

The public sector communications function

Definition:

The public sector communications function enables the effective flow of information and ideas between an agency and its internal and external publics, to facilitate participation, service delivery, and informed decision-making, and to build accountability and trust in government.

This is achieved by developing, delivering and evaluating public agency communications based on good practice communications techniques, supported by the principles of integrity and neutrality of the public service.

Rationale:

Effective communication enables an informed and participating public:



COMMUNICATIONS IS A SUCCESS MULTIPLIER CONTRIBUTING TO PUBLIC SECTOR AGENCIES ACHIEVING THEIR OUTCOMES.



Why is effective communication important to participation, improved decision-making and accountability?

Participation:

- Public sector communication is a service for citizens. The guiding principle is openness.
- Effective public sector communication is a dialogue, engaging with individuals and communities at all levels and helping them voice their views and opinions.
- Agencies should be credible, efficient and prompt disseminators of authoritative information. They should answer questions accurately, honestly, and completely.
- A clear and positive (not misleading) presentation of government policies and achievements is important in maintaining the trust and confidence of the public.
- Modern technology offers agencies many tools for direct, unmediated communications with the public. These need to be used effectively.

Informed decision-making and service design:

- Good communication is essential for effective consultation and engagement, informing policy-making and service design, and ultimately leading to better policy and services.
- Communicating clearly and credibly in a co-ordinated way enables citizens to make decisions, particularly in a public safety or emergency situation.
- Agencies therefore need close integration of the policy development, service delivery, and communications functions. Communication is a core part of the process of policy and service development and is critical to effective management of public safety or emergency situations.

Accountability:

- Citizens can judge the quality of decisions and the delivery of services that affect their lives using information given by government.
- Agencies must be accountable for what they do, be prepared to explain and defend decisions, and also to admit mistakes.
- Agencies should develop communications strategies that link communication explicitly to the achievement of their outcomes.
- Political neutrality is a cornerstone of public sector communications.



WITH EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION, GREATER TRUST CAN BE BUILT AMONG GOVERNMENT, THE GENERAL PUBLIC, AND THE MEDIA.

GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION NEEDS TO MEET PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS AND BE A CREDIBLE SOURCE OF INFORMATION FOR CITIZENS, PARTICULARLY IN PUBLIC SAFETY OR EMERGENCY SITUATIONS.

GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION NEEDS TO BE AS GOOD AS THE BEST IN ANY SECTOR.

