consolidation with a person responsible for provinces and another for national departments.
- Marketing and distribution.
- Media liaison with two media liaison people. One is responsible for mobilising media at national level while the other person is responsible for mobilising media at local level (community media).
- Overseeing the provincial imbizo co-ordinating team.
- Capturing programmes/events onto the database (but this does not take away departments' and provinces' responsibility to factor their programmes onto the database).
- Developing an imbizo poster which will be sent to provinces to translate according to their own language needs.
- Developing radio and television advertisements.
- Media monitoring and analysis.

The provincial co-ordinating task team's responsibilities include:

- setting up the provincial imbizo task team
- drafting imbizo programmes and factoring them into the database and/or submitting them to GCIS
- liaising with ministers' offices regarding the deployment of political principals (ministers/deputy ministers)
- submitting post-imbizo reports to the national task team (GCIS).

Budget

The budget is another crucial aspect of an imbizo's implementation. Sometimes, budget commitments will be shared between the national department and the province. When this is the case, it must be made clear which aspects of the budget are the responsibilities of the province and which of the national Government. At times, this is left hanging and often results in unnecessary debts and unhealthy relations.

Departments are encouraged to spend less or pursue less costly izimbizo events/ programmes.

Consultation with the province and local municipality

Most izimbizo are conducted in particular municipalities or districts. It is important to observe all necessary protocols before pronouncing publicly the intention to undertake an imbizo. All parties must be consulted in advance as improper consultation can be a recipe for failure. It is advisable that the task team should as much as possible be stationed in and operate from the province a few weeks before the imbizo is to take place. This is critical as reports that are submitted by provincial officials about potential project sites to visit should be confirmed by actually visiting them.

Developing the imbizo programme

The programme is the ultimate reflection of long hours of work. The imbizo programme should cater for the principal's interaction with the people, allocating enough time for people to express their concerns and issues. The projects to be visited should also relate to the developmental and service-delivery programme of government.

Long before deciding what the programme should look like, the province should have been requested to submit ideas about possible projects and programmes, which can be visited by the President, minister or premier. The task team should select suggestions that are closest to the objectives of the imbizo as outlined in the communication strategy. For instance, in a rural and poverty-stricken province, issues that should be prioritised by an imbizo programme include:

- water
- roads
- poverty-alleviation initiatives
- health facilities
- electricity
- housing
- education programmes
- agricultural initiatives
- economy-boosting initiatives.

There may be other political or social ills that are high on the agenda of the province that may need to be addressed during the imbizo. These may be problems of racism, high level of crime, unemployment, etc. By making these considerations, the programme will be responding to the needs of the environment as outlined in the communication strategy.

The programme has to be approved before any commitments are made – either to different stakeholders or to the media. Once the programme is approved, a second version has to be produced for the public. This will then be handed to interested parties, especially the media. This version will not include details related to security and protocol.

Media liaison

Media liaison is critical to popularise izimbizo to relate to people the commitment government has in uniting with the people to achieve change.

A media liaison manager must be identified. Too many people managing media-liaison activities often result in confusion and negative coverage of the imbizo. The media liaison manager and team will then be responsible for developing and implementing an effective media liaison strategy and plan which should entail, among other things:
- media briefings
- interviews
- media to be targeted
- opinion pieces
- key messages about the imbizo
- contents of the media kit.

It is crucial that the media should be informed in time what the imbizo is about – and this does not, at initial stages, have to cover details in the programme.

During some izimbizo, it may be necessary to organise transport for the media to move from one venue to the next so that at all times they have access to the activities of the principal. Another essential element of media liaison during an imbizo is to provide the facilities necessary for the media to do their work effectively. This may be an Internet café where the media can file their stories. A briefing room could also be handy when the need arises to give further briefings to the media.

Publicity

To reinforce the message, publicity material has to be developed, availed and widely distributed. Such material must relate to government's programmes, reflecting on the successes and challenges of service delivery. To achieve maximum impact, common publicity material is used, including posters, pamphlets and leaflets. The GCIS is responsible for producing leaflets and posters for the SoNA and the *People's Guide to the Budget*, which it makes available for izimbizo.

Departments and provinces can produce other material of their own, as long as the central message of government is integrated. People are often not well-informed of government's activities and programmes through the mainstream media, hence the emphasis on publicity material during izimbizo.

Promotional material

Media statements, interviews and publicity material can be complemented by any promotional material. The GCIS sends a poster framework to provinces indicating the theme. Provinces have to produce their own posters with their message, from the one provided by GCIS.

Conducting research for izimbizo

Preliminary research: Research must be conducted on the area where the imbizo is scheduled to happen. This could either be a province, a particular community or village. In terms of quantitative data, some of the service-delivery indicators that could be used include statistics of:
- electricity grid connections
- houses completed or under construction
- people gaining access to water and healthcare
- number of telephone lines installed
- matriculation results
- educator:learner ratio.

To show a trend in terms of service delivery, it is advisable for statistics to reflect delivery from 1994 up to the most recent and verified reports. This can in turn be used for publicity material for the imbizo. In terms of qualitative data, consideration must be given to developmental issues in the specified area, languages spoken, natural resources and the communication milieu in the area.

Secondary research: In assisting the project team to make informed decisions on the development of the programme, it is necessary for information to be gathered from various service-delivery departments on successes and challenges that face their programmes in the given area.
- It is important that information received from departments is verified by independent research, which may involve field visits or contacting people involved in the programmes, etc.
- In processing the research, consideration must be given to both the output and impact of service delivery.
- Research briefings must be written on each service-delivery programme, whether it is building a school or constructing a clinic. All research briefings must be in a format that is easily readable and succinct. It should ideally contain sections on the background, success, status and challenges of the programme.
- It is important to keep the briefing notes clear and precise, because they can then be used and further processed by the MLO and included in the press packs.

Assessment and follow-up research

This is crucial for an effective imbizo, which will ultimately be measured by its follow-up in terms of action taken:
- The researcher needs to identify and brief scribes for each event. Scribes must be fluent in both English and the prevalent language spoken in the area where the imbizo takes place.
- Ideally, scribes should come from the communication sections in provinces, because they are more aware of the communication environment in which they will be documenting issues raised.

43

- A user-friendly form needs to be compiled by the researcher for each scribe to complete when documenting issues raised by the people.
- All scribe notes need to be collected and collated into a follow-up report comprising all issues raised. Ideally, this should be in the form of a database, or in a tabular form, which captures all the fields of the scribe's form.
- A fortnight after the imbizo, it may be necessary to visit the province to obtain their report-back, as well as discuss the development of a consolidated report.
- The consolidated report, which will also include timeframes of action required by responsible departments and bodies, should be presented to the relevant principal.
- The report must be communicated to the relevant responsible departments or bodies via the proper protocol channels to ensure that action is taken and communicated to the affected province or area. Together with other documentation and plans, all research material and notes must be filed and used during the assessment and closure of the project for that particular imbizo event.

During the imbizo
During the imbizo, the task team must take care of several critical issues.

Recording proceedings
The task team has to allocate people who will be in charge of recording and documenting the issues raised by people, and the responses given by government officials. Audio-visual and radio recordings should also be done to reinforce the recording process. An important part of ensuring that things are well-recorded and that people are able to raise their issues audibly is the need to avail communication facilities for this purpose. The task team must therefore ensure that there is an operational public address (PA) system and roving microphones. Given the mobile nature of these sessions, it would be advisable to outsource the PA system from venue to venue. The GCIS' broadcast production unit may be requested to record those events that have a development-communication element. These requests need to be made within a reasonable timeframe as GCIS provides its services pending the availability of resources at the time.

Monitoring the programme
The task team should allocate members to all the venues where the imbizo will be taking place to ensure that things are efficiently organised. Any problems should be reported immediately to the project leader for alternative arrangements, if necessary. The provincial project leader should at all times be with the principal, advising on proceedings and managing the time as prescribed in the programme. Adherence to the time allocated to the programme is crucial. It is critical to advise people beforehand about the actual venues to avoid situations where people wait for the principal in venues that are not part of the itinerary.

However, the provincial project leader should be dynamic and flexible to deal with unforeseen circumstances. The head of protocol and security should be briefed continuously to inform them when the programme has to take a slight or drastic change. If the imbizo is happening over a few days, the task team should meet at the end of each day's programme to assess the proceedings and plan for the next day.

Post-imbizo tasks
The task team does not disband immediately after the last item on the programme of the imbizo. There are issues to be dealt with after the imbizo, e.g. ensuring that issues raised are sent to the responsible departments.

Evaluation of the imbizo
The task team needs to evaluate the imbizo and critique where necessary for future improvements. The evaluation should be the first step towards writing a report about the imbizo.

Imbizo report
The task team has to produce a report about the imbizo, which is submitted to management. The report should contain recommendations about how issues raised will be taken forward.

Follow-up
The task team should also set up a process through which issues that were raised during the imbizo will be followed up. This may entail consulting relevant government structures that may not have been at the imbizo but are the competent structures to respond to issues raised. Formal contacts need to be made with those structures through the political head or appropriate official.

Continuous assessment of the follow-up is required to ensure that government is indeed fulfilling its commitments. After a while, it is advisable to return to the areas visited during the imbizo to see if there have been changes. Areas showing good progress can form the basis for a good media follow-up.

The generic guidelines and checklists outlined in this document should be adhered to in order to conduct a successful imbizo. It should, however, be borne in mind that an imbizo is not a public relations exercise, but a catalyst aimed at getting a sense of the needs of ordinary people in order to improve their quality of life.

Guidelines for effective scribing during an imbizo
A crucial determinant of the success of an imbizo is effective follow-up on issues and concerns raised during an event, as it will ultimately be measured by its follow-up in terms of action taken. Outlined below are some guidelines, which serve as pointers for effective capturing of issues and concerns.

There should be a central person to co-ordinate and brief scribes. The co-ordinator should also have prior access to the programme to make logistical arrangements for scribes to be present at all events. There should be at least two scribes allocated per event. Scribes could take on alternate events in the programme to allow for travelling arrangements.

Scribes must be fluent in both English and the prevalent language spoken in the area where the imbizo is held. Scribes should come from the communication section, because they are more aware of the communication environment in which they will be documenting issues raised. When capturing issues raised, it must be done in such a way that follow-up action is borne in mind. Accuracy and capturing the gist of the issue are therefore essential.

The response and action committed to by the relevant political principals must also be accurately captured. This is crucial in terms of accountability. A user-friendly form needs to be drawn up for each scribe to complete when documenting issues raised by the people. Copies should be made of the form and compiled into a booklet with a hardback cover and a plastic front cover. This helps scribes to document in rural areas. An example of the scribe form is attached below.

The co-ordinator needs to collect all scribes' notes and collate them into a follow-up report of all issues raised. Ideally, this should be in the form of a database, such as Access, or in a tabular form, which captures all the fields of the scribe form. An example is attached in Addendum 2.

A fortnight after the imbizo, it may be necessary to visit the province to obtain their report-back as well as to discuss the development of a consolidated report. The consolidated report of issues raised will form part of the comprehensive report prepared by the province hosting the imbizo. Issues raised will affect various provincial departments and local government, and may even have implications for national departments. The report must therefore be communicated from the relevant Office of the Premier to the relevant responsible departments or bodies via the proper protocol channels.

This will ensure that action is taken and communicated to the affected province or area. The HoC in the province needs to ensure that feedback from provincial departments, national departments and all other responsible entities is communicated to the affected communities. Together with other documentation and plans, all research material and notes must be filed and used during the assessment and closure of the project for that particular imbizo event.

An example of a scribe form used at a Presidential imbizo

Stakeholder meeting

Issues raised	Action already taken	Proposed plan of action

State–of–the–district presentation

Issue raised	Action already taken	Response	Proposed plan of action

Community imbizo

Issues raised	Action already taken	Proposed plan of action

TOWARDS A COMMUNICATION SYSTEM AT LOCAL GOVERNMENT

**government
communications**

Department:
Government Communication and Information System
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

TOWARDS A COMMUNICATION SYSTEM AT LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The local government communication system

Communication structures, systems and processes at local government level are in the formative stage and may not be well-capacitated to meet the communication challenges that play themselves out from time to time.

The Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998 (Act 117 of 1998), Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 2000 (Act 32 of 2000), the Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2000 (Act 2 of 2000), and the Constitution of South Africa, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996), place unique obligations on local-government communicators and demand high levels of transparency, accountability, openness, participatory democracy and direct communication with the people in improving their lives.

The involvement of the people as agents of social change is significant in implementing government's POA in general and that of local government in particular, through the IDP process. The challenges of local-government service delivery are inextricably linked to the concrete building of partnerships.

The communication system should enable local government to communicate in an efficient, co-ordinated, integrated and coherent fashion. Building capacity, both human and capital, in the local government sphere is fundamental to ensuring that government's central message as outlined in the national GCS, is communicated in an integrated, consistent and co-ordinated manner.

Current communication scenario in the third sphere

Between 2003 and 2004, the South African Local Government Association (Salga), with the support of GCIS, concluded preliminary research on the status of communication in municipalities. In broad terms, the study revealed that communication at municipal level was not properly institutionalised or systematised.

These findings were elaborated on during 2005 by hosting workshops on the local-government communication system in all provinces. While significant detail was found, in general terms, no real system of communication existed across the three spheres of government and by and large, municipalities did not properly interface with the communication processes of national and provincial government. Similarly, the flow of information, especially to municipalities, from other parts of the system of government communication is random or even by chance.

Areas to develop communication at local government

FOUR broad areas of focus are:
a)   governance and advocacy
b)   communication
c)   capacity-building
d)   structures and systems.

a)   Governance and advocacy
Municipalities' communication services need to operate within a policy framework which is developed in conformance with the prevailing local-government legislation but considering precedents set by prevailing norms and standards guiding the system of government communication generally.

Political leadership and oversight of the communication function locally is a critical success factor in ensuring healthy communication with communities.

It is only when communication functions are properly reported on and accounted for, monitored and evaluated, that municipal communicators are able to effectively support the implementation of a municipality's programme of action.

Institutional arrangements need to be in place to ensure co-ordination of an integrated and coherent system of government communication from the national to the provincial sphere. This cannot be random but must be intentionally planned and enabled to ensure that communication information reaches all government communicators. This suggests that certain institutional arrangements should be in place at municipal level as well as at intergovernmental system level to ensure effective interface of communicators from all spheres.

Recommended interventions
•   the location of the communication function in the highest office in the municipality – politically accountable to the mayor but administratively located in the office of the municipal manager
•   a generic municipal policy
•   detailed description of supporting legislation
•   clear statements/explanations of the following policy issues:
    – plain language statement
    – official languages
    – corporate identity
    – diversity
    – editorial policy
    – environmental assessment
    – consultation and citizen engagement

49

- risk communication
- crisis and emergency communication
- media liaison
- event management
- advertising and marketing
- internal communication
- institutional arrangements
- communication cycle.

Oversight, monitoring and reporting of these processes should be done in the premier/mayor's forum meetings provincially and in the relevant political working group of Salga.

Provincial communication core teams should be strengthened as provincial implementation hubs.

Awareness-raising roadshows among mayoral committees should be undertaken by provincial core teams.

Communication programme

Government communication is a not stand-alone or self-serving discipline. It is a strategic and planned process aimed at supporting the implementation of the policy and programmes designed by government to better the lives of the people. As such, a municipality must have a dedicated communication capacity which puts in place an intentional and planned communication programme.

Strategising for communication needs to be a frequent and ongoing exercise in the life of the municipality.

Local government is the sphere of government closest to communities. This places a particular onus on municipalities in fulfilling a wide range of communication functions across the spectrum of communication – media liaison, marketing, advertising and branding, direct and intensive unmediated communication, to name a few. As such, municipalities' communication strategies need to address not only the varied functions of the municipality, but the widely distinct target groups resident in any municipality.

Capacity–building

There is a need to create an enabling environment for structures and processes for coherent communication. The following were identified as key skills needed to build capacity and consolidate the local-government communication system:

- community liaison, networking, facilitation, negotiation, research, media liaison, communication planning and strategy, event management, understanding of government policy and linguistic or communication skills

The GCIS, the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG), Salga and provincial HoCs should ensure that the government communication system and provincial communication strategies help shape the character and nature of the local-government communication system to ensure that government communicates with one voice.

This would be aided by the effective use of all forums/platforms where co-ordination and networking can take place, both in a formal and non-formal way.

Research and various provincial audits show that the communication function at municipal level is hardly resourced. The scenario has, however, shown significant improvement since the 2002 Conference on Local Government Communication.

Structures and systems

Communication units and structures are arranged in a manner that enables them to serve a number of target audiences (internal and external) and meet the communication objectives of the local government. It is a trend that communication units are politically accountable to office of the mayor while administratively they report to the office of the municipal manager.

As communication is a strategic function that should be consciously planned, dedicated institutions for this function are required at municipal level. Best-practice models on how to optimally structure a communication unit in government are available but lack standardisation across municipalities. Guidelines in this respect as well as job descriptions, performance agreements and key performance areas (KPAs) for incumbents of such posts are not uniformly applied. Such arrangements need to be located within the prevailing institutional and employment arrangements applicable to the third sphere which are different from those of the national and provincial spheres.

Guidelines to regulate the way national and provincial government collaborate around communication functions have been developed by GCIS:
- District communication forums should be established as communication co-ordination points in all district municipalities. This should also entail effective monitoring of such fora by the relevant political provincial intergovernmental relations forums.
- A communication structure at district municipal level is recommended.
- A communication structure at local municipality level is recommended.

- Each provincial local government core team should establish the necessary intergovernmental rapid response teams aimed at implementing crisis communication-support initiatives in municipalities encountering protest actions.
- Provincial core teams must assist in communication capacity development, communication strategising and strategic interventions in specific municipalities when problems arise.

The imbizo approach should be implemented on an ongoing basis annually in the municipal communication cycle through 'Mayor and Ward Councillors Meet the People' initiatives.

The following are recommended at municipal level:
- A communication unit located in the Office of the Mayor but with administrative accountability to the municipal manager of a municipality. This unit should ideally comprise officials to handle the following functions: internal and external communication, including the imbizo programme; media and stakeholder liaison; media production; and marketing and branding.
- Municipal communicators should have access to the executive committees and other decision-making bodies of municipalities.
- Regular communication strategising meetings should be held in the municipality to provide communication guidance.
- Municipal communication officers should be represented on the provincial government communication forums.