

7. COMMUNICATION PROTOCOL AND THE PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION

Government communications has critical core competencies consistently identified for each of the communication messengers in government. This is because government communications has a critical role to play in harnessing goodwill for productive purposes and in helping to shape the national mood that assist with the attainment of nation-building.

Pursuant to the above, it is important to ensure that in this process of providing strategic messages to the public, government has to use correct messengers and should provide citizens with information about how they can take part in local, provincial and national discourse so that they influence the direction in which the country is going.

It is within this context that some messages are better communicated by the head of state or other political principals in an efforts to work together to improve our communication as government. Communication structures have a central role to play in this, but it is even more critical that government as such, and the public servants in general, are oriented towards open and transparent dissertation with their own people and the wider world. To ensure that there is no confusion in the country and within the communication environment government should adhere to the following communication protocol:

7.1. Coordination and Protocol

Coordination of government action and communication in South Africa is assured in a hierarchical manner. The President is the effective chief of government; the premiers, mayors and all ministers are also part of this robust communication machinery.

a. President:

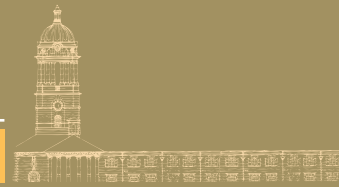
- Communicator-in-Chief
- Norm on not sharing podium with the President.

b. Cabinet:

- Pronounces on key policies and decisions
- Gives policy direction for the country through its approval of the work of government.

c. Cabinet ministers:

- Faces of Government
- Respective departments and pronounce on policy direction.



d. Directors-General:

- Pronounce only the implementation aspects of policy.

e. Norm on adverts:

- Pictures must enhance the message.

f. Government communicators:

- Support Minister's policy pronouncements and implementation aspects of the policy.
- Attend strategic meetings in the respective departments.
- Communicators facilitate the visibility of the leadership.

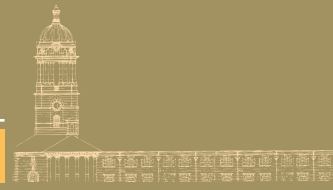
- "Communications should be the primary task of 2011" – President Jacob Zuma

- Government will need to communicate regularly and more consistently, and set the agenda instead of responding to the media all the time.
- This [communication] is a very important aspect as the people need to know what services are being delivered, how, where and by whom and we can inform them through meaningful and regular communication.
- We need to remember that the essence of this administration is [among others] the following; how do we mobilise other sectors such as business, labour, youth, traditional leaders and women to be part of our programmes and activities?
- How are we mobilising public servants to work better, faster and in a more caring manner?

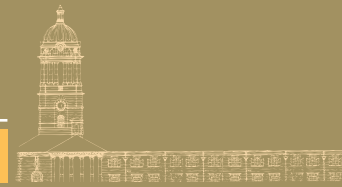
**7.2. The 10 basic principles of government communications - by Joel Netshitenzhe
"Challenges of government communication - The South African experience, 18 March 2003"**

1. Government work is a public activity.

- In any democracy, government is elected by its people, and is therefore an institution for the people and by the people. It is essential that ordinary citizens are constantly informed about government work and empowered to take active part in it.
- Government needs to make an effort to continually counter insinuations that government work is secretive whenever and wherever they surface.



- 2. A central communication service must have the authority to carry out its work – it must be located in the highest office.**
 - To ensure legitimacy and effectiveness, all government communication must have its genesis and coordination from the highest office in the government's structure.
 - On all other levels, communication structures must be placed in the offices of political principals.
- 3. Political principals are the main communicators.**
 - Government communication must, in the main, be done by individuals holding positions of political oversight or leadership.
- 4. Everyone in government is a communicator.**
 - Everyone working in government is indirectly a communicator and must therefore assume the role of an emissary and be a positive representative of government.
 - This is pertinent in every public servant's behaviour, including verbal and non-verbal interaction with the people.
- 5. Communication must be based on an integrated communication strategy and programme (with core messages that guide all actors).**
 - The central communication service must coordinate the formulation of the main and all-encompassing communication strategies for the whole of government.
 - All different spheres and parts of government must at all times communicate in one voice, meaning there must be consistency in messaging.
- 6. Communication structures do not determine policy – they articulate it.**
 - Government policy and priority are pre-determined and communication is there to inform and accurately disseminate them to the public.
- 7. Communication is more than just media liaison.**
 - In communicating, special efforts must be taken to seek, evaluate and, where feasible, employ all available measures or tools to get the message across.
 - In implementing major campaigns in particular, a multimedia approach must be adopted for effective message diffusion and sufficient reach.



8. Direct communication and mutual exchange of views with the public is the most effective form of communication (where possible, there should be communicators in all localities).

- Communication structures must be established to enable interaction, mediated or otherwise, between government and the public.

9. In working out campaigns and programmes, there must be a deliberate effort to understand the communication environment.

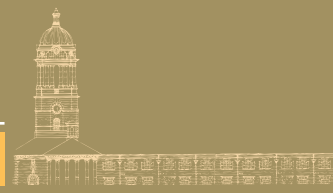
- Research is an integral part of the communication process.
- In any event, the success of communication depends on the accurate diagnosis of the surroundings that will inform, among other things, the selection of appropriate messages, target audiences and media platforms.

10. Communication campaigns work best when they are carried out in partnership with others outside of government.

- Government does not function in a vacuum and for maximum communication impact, especially in terms of credibility and reach; role-players such as non-governmental organisations, opinion makers and other important figures need to be involved.

11. General government communication principles – communicators should ensure the following:

- a. More direct, unmediated communications with the public.
- b. Genuine engagement with the public as part of policy formation and delivery, not communication as an afterthought.
- c. Positive presentation of government policies and achievements, not misleading spin.
- d. Use of all relevant channels of communication – including those that reach the poorest of the poor and those in rural areas (eg. GCIS Radio/SAnews/Vuk'uzenzele).
- e. Integrated planning and communication – interdepartmental and inter-governmental.
- f. Invest in preparation – each communicator should always be guided by a communication strategy and plan.
- g. Everything is on the record – rather do not make comments or behave in a way that you would not like to see in the public domain.
- h. Humour – one person's idea of a joke may be insensitive or offensive to others.
- i. Key messages are important – these are key statements to be communicated to ensure coherence and coordination.
- j. Avoid jargon – use 'plain language'. Remember that communication is only effective if it is understood by the intended audience.



CHAPTER 5

- k. Never lie – Untruths are invariably exposed – if not in the short-term, then certainly in the long-term – creating significant reputational damage.
- l. Be familiar with your work – this assists in responding effectively.
- m. Have access to key experts in the department – this will assist with speedy responses.