Communication Strategy Guidelines - Department of Health

Summary Guidelines to assist NSW Health Department officers to assess the need for and begin to plan a Communication Strategy.

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November 2005
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1. **Introduction**

These guidelines have been developed to assist NSW Health Departmental officers assess the need for and begin to plan for a Communication Strategy.

A Communication Strategy is a planning and implementation process for promoting and informing a designated target audience of an existing or proposed policy or program. The Strategy also outlines the desired outcomes of the information campaign.

When considering developing a Communication Strategy, it is useful to go through a checklist of ground rules that will assist in determining whether you are ready to develop a Communication Strategy or if one is indeed required.

These guidelines also provide an outline of the support and assistance that Media & Marketing can offer should it be determined that a Communication Strategy is required.

Before contacting Media & Marketing, please ensure that you have read these guidelines and that you have considered each item on the checklist.

2. **What can a Communication Strategy help you achieve?**

A Communication Strategy is an effective way to inform and educate the public or organisation of new, existing or proposed policies or programs. It is an opportunity to provide information on issues or government services that the public should know about, such as breast screening or nursing recruitment programs.

A Communication Strategy can remind the public of an existing program where the take up is low or requires improvement and it can help to change the entrenched behaviour of individuals or society as a whole – for example, programs relating to the prevention of Sexually Transmitted Infections, the health and social risks associated with problematic alcohol consumption or the benefits of immunisation.

In addition to promoting or raising awareness of a program or policy area, a Communication Strategy can greatly assist in implementing the policy or program to the appropriate audience. As such it is imperative that a Communication Strategy be integrated in the policy or program implementation plan.

A successful Communication Strategy will always involve a clear ‘call to action’ from its target audience. The audience should not just be informed as a result of the Communication Strategy but should be motivated to respond in a specific way to the policy or program.
3. The ‘must haves’ of a Communication Strategy

Before contacting Media & Marketing, you must have the following:

a. A program or policy that is complete and ready for implementation or a strategic plan for a program or policy that is ready for implementation

Research has shown that a Communication Strategy is most effective when dealing with a specific policy or program that is ready to be implemented to its target audience.

The more specific the program or policy the more likely a target audience is to respond as desired.

b. Completed or planned some developmental communications research

This will assist you in determining your target audience, their needs, behaviours, attitudes, current knowledge and perspectives and their likely responses.

Developmental research can also help determine the audience demographic, how the key communication messages should be delivered and what their motivators or barriers may be.

Importantly, developmental research will determine whether a Communication Strategy is needed at all and what the strategy can realistically achieve.

There are a number of ways to approach developmental research; the simplest is to conduct brief surveys or focus group discussions with samples of the audience you are wishing to reach.

c. A completed Communication Strategy Request Brief

The purpose of the brief is to formally engage Media & Marketing to assist you in developing a Communication Strategy. The brief should tell us all that we need to know to assist you in planning for an effective Communication Strategy.

The template attached at Appendix A provides a list of the details that should be included in the brief. Further, your brief should incorporate information relating to the checklist following at point 4.
4. A checklist of things you need to know before developing a Communication Strategy

When preparing your Communication Strategy request brief, it is important that the detail you provide incorporates information from the checklist below:

- What are the objectives of your Communication Strategy?
- Who is the target audience for the Communications Strategy?
- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats - SWOT analysis
- What do you want them to know?
- What is your timeframe?
- What is the audience’s current perspective on the program?
- What is the benefit to the target audience in hearing this message?
- What does this Communication Strategy call the target audience to do or act upon?
- What research has been undertaken to justify and inform the strategy?
- Is this Communication Strategy part of the policy/program development and plan?

To help with the strategic thinking process, make sure that you can answer yes to all or most of the following questions:

- Do you know what your budget is?
- Are your objectives clear, realistic and measurable?
- Is there communication research to inform your strategy?
- Do you understand the research results and their implications?
- Do you know how to frame your message so that you are confident it will be interesting and persuasive to the target audience?
- Do you really know what you want your target audience to do as a result of receiving the Communication Strategy?
- Have you considered the needs of special audiences such as people with hearing, sight and other disabilities, CALD people, remote or rural communities and Aboriginal people?
Do you have a clear timeframe for delivering the strategy?

Are your expectations of your campaign realistic given your timeframe and budget?

5. What can Media & Marketing do to support you in developing and implementing your Communication Strategy?

Once you have prepared a Communication Strategy request brief, Media & Marketing will initiate a consultative process with you or your nominated staff.

This process will involve building a Communication Strategy document, based on the model attached at Appendix B, which will look at the activities and timeline for conveying your message to the identified target audience.

Media & Marketing can assist you in planning and organising a range of communication activities, which can include:

- media coverage;
- managing relationships with communication, advertising and media consultants;
- commissioning and conducting developmental research; and
- managing information sessions, forums and other relevant events.

While a formal approval from the steering committee and/or Director is needed for Media & Marketing to commence work on a Communication Strategy, early consultation can assist with project planning.

Elements such as a situation analysis, setting objectives, developing key messages, identifying issues and thinking through appropriate communication channels and evaluation techniques are covered in the development of your strategy.

The process is consultative and may take approximately six (6) weeks to develop. When all parties have agreed to the strategy, formal approval is sought to progress and implement communications.

6. What your Communication Strategy will look like

Media & Marketing has developed a Communication Strategy template, which provides a uniform approach to planning a Communication Strategy. This template is attached at Appendix B.
**APPENDIX A**

**brief**

**<<INSERT BRANCH NAME>>**  
**<<INSERT UNIT NAME>>**

Trim No: **<<INSERT NO.>>**  
File No: **<<INSERT NO.>>**

**Purpose**
To seek approval to engage Media & Marketing in the development of a Communication Strategy for (subject).

**Background**
The following information must be clearly provided to Media & Marketing in this preliminary briefing. Please refer to the Communication Strategy Guidelines before completing this brief.

- Background information and what has instigated the program/ or issue.
- Information on the program/policy/issue itself, its current status and key milestones.
- Ownership of the program/policy/issue - who is responsible for it and any key stakeholders. This may include the project team, committees, associated agencies etc…
- Intent, aims, objectives of the program/policy/issue and how it may relate to issues.
- Provide a risk analysis for this program/policy/issue, including strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
- List the target audiences for this program/policy/issue.
- Outline of multicultural considerations – translations of publications, need to work with the ethnic media etc
- How the program/policy/issue ties in with NSW Health’s overall strategic directions and priorities.
- Project budget and cost centre

**Recommendation**
That Media & Marketing review the information enclosed on (subject) and that approval be given to commence production of a Communication Strategy.

**Author:**  
**Phone:**  
**Date:**

1. (Unit) Manager  
2. (Branch) Manager  
3. Director, Media & Communications  
4. Manager, Media & Marketing  
5. Return to Author
APPENDIX B

INSERT PROGRAM OR POLICY NAME

Communication Strategy

MONTH YEAR
Insert Program/Policy Name
Communication Strategy

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8  TIMELINE and RESPONSIBILITIES
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### GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AHS</td>
<td>New South Wales Area Health Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CE</td>
<td>Chief Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoH</td>
<td>NSW Department of Health</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The executive summary is important, as it summarises the intent and content of the communications strategy. It should introduce the program/policy that will be communicated, explain why the Communication Strategy has been developed, identify the target audience, the strategy objectives, expected outcomes and summarise the planned implementation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The introduction should provide detailed background information on the program/or policy including evidence/research findings supporting your program/policy. Why the policy/program was developed, what stage it is at. Stakeholders should be identified and links to state and/or national initiatives. This information should be sufficient to enable a reader with no prior knowledge of the program or policy to understand the key issues to be addressed by the Communication Strategy.

The introduction should also include a broad outline of the circumstances that prompted the need to communicate on the issue. Include a rationale for the Communication Strategy and why it is necessary. The rationale should describe the benefits to the target audience in hearing the message as well as a clear indication of what the target audience is expected to do as a result of receiving the Communication Strategy.

2. OBJECTIVE(S) OF THE POLICY OR PROGRAM

This section should begin “The objective of the Policy/Program is to …..” and go on to describe the key principles of the policy or program

The intended outcomes of the policy or program should also be discussed and listed here.

3. RISK ANALYSIS AND ISSUES MANAGEMENT

It is important here to list the strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats of the program. These details will assist in determining the objectives of the Communication Strategy.

Identify issues that will need to be managed. Identify the impact of potential issues and associated communication activities that will reduce the potential of the issue arising.

4. COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

The communication objectives are different to the program objectives. They should outline what is intended to be achieved through the communication activities. Communication objectives should begin as follows:
The primary communication objectives are: (for example)

1. to increase awareness of quit smoking support phone line;
2. to inform nursing undergraduates of the NSW Health nursing recruitment strategy; and
3. to reinforce the requirement for frontline health workers to adhere to the DV screening policy.

The activities relating to these objectives will be listed in the Communication Activities section of this document.

In setting your objectives you must be mindful of your timeframe, budget and resources and ensure that your objectives are realistic and measurable (for example if the objective is to increase, there should be a known baseline to measure the increase against).

5. TARGET AUDIENCE

Who exactly do you want to receive your message?

This section should identify the target audience for the Communication Strategy; these may be primary and secondary groups and stakeholders.

**Primary** target audience – people/groups who are directly affected by or require the greatest exposure to your message.

**Secondary** target audience – people/groups who would also benefit from the hearing the message, particularly as a means of supporting or influencing the primary target audience.

**Stakeholders** – other people/groups who are directly affected by your message or might have a stake in the message. This group would normally include peak body organisations, interest groups, other government agencies etc.

6. COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

You will now need to think about how you will package or convey your message(s) and what activities will feature in your Communication Strategy.

Below are some examples of the types of communication activities or tactics that could be included in your Communication Strategy:

- Information sessions;
- NSW Health Intranet/Internet;
- news@NSWHealth;
- Posters/flyers;
- Training video;
- AHS newsletters;
- Media releases;
- Forums;
• Advertising; and
• Sponsorship.

Does your policy/program have a brand? Does it comply with the NSW Health corporate branding policy? If yes it is important for all your Communication Activities to carry that branding.

This section should also contain an outline of any multicultural considerations – translation of publications, need to work with the ethnic media etc.

7. BUDGET

Include in this section total budget allocated and the cost centre where funds are available.

Where possible you should also include:

• the period in which the money is available, for example 1 July 2005 – 30 June 2006; and
• itemised breakdown of budget against the various components of the strategy, for example research, advertising, printing, design.

8. TIMELINE and RESPONSIBILITIES

The timeline should include a proposed start and finish date (if appropriate). Include any significant dates relevant to the strategy within this time, for example World No Tobacco Day, Multicultural Health Week etc.

Consideration should also be given to approval processes both internally and externally if dealing with another agency or group.

Detail the responsibilities for the implementation of the communication plan.

9. RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

This section describes the evaluation activities planned to measure the success of the Communication Strategy.

Evaluation may include qualitative and quantitative measure.

Qualitative may include ad hoc feedback to project team, questions asked at information sessions, qualitative questions in surveys.

Quantitative may include number of staff attending information sessions, number of enquiries about program/project, quantitative results in surveys.

Evaluation results can be used to develop further stage communication activities.