

I. EDITORIAL

The establishment of Government Communications (GCIS) in 1998 introduced a new approach to government communication, which encourages integration, coordination and high levels of professionalism across the three spheres.

This new approach assists government to achieve the communication objectives it set for itself. Such an approach would give coherence to government's communication about its mandate. It allows communication to serve as a strategic tool in the implementation of a people-centred social policy. As such government communication ensures that the government's message is heard while providing the citizenry with ample opportunity to express their views and opinions through a range of communication platforms.

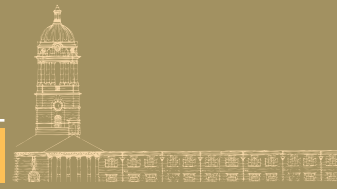
It is this paradigm that compels a government communicator to view communication as a strategic element in service delivery. The *Government Communicators' Handbook* is published by the GCIS to entrench the new ethos and approach. This handbook is designed to assist government communicators to locate themselves in the overall government communication system in a rapidly changing working environment.

It is within this context that it is important to always update the *Government Communicators' Handbook* with information that is most current and accurate as it is considered by communicators as a practical guide on government communications written in a simple and understandable manner.

Updating the handbook ensures that government communicators use the most current information and apply the correct strategies on their daily work and thus remain at the cutting edge of their profession. The update of the handbook assists to drive a well-functioning and effective government communication system.

The need to produce a guide that will assist communicators of the democratic South Africa was necessary as government has a responsibility to communicate with its people as prescribed by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996.

The last 20 years presented a number of challenges for government communicators. The central challenge has been to infuse an appreciation of government communication as a strategic element in service delivery. Related to this is the challenge to grapple with managing public perceptions. Essentially, citizens who experience government's performance in all spheres of governance form their own perceptions about the implementation of government's Programme of Action (PoA).



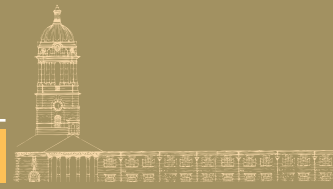
2. PREFACE

THE GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATORS' HANDBOOK

- The handbook is a direct response to many questions about the functioning of the government communication system. Of importance is that good communication had no precedence in pre-1994 South Africa.
- The handbook is a guide that assists government communicators to understand their roles within the communication system and to locate themselves in the overall government communication system in a rapidly changing working environment. It further equips government communicators with the requisite knowledge to be more effective and professional in the performance of their duties.
- The handbook is written with sufficient flexibility to provide the communicator with a one-stop reference to challenges which cut across all government spheres.

SCOPE

- The issues raised within the handbook are certainly not unique to any part of the world – the only difference will be the implementation of this handbook and the position and political support that communication enjoys within government. The material in this handbook also reflects the working experience of the GCIS on a number of key issues since its establishment in 1998.
- The handbook contains, among other things, the role of the GCIS; the performance scorecard for government communicators; Media Engagement, Internal Communication, event-management guidelines and crisis management.



3. ABOUT THE GCIS

3.1. Background

- In 1998 the South African Communication Service (SACS) was dissolved and the GCIS established by Cabinet, largely on the basis of recommendations contained in the report of the Task Group on Government Communications (Comtask, 1996: 58).
- Government's mandate requires that its communication be expanded to enhance access to information that enables the public to participate in the country's transformation and in bettering their own lives; that it should bring the realities of our emergent and thriving democracy to the attention of the international community; and promote the renaissance of Africa, including regional integration and implementation of people-centred development programmes.

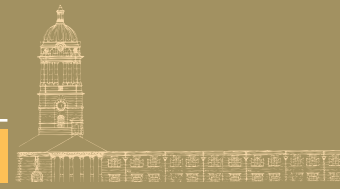
3.2. The GCIS

- The GCIS provides cutting-edge communication solutions to the rest of government.
- The GCIS was established on 18 May 1998, according to terms of Section 7 (Subsection 2 and 3) of the Public Service Act, 1994 (Act 103 of 1994) and GCIS mandate – from section 239 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996).
- The starting point for the post-1994 communication system was the Constitution and Bill of Rights, which guarantee freedom of expression and the right of access to information – committed to openness, accountability and transparency.
- The GCIS is located in The Presidency and is responsible for setting up the Government Communication System and continuously working with the rest of government to communicate and inform the public about the policies and programmes of government aimed at improving their lives. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of GCIS attends Cabinet meetings and is the official Cabinet spokesperson.

3.3. GCIS Strategic Support

The GCIS's Communication Resources Centre provides communication services, support and advice to government, the media, the public and the international community.

CHAPTER I



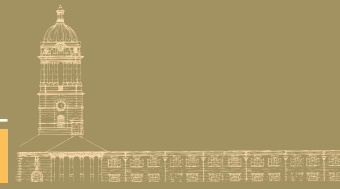
Support to government:

- a. ensures development and monitoring of communication strategies and plans.
- b. assists departments with:
 - i. marketing and distribution;
 - ii. media bulk buying;
 - iii. copywriting and editing;
 - iv. media support, media liaison;
 - v. media monitoring and analysis;
 - vi. communications research;
 - vii. managing the government-wide website.
- The GCIS develops and implements the national communication strategy based on the government's PoA and the State of the Nation Address (SoNA). The GCIS also contributes to coherence of content by providing communication products for all government transversal campaigns, working with the relevant departments or clusters.
- The GCIS provides support to Cabinet and departments by managing the development of key messages and current affairs issues. It monitors implementation of the Government Communication Programme (GCP) and advises Cabinet and other government institutions on communication matters and takes issues up with departments, clusters and communicators. Through improved coordination, the government-wide communication system has increased coherence and consistency in messaging and content.

The establishment of the GCIS introduced a new epoch and approach to government communication, which encourages integration, coordination and high levels of professionalism – the handbook is one of the tools that will assist to enhance high levels of professionalism.

INTRODUCTION

- The capacity to communicate effectively with constituents is a fundamental function of modern democracies and it also contributes to good governance. In recent years, communication has established itself as a critical element within government. To some degree, communication is recognised as a strategic element in service delivery but there is a new battle – and this is about a value for communication. In a rapidly changing environment, the GCIS strives to achieve integration, coordination and high levels of professionalism in the government communication profession.



3.4. Legislative mandate

A number of guidelines, Cabinet memorandums, policies, etc, have been critical in shaping government's approach to communications. All this information and legislations/policies place an obligation on government.

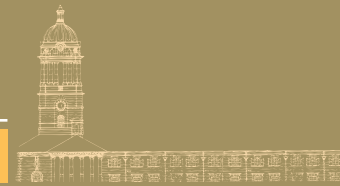
Cabinet took a decision to recognise communication as a strategic element to service delivery. Government has a legal obligation and a political responsibility to ensure regular and effective communication with citizens. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, the Municipal Structures Act, 1998 (Act 117 of 1998), the Municipal Systems Act, 2000 (Act 32 of 2000), and the Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2000 (Act 2 of 2000) all impose an obligation on government communicators and require high levels of transparency, accountability, openness, participatory democracy and direct communication with the citizens in improving their lives.

The citizens, on the other hand, have a right and a responsibility to participate in their governance and decision-making. The Constitution represents a legal expression of the political contract between the people and the citizens within the democratic State. Our democratic government is committed to the principle of Batho Pele (People First) and this, in simple terms, means elected public representatives and public servants must always put people first in what they do.

The following are the key legal and policy frameworks and guidelines that inform South African government communications:

a. Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

Section 16 contains detailed provisions regarding freedom of expression, stating: "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes freedom of the press and other media; freedom to receive or impart information or ideas; freedom of artistic creativity; and academic freedom and freedom of scientific research." Section 16 contains the following limitations to freedom of expression: "The right in subsection (1) does not extend to propaganda for war; incitement of imminent violence; or advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm."



b. Comtask Report

The Communication Task Group report published in 1996 made 83 recommendations to government to overhaul its communication system and machinery. Central to the recommendations was that communications is a strategic function and requires a strategic approach to be a success. All the recommendations were made in line with sections 16 and 32(1)(a) and (b) of the Constitution. (Comtask Report, 1996).

c. Cabinet Memorandum 8 of 1997

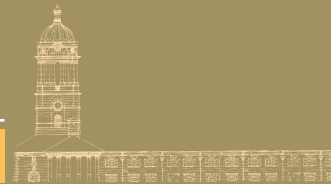
The memo was adopted in 1997 based on the recommendation of the Comtask Report. The memo represents an approval by Cabinet to establish the GCIS replacing the SACS. The memo proposed the development of professional and effective corps of government communicators through the setting up of a system aimed at professionalising and streamlining government communications. It emphasised the creation of communication structures in ministries led by a Chief Director. It also recognised the role of the GCIS as the nerve centre of government communication strategy, policy development, planning, research and administration.

d. Cabinet Memorandum 8 of 1998

The memo was adopted by Cabinet in 1998 to guide the setting up of communications in line with the Comtask recommendations. It also emphasised the need to have relevant structures in departments and some communications coordinating forums to assist with the coordination of communications within South Africa. The memo also emphasised the importance of government developing communication strategies to drive communications as informed by the national communications framework that the GCIS will develop annually. The memo also refers to the levels of communicators in government, thus outlining the ideal structure of communication sections in departments.

e. Cabinet Memorandum 16 of 2000

The memo concentrated on progress made since the establishment of the GCIS in 1998. Even though there was progress made, the memo was very critical of some departments that did not have the correct structures in place. The memo indicates that communication should be recognised as a strategic element in service delivery by government. The memo suggests in addition to the other channels of communications, Izimbizo (public participation) should be endorsed as one style of communicating with the people. Key performance areas (KPAs) of Heads of Communication (HoCs) are also outlined in the memo for better understanding of the role of HoCs.



f. *White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (Batho Pele)*, 1997

The government's approach to service delivery is that people should come first. The community is larger than individuals and any attempt to provide a service should consider all eight *Batho Pele* principles. The principles also affect government communications and communicators should use these principles to provide information and messages to the public.

g. *Municipal Structures Act of 1998*

The Act integrates and regulates local government throughout the country and it also places an obligation on municipalities to communicate with the people. This will ensure that the people hold government accountable and take part in their own governance.

h. *Municipal Systems Act of 2000*

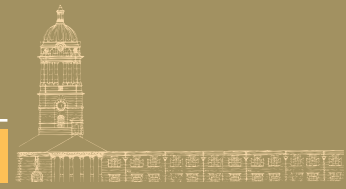
A municipality must develop a culture of municipal governance that complements formal representative government with a system of participatory governance. It must also encourage and create conditions for the local community to participate in the affairs of the municipality.

i. *Cabinet Memorandum 15 of 1999*

The memo mandated the GCIS to provide information to the public to enable them to become active participants in changing their lives for the better. The GCIS facilitates and coordinates the government's Development Communication initiative through the establishment of Thusong Service Centres (TSCs), which were previously called Multi-Purpose Community Centres.

j. *Promotion of Access to Information Act of 2000*

South Africa's Constitution gives every person the right of access to information, held by a public or private body as required for the exercise or protection of any right. The Act seeks to advance the values of transparency and accountability, which government communications promotes. The Act was necessitated by the vision and a fundamental need of government information and messages to reach the majority of the population, especially the disadvantaged and those previously marginalised by the apartheid system.



3.5. Government mandate

Government's mandate required that communication should expand access to information that would enable the public to participate in the country's transformation and in bettering their own lives; that it should bring the realities of our emergent and thriving democracy to the attention of the international community; and promote the renaissance of Africa, including regional integration and implementation of people-centred development programmes.

The South African Constitution has entrenched a number of rights and obligations on its citizens, and powers and responsibilities on government. Among the rights conferred on citizens by the Constitution is the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to receive and impart information or ideas. What this means is that a fundamental need of government communications is to reach the majority of the population, especially the historically disadvantaged.

Post-1994, South Africa ventured in an era of information age – in which access to knowledge and information is power and where successful citizens are those who understand this currency and are able to use it to advance their interests. This should mark a break with past practices and a recognition that government is able to improve the lives of the people it serves in a number of ways, including through the free flow of information.

Effective communication is a strategic element that enhances service delivery.