

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS

ICURR LITERATURE SUMMARY NO. 7

July 1999

**Prepared by Keiko Nittel
Research Assistant, ICURR**

BACKGROUND

During the 1990's communication became synonymous with results in both government and community. If citizens are to participate more in civic life, government officials must meet the growing challenge of disseminating essential up-to-date public information in a timely fashion, and facilitating citizen input.

Communication strategies have subsequently become recognized as useful tools by local governments. Effective internal communication results in employee satisfaction and increased productivity, while good external communication is linked to strong supportive partnerships between governments and outside agencies and/or citizens.

This summary reviews a selection of documents which focus on communication modes and strategies for municipal government. Drawn from Canadian and American experiences, the documents in this summary are organized under the following four categories:

- Communication Strategies
- Connecting Citizens and Municipal Government
- Service Provision
- Media Relations

ORGANIZATION

This document assembles a selection of existing resources on communication strategies which are available through the ICURR library. In choosing publications for inclusion in this document, the following criteria were considered: currency, Canadian content or relevance, and the potential for practical application by municipalities. Entries are presented beginning with the most recent works in each section. While this summary of available resources on communication strategies is wide-ranging, it is by no means exhaustive.

ICURR LITERATURE SUMMARIES

ICURR Literature Summaries are an information service provided by ICURR. The intent of these summaries is to provide an overview of key resources available through ICURR on topics of interest and relevance to Canadian municipalities.

© 1999 by the Intergovernmental Committee on Urban and Regional Research (ICURR).
No part of this document may be reproduced without permission of the copyright owner.

OTHER ICURR LITERATURE SUMMARIES

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| June 1998 | <i>Alternative Guidelines and Practices for Municipal Planning and Development (No. 1)</i> |
| July 1998 | <i>Healthy Cities, Healthy Communities (No. 2)</i> |
| July 1998 | <i>Performance Measurement and Program Delivery (No. 3)</i> |
| August 1998 | <i>Remediation and Redevelopment of Former Industrial Sites (No. 4)</i> |
| May 1999 | <i>Safe City and Crime Prevention Strategies (No. 5)</i> |
| June 1999 | <i>Causes and Consequences of Urban Sprawl (No. 6)</i> |

Comité intergouvernemental de recherches
urbaines et régionales **CIRUR**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Communication Strategies

| | |
|--|---|
| <i>Nouveau guide de la communication municipale.</i> (1997) | 4 |
| <i>Effective Communication: A Local Government Guide.</i> (1994)..... | 5 |
| <i>Developing a Communications Strategy for Your Municipality.</i> (1992 | 7 |

Connecting Citizens and Municipal Governments

| | |
|---|----|
| <i>Encouraging Community Involvement.</i> (1997)..... | 8 |
| <i>Connecting Citizens and Their Government: Civility, Responsibility and Local Democracy.</i> (1996) | 9 |
| <i>Reconnecting with Citizens and Rebuilding Confidence in Local Government.</i> (1995) | 11 |

Service Provision

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>Keeping the Public Informed and Supportive of Your Project.</i> (1997) | 13 |
| <i>Practical Promotion: Strategies for Improving Services and Image.</i> (1992)..... | 14 |

Media Relations

| | |
|---|----|
| <i>Media Relations: A Guidebook for Effective Communications for Public Officials.</i> (1992) | 15 |
| <i>Effective Public Relations Can Make Life Easier for Grassroots Officials.</i> (1991)..... | 17 |

| | |
|-------------------------|----|
| APPENDICES | 18 |
|-------------------------|----|

| | |
|-----------------------|----|
| CONTACTS | 21 |
|-----------------------|----|

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Penven, Françoise and Odette Lupien. 1997. *Nouveau guide de la communication municipale*. Sainte-Foy, Quebec: Ministère des Affaires municipales du Québec. (107 pages, bibliography, ICURR Document MA 079, FRENCH).

Purpose

A tool for developing effective communication policies and plans at the municipal level of government.

Key Definition(s)

A *communication plan* is a strategy for sending messages to and receiving messages from a target public. A *communications policy* is an ensemble of principles, objectives, procedures, and directives for the internal and external communications of an organization. *Protocol* is an assembly of etiquette rules for presiding at official ceremonies and events.

Summary

Municipal governments rely on quality internal and external communications to function effectively and maintain citizen support. Honest, coherent and well structured communications facilitate citizen confidence in government and community support of government decisions. This guide assists municipalities in developing communications policies and plans. Composed of two parts, the guide discusses communication processes, and explains the methods, tools, activities, and techniques for establishing effective communications.

Key Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

Municipalities have a legal obligation to communicate with citizens, since they make decisions for and act on behalf of the public. The guide concludes that communication needs to be a priority in government organizations.

The guide recommends using communication strategies to ensure that both municipal staff and the public are kept up-to-date on government news. Effective communication methods are based on structured communications, including both formal and informal exchanges, to keep employees, organizations, and the different publics informed.

Municipalities cannot function effectively without effective communication skills. Communication strategies are needed to determine the needs of the public, and to promote the services, programs, and projects offered to fulfil those needs.

A communication policy is the precursor of efficient, effective, and coherent communication strategies. The role of a communications policy is to:

- define the mission, position, values, and priorities of a municipality
- determine the role of communication within the municipal context
- designate the person(s) or department(s) responsible for municipal communications
- delineate the nuances between political and administrative information

- define the purpose, role, limits, and subjects of internal and external communications
- provide direction and procedures for dealing with the media, production of materials, publicity, and internal information activities.

A communication plan details strategies for efficient implementation of the municipal communication policy. The guide outlines four steps to developing an effective communication plan:

- Step 1: Determine the context of the plan; define goals; and define the public
- Step 2: Formulate the plan; define strategies for reaching goals
- Step 3: Implement the plan
- Step 4: Evaluate the plan.

The guide also recommends that municipalities use a variety of methods to publicize information. Written communications include municipally published materials (such as brochures, calendars, and citizens' guides) as well as media-published materials (such as newspaper articles). Audio-visual methods are effective means of transmitting information to a broad audience, particularly through television and radio. Public announcements permit municipalities to control the diffusion of information. Consultations (such as public meetings) facilitate person-to-person contact between citizens and the officials who administer their city.

Protocol (regulating staff etiquette during interaction with the media and the public) is also an effective way of preventing undesirable incidents or frustrations at ceremonies, news conferences and public meetings.

Part 1: processus communicationnel; Part 2: moyens, outils, activites et instruments de communication; fiches techniques; Part 3: aspects juridiques de la communication en milieu municipal.

Wheeler, Kenneth M. (ed.) 1994. *Effective Communication: A Local Government Guide*. Washington, DC: International City/County Management Association (ICMA). (258 pages, bibliography, ICURR Document MA 226, English).

Purpose

To offer local government practitioners information and guidelines on communication strategies and skills.

Key Definition(s)

Communication involves listening to and passing on information. Good communicators are almost always good listeners. *Listening* goes beyond just not talking. It also involves "actively seeking to hear other people's messages." (p.13) *Identity* is what an entity really is. *Image* is the public's perception of an entity - what people think it is. (p.29) A *communication program* is a process where issues are defined, and a plan is developed, implemented and evaluated. *REPACE* is an acronym for the six steps to developing a successful communication strategy: research, evaluation of the research, planning, action, communication, and evaluation of the program.

Summary

Effective communication is essential in achieving results in both government and community. Local government officials “are working in a world of empowered citizens who are quite ready to take whatever information is at their disposal and mount an informational counter-attack to achieve their goals.” (p.13) This book teaches government practitioners how to turn everyday communication into effective communication. It identifies the four important publics with which government practitioners interact: the citizen, elected official, local government team, and news media. The book also outlines the tools and techniques required for communication planning and staffing, interpersonal communication, effective presentations, local government publications, and cable television productions. At the end of each chapter a checklist summarizes the key points.

Key Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

The book finds that good communication gets results. Governments therefore benefit from improving relations between local citizens, elected officials, government employees, and news media.

The book also finds that government interactions with citizens serve to promote greater participation in civic life. Citizens groups (such as neighbourhood associations) can be strong allies in efforts to bolster government mandates and boost government capacity to provide better local services.

Elected officials represent their communities and should thus keep up-to-date on issues within their communities, including how citizen complaints are handled and how problems are resolved.

Employee loyalty is fostered through strong communication within organizations. Managers would be well advised to survey their staff to find out what is on their minds, and to always strive to keep them informed on municipal issues. Employees who actually do the job rather than simply oversee operations should be recognized for their importance in municipal problem-solving processes.

Good media relations are essential in keeping the public informed and supportive of local government. News media should be dealt with professionally and honestly.

Communication programs are most effective with limited groups of people, and should be ambitious, attainable, and measurable.

Interpersonal communication involves both formal and informal methods of sending messages. Officials should be aware of both verbal and non-verbal behavior when interacting and exchanging information. Individuals should develop a personal style for sending and receiving messages that is open, honest, direct, and flexible.

When using presentations to communicate, presenters should know their audience and customize their presentations accordingly. Government officials should adhere to their organization’s policy on public speaking.

The guide recommends keeping local government publications simple, clear, and identifiable.

Cable television is an effective medium for instant contact between citizens and local government. Television communication programs, however, require a commitment of funds, staff, equipment, and resources to successfully provide community information.

Chapter 1: Effective management means effective communication; Chapter 2: Identity and image of local government; Chapter 3: Local citizen: voter, taxpayer, and customer; Chapter 4: Communicating with elected officials; Chapter 5: Employees: the local government team; Chapter 6: Working with the news media; Chapter 7: Communication planning and staffing; Chapter 8: Interpersonal communication; Chapter 9: Effective presentations; Chapter 10: Local government publications; Chapter 11: Role of cable television.

Evans, Joanne Young. 1992. *Developing a Communications Strategy for Your Municipality*. Mississauga, Ontario: Association of Municipal Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO) (48 pages, bibliography, ICURR Document MA 442, English).

Purpose

To aid in the development of municipal communication strategies.

Key Definition(s)

A *communications strategy* is a plan for improving an organization's ability to effectively convey messages to both internal and external groups.

Summary

Organizations reap benefits from good communication in terms of better productivity in the workplace, and a more knowledgeable and informed public. Good communication in an organization is often the product of a coherent plan or strategy. Based on the City of Waterloo, Ontario Communication Strategy, this guide provides guidelines for developing communication strategies. The guide suggests a ten-step process for creating a communications plan, and defines its five key elements. The guide also provides estimates on the potential costs of a communication strategy, and steps for its implementation.

Key Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

The guide concludes that a strong, effective communications strategy is essential in limiting the number of crises a municipality might face, and when they do occur, can make crisis management easier.

A ten-step process for developing a communication strategy is outlined as follows:

- Step 1: Get a team together
- Step 2: Agree on priorities
- Step 3: Set up an internal survey
- Step 4: Set up an external survey
- Step 5: Conduct a print audit
- Step 6: Conduct a public opinion survey
- Step 7: Examine related issues
- Step 8: Draft the report and critical path
- Step 9: Build council and senior management commitment

Step 10: Evaluate and monitor.

The guide also outlines the five key elements of an effective a communication strategy: positioning; visual identity; coordination/production process; distribution of communications; and communications initiatives.

Once completed and approved, a communication strategy is implemented. Policies and procedures should then be developed to establish realistic target dates, and address budgeting implications.

Part 1: Why is a communications strategy important?; Part 2: What's the process?; Part 3: Structuring your report; Part 4: What are the critical elements?; Part 5: How much will it cost?; Part 6: How do we carry this out?; Part 7: Crisis communication; Part 8: Recommended book list.

CONNECTING CITIZENS AND MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS

Smither, Michael J. 1997. "Encouraging Community Involvement". *Municipal World* 107 (2):3-5,12-17. (9 pages, ICURR Document MG 109, English).

Purpose

Outlines ways of encouraging citizen participation in local government.

Key Definition(s)

Democracy "is best addressed when a citizen is a unit of control, and facts reach the citizen in understandable form, and the citizen's opinions translate into government action." (p.3. A *plebiscite* is an expression of opinion that has no statutory weight. (p.14)

Summary

In a democratic society, it is imperative to maintain accountability and a community of interest. This February 1997 article outlines ways in which local governments can encourage citizen participation. It provides examples of techniques which municipalities have employed to encourage people to express their opinions on local government issues, and outlines methods which local governments can use to provide information to the public.

Key Findings, Conclusions and Recommendation

In today's society citizens are too often dependent on local media to translate information regarding local government issues. When participating in local government, citizens should be knowledgeable and attempt to understand the system and its operations, and be aware of their rights and responsibilities.

The article recommends using positive methods to encourage citizens to act socially responsible, and to reward people "for civic acts demonstrating consideration for others." (p.4. One such communication method is a phone-in system used by citizens to report acts of civic kindness and responsibility.

Governments are also advised to identify citizen/customer attitudes regarding levels of service, and to allow citizens to suggest service improvements.

In situations where groups (such as citizen pressure groups and ratepayers associations) display negative attitudes toward local government, clear two-way communication is required to address citizen concerns. Local governments need to acknowledge that the objectives of a particular group may not be in the interests of the larger public.

Citizen participation programs should encourage individuals to contribute and express opinions. Local governments can facilitate this kind of input through platforms such as scribbling walls, postcard schemes, and quiz cards. Plebiscites, facilitated by modern methods and communication modes such as phone-in lines and e-mails, are another means of allowing citizens to “vote” on municipal issues. Municipal information offices can distribute civic information through newsletters, faxes, cable TV, and the Internet.

Government officials must recognize the economic and social diversity of citizens when developing policy. In order to successfully foster effective citizen participation, the article recommends that local governments:

- research the attitude and feelings of target audiences
- carefully review the circumstances that have contributed to the opinions of individuals and groups
- explore alternatives to heal serious rifts.

Discusses democracy; public opinion; urban reality; education; ratepayer diversity; Simcoe seminar; external customer service survey; citizen pressure groups; ratepayer associations; citizen participation; communication; Internet; cost reduction; volunteers; teenagers; elections; voter turnout; freedom of the press; employment of local residents; economic development; emergency preparedness; alternative dispute resolution; council-local boards; public employee recognition; legislative process.

ICURR Intergovernmental Committee on Urban and Regional Research

National League of Cities. 1996. *Connecting Citizens and Their Government: Civility, Responsibility, and Local Democracy*. Washington, DC: National League of Cities. (41 pages, ICURR Document MA 418, English).

Purpose

Guide for connecting citizens and government through increased citizen involvement in government life and public affairs.

Key Definitions

Democracy is the framework of society that emphasizes civility and responsibility. In a democratic society, citizens are involved in decision-making and problem-solving, and local elected officials are the “caretakers” of community public life. (p.3) *Civic journalism* is the media helping public life by renewing interest in civic affairs, while giving citizens a voice and encouraging involvement.

Summary

In a democratic society, municipal officials are responsible for establishing two-way communication between citizens and local government. Involving citizens in local government enhances government effectiveness. Section one defines the stakes for local officials in creating a better public life at the community level. Section two outlines the potential roles that municipal officials can play in strengthening the relationship between citizens and government. Section three discusses the role of the media, and provides advice for working with the media to promote citizen engagement. Section four emphasizes the importance of involving youth in the decision-making process.

Key Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

The authors found that Americans are significantly less involved in their communities than they were a generation ago. Citizens tend to feel disconnected from the ruling forces that control many aspects of their lives. This alienation often results in anger and distrust of government, which serve to undermine effective democracy and public problem-solving.

Active involvement in civic affairs serves to create public trust. This document therefore recommends that citizens be educated, engaged, and empowered to take action within their communities.

The document outlines four roles for local elected officials in connecting citizens and their government:

- *As models* that set the tone for civil discourse and productive problem-solving by maintaining a spirit of civility and cooperation
- *As messengers* that encourage people in the community to play an active role in community-building initiatives
- *As shapers* of processes, programs, and interventions that engage citizens
- *As leaders* skilled in bringing people together, building trust, and energizing citizens.

The media plays an important and influential role in the relationship between citizens and government. (p.25) Media coverage can be a tool to help reconnect citizens with their governments, and encourage people to become more active in their communities. An eight-step strategy to build better media relations is outlined:

- *Step 1:* Develop a working relationship
- *Step 2:* Work closely with the media
- *Step 3:* Look at how you do business
- *Step 4:* Invite the media to meetings
- *Step 5:* Hold special briefing sessions for the media
- *Step 6:* Reach out to a variety of media
- *Step 7:* Include the media in any public input processes
- *Step 8:* Survey the media.

Local governments can “make their own news” by providing information about government action. Examples include government newsletters, public relations vehicles, cable access programs, e-mail, web sites, and electronic kiosks.

Youth involvement in local planning and decision-making is recommended as an essential ingredient of citizen participation. Involvement early in life fosters participation in the future,

and makes it a way of life. A successful youth program requires a diverse population and a mix of initiatives to address a wide range of community needs. Examples of youth programs include community improvement projects, youth advisory boards, youth service councils, and summer internship positions.

Part 1: Introduction; Part 2: What municipal officials can do; Part 3: Role of the media; Part 4: Youth involvement; Part 5: Conclusion.

League of California Cities. 1995. *Reconnecting with Citizens and Rebuilding Confidence in Local Government*. Sacramento, Calif.: League of California Cities. (149 pages, bibliography, ICURR Document MA 314, English).

Purpose

Provides strategies to help city governments re-engage residents and business people in solving community problems.

Key Definition(s)

Communication tools are the means of reaching an audience, and include newsletters, meetings, cable television programs, media relations, debates, hotlines, and advisory committees. *Community relations* refer to an organization's planned, active, and continuing participation within a community in order to benefit both the organization and the community. *Customer care programs* help local government get closer to its "customers" and foster better customer service, customer cooperation, and long-term financial and political support.

Summary

This document is a tool kit for reviving the relationship between citizens and local government by opening lines of communication and re-engaging residents and business people in community problem-solving. The kit is composed of six folders: the first four discuss public relations campaigns in terms of research, planning, strategies, and evaluation; the fifth profiles a "Heart of the City" campaign educate the general public about the role of cities, and to encourage citizens to become more involved in local government; the final folder provides further references.

Key Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

Good communication helps local governments build understanding, cooperation and citizen support. It is therefore important for local governments to maintain ongoing communication with residents. Surveying citizens provides “a steady finger on the pulse of the community and the mood of its residents.” (Folder 1) Community Participation Programs open lines of communication by “involv[ing] residents and ... creat[ing] a channel for communicating citizen ideas, needs and concerns to city staff and city council.” (Folder 1)

Successful communication plans should be focused, measurable, and results-oriented. A successful communications plan:

- defines the city’s goals
- breaks down the existing community into manageable groups or audiences
- conducts research to learn audience perceptions, desires, needs, wants, and dreams
- establishes the context of the project, then maps out how to proceed
- defines the desired project outcome
- uses communication tools effectively and creatively to get the right message to the right audience
- evaluates whether the city has accomplished its communications objectives.

The role of government organizations is to state and clarify problems, not to sell their solutions to the public. The document recommends that citizens be involved in public processes and be asked to help find solutions.

Communication strategies should allow for citizen feedback, as well as provide information. The kit recommends communication tools such as surveys, meetings, response cards in publications, union meetings, informal questioning, call-in radio and cable TV shows, hotlines, voice mail, and town meetings. Using the Internet to provide public access to municipal information is also deemed effective.

City programs to encourage citizens to participate in and contribute to their community include youth education programs that explain the roles and responsibilities of local government, and neighbourhood programs that involve residents in government service delivery and community problem-solving.

A 1993 League of California Survey concluded that local government troubles go beyond budget deficits. In general, citizens do not understand what cities do, and do not trust city government. A “Heart of the City” campaign addresses these problems using a three-pronged approach: educate the public about local government; engage citizens in solving problems with their local governments; and re-create a sense of community and common good. (Folder 6)

Part 1: Introduction; Part 2: Research; Part 3: Planning; Part 4: Strategies; Part 5: Evaluation; Part 6: Heart of the city; Part 7: Contacts, etc.

SERVICE PROVISION

Nisich, Anthony J. 1997. "Keeping the Public Informed and Supportive of Your Project". *Public Works: Engineering, Construction, & Maintenance* 128 (6):46-49. (4 pages, ICURR Document BG 060, English).

Purpose

To share some of the tools used to promote a positive project image and facilitate project completion.

Key Definition(s)

Internal coordination relies on communication with the project team, keeping all parties informed, and an effective team environment which includes city staff, council and managers. *Community coordination* involves keeping the community informed and requires the ability to communicate with large audiences.

Summary

The task of keeping the public informed and supportive of programs and projects is a difficult one for public officials. Poor communications can plague a project with controversy. This May 1997 article examines the seven tools used by the City of Santa Clarita, California to successfully implement a capital improvement program. These tools include coordination of agencies and utilities, coordination with impacted businesses and residents, internal coordination and communication, management of contractors, coordination with the press, community communication, and quality improvement.

Key Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

Establishing a good working relationship is essential in maintaining citizen support for a project. The author recommends asking outside agencies and companies for their input, and assessing their needs.

Contractors working for the city reflect on the city, therefore their activities should promote and maintain a positive image. Construction workers should adhere to a code of conduct, and communicate clearly and considerately with the public.

Residents and businesses, who will undoubtedly be inconvenienced by project construction, should be included in the project early on. Written materials inform, and hotlines encourage communication; these promote a positive image, educate the public, and reduce controversy and complaints.

Internal communications are also important. Project teams should be established to involve employees in project design and implementation.. Team members make site visits, attend briefings, and keep council up-to-date. This will result in an effective well-informed team which is well prepared to communicate with the public and ready to deal with potential problems.

The article recommends using the press to send city messages. A Public Information Office can circulate press releases, maintain a good working relationship with the press, and provide training on press relations to project managers.

The article concludes that keeping the community informed is essential for maintaining citizen support. The author recommends providing residents with information early in the planning processes and acknowledging their concerns before and during project implementation. Completed projects should subsequently be assessed. Employees, businesses, and residents should be invited to identify problems and make suggestions for improving future projects.

Sections on coordination with outside agencies and utilities; coordination with impacted businesses and residents; internal coordination and communication; management of contractors; coordination with the press; community coordination; quality improvement.

Stoner, Randall C. 1992. *Practical Promotion: Strategies for Improving Services and Image*. Washington, DC: International City/County Management Association (ICMA). (257 pages, ICURR Document GG 088, English).

Purpose

To help local officials promote and improve municipal services.

Key Definition(s)

Promotion is the advocacy of selected ideas through carefully chosen words, images, and pictures, and the act of sending specific messages to a target audience in the hope that some specific goal will be achieved. (p.33) Types of promotions include marketing, public information, public relations, and media relations. *Quality Improvement Programs (QIPs)* help governments enhance services by making better use of their most valuable promoters - employees. *Identity* is the sum of what a person, company, institution, or community really is - the numerous intrinsic things that make up the entity.

Summary

Promotion is an effective tool for improving government services. Effective promotional strategies rely on good communication between government staff and citizens. This book provides strategies that help municipalities improve the services they offer their citizens. Using case studies, the book identifies the need and opportunity for promotion; provides steps in organizing promotions; and describes how promotions can be carried out successfully.

Key Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

Communication with the public is an obligation of government agencies. Citizens, who ultimately guide and control government, should understand what their government is doing and what it might do in the future. Promotion can be an effective tool for providing citizens with public information.

Promotion goals include:

- improving services and building excellent staffs
- encouraging the use of services and facilities
- encouraging participation in government processes and decisions
- developing pride and a positive social fabric
- reducing negative impacts beyond municipal control
- developing cooperation for unpopular government actions
- responding to forced decision points effectively
- maintaining a healthy and growing local economy
- developing tolerance for and pride in cultural diversity
- enlisting help from outside powers.

Quality service is a precondition to any kind of promotion. The act or process of improving services is a solid promotion in itself. Quality improvement programs (QIPs) can help governments enhance services by making better use of their most valuable promoters - employees. Establishing an internal culture which emphasizes the importance of customer service is therefore essential to QIPs.

There are five steps to developing a promotional plan:

- Step 1: Determine the messages government is sending to the community
- Step 2: Identify additional or alternative messages
- Step 3: Decide how to send the desired messages and implement the plan
- Step 4: Evaluate the success of the promotion
- Step 5: Make recommendations for the next campaign.

Successful promotions have the support of both citizens and government. Government agencies can save costs by working in partnership (co-promoting) with local businesses, not-for-profit organizations, local television and radio stations, state and federal agencies, colleges, and universities.

Part 1: Setting the stage for promotion; Part 2: Promoting to citizens and service users; Part 3: Marketing for economic development; Part 4: Promoting promotions.

MEDIA RELATIONS

Honeycutt, Louanna. 1992. "Media Relations: A Guidebook for Effective Communications for Public Officials". *Assessment Digest 14 (2):2-4,6-7,9-10.* (9 pages, ICURR Document GG 064, English).

Purpose

To provide public officials with a better understanding of the media process; and to help public officials develop effective communication skills.

Key Definition(s)

Public relations is defined as “a management function by an organization or individual which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of the organization or individual with the public interest, and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance.” (p.2) *Public information* reveals what, where, how and when the government is administering the business of the people. A *public* is a group of people who share a common cause, concern, interest, or like expertise, occupation, practice, or education. The *media* refers to the medium - newspapers, magazines, printed material, radio, and television- which transmits and relays human communications.

Summary

Public officials are in the business of administering government on behalf of citizens. Citizens therefore have the right to be kept informed of their government’s activities. Officials can take advantage of media contacts to effectively communicate with the greatest possible number of people in their community. This March/April 1992 article provides public officials with a better their understanding of the media as a tool for effective communication with the general public.

Key Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

Prior to establishing government-media relations, government agencies should first determine who they are; define their objectives; accept the media as a representative of the public; and know their public.

Public officials should then choose an appropriate news medium. Newspapers are an effective medium for they appeal to the reader’s intellect; are read by more than one family member; remain in the household an average of three days; and may be clipped. Radio and television appeal to eyes, ears, and emotions. Their impressions, however, are usually momentary and fleeting.

The article recommends that government officials familiarize themselves with available media outlets. Media staff should be introduced to government agencies, provided with a fact sheet ,and should receive a personal visit from agency staff. Good media relations are based on the cooperation of government agencies and reporters, so that fair and accurate news is printed and broadcast. Government officials can give reporters a “scoop” if they ask a question or initiate an interview. As other reporters begin to work on the story, however, they should all be answered with consistency and truthfulness. The author emphasizes the importance of maintaining government credibility.

The author also recommends using new releases to provide valuable publicity for government programs. Effective news releases should cover only one topic, be easily readable, and concise. A successful news release serves a useful purpose; is dignified; has public interest; tells the truth; stands on its own merits; and, is consistent. News conferences should be handled like news releases, and include everyone, not just selected members of the media.

Sections on knowing yourself, the media, and the public; understanding the news media; government agency-reporter relations; news releases; news conferences.

Landers, Susan J. 1991. “Effective Public Relations Can Make Life Easier for Grassroots Officials.” *NATaT’s Reporter No.112:4-7. (4 pages, ICURR Document MG 814, English).*

Purpose

To illustrate how local government officials and members of the community can use the media to effectively communicate with each other.

Key Definition(s)

NATaT is the acronym for the National Association of Towns and Townships.

Summary

This June 1991 insert discusses effective media relations for grassroots officials. It concentrates on how officials can use local media to publicize local issues. Good communication skills are essential in dealing with reporters. The article focuses on building strong relationships with reporters. Local officials are advised how to use local cable television programming (including public access shows) and radio, are informed of the benefits of a newsletter, and offered improvements to interview and communication skills.

Key Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

Cooperation among local officials and the news media is an essential part of keeping the public informed on civic issues. Good relationships lead to more effective communications and problem-solving, while keeping in mind the over-riding goal of community improvement.

When dealing with the media, local officials have the right to:

- have off-the record comments honoured as such
- expect corrections and retractions
- honourable and fair reporting
- privacy when at home or with family.

Cable television can be an effective forum for “increas[ing] visibility, gain[ing] support for an issue or educat[ing] a community.” (p.5) Local radio is also recommended as a communication medium for it is universally accessible and thus the main source of public information. Radio stations, particularly local non-profit radio stations, often provide programming with a community focus. Civic-minded radio programs can be provided with press releases and public information.

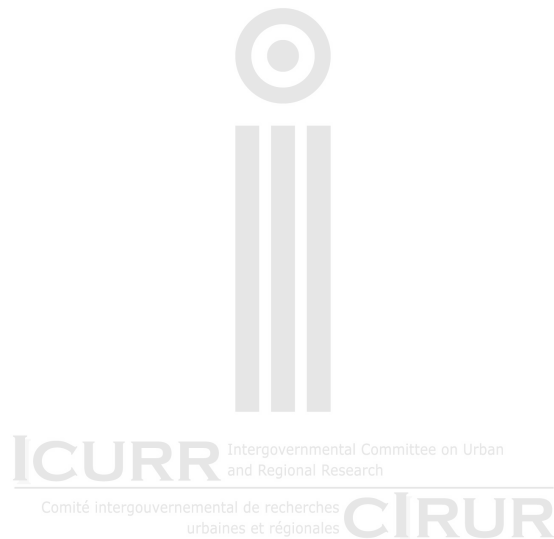
Newsletters are also recommended as a good way to get the word out to people, since there is never enough space or time in the area’s newspaper, radio, or television, to tell people everything they need to know.

The article concludes that public officials require strong interview skills in order to communicate effectively. Officials should therefore be well prepared, comfortable, in control, and positive during interviews.

Sections on: work with the local media, not against them; cable television stations are looking for a few good programs; spread the word with a community newsletter; radio stations provide custom programming; good communication skills are key; work to improve interview skills; put it in writing.

Appendix A

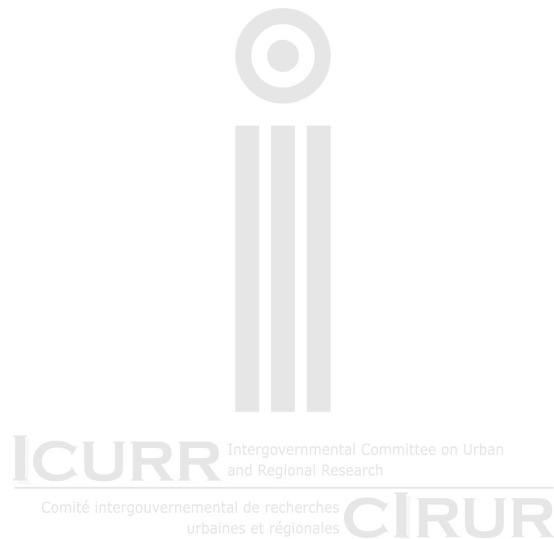
The Ten Commandments for Communications Situations



Source: Wheeler, Kenneth M. (ed.) 1994. Effective Communication: A Local Government Guide, p. 131.

Appendix B

Communication Policies for Narrowing the Communication Gap



Source: Wheeler, Kenneth M. (ed.) 1994. Effective Communication: A Local Government Guide, p. 75.

Appendix C

Public Project Information Objectives

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| | |
| Objective One | provide information to build trust and citizenship. |
| | |
| Objective Two | keep project promises |
| | |
| Objective Three | offer choices |
| | |
| Objective Four | keep public information integrated with project operations |
| | |
| Objective Five | commit constant re-evaluation and improvement |
| | |

Source: Stoner, Randall C. 1992. *Practical Promotion: Strategies for Improving Services and Image* p. 114.

ICURR Intergovernmental Committee on Urban
Comité intergouvernemental de recherches
urbaines et régionales CIRUR

CONTACTS

City of Santa Clarita, California

Building and Engineering Services Department
23920 Valencia Boulevard
Santa Clarita, CA 91355
USA
Tel (805) 255-4942

City-County Communications and Marketing Association (3CMA)

409 Third Street, SW
Washington, DC 20002-4414
USA

International City/County Management Association (ICMA)

777 North Capital Street, NE
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20002-4201
USA
Tel (202) 289-4562
Internet: www.icma.org/feddev

Quebec Ministry of Municipal Affairs

20, rue Pierre-Olivier Chauveau
Aile Cook, 2e etage
Quebec QC G1R 4J3
Tel (418) 691-2032
Fax (418) 644-6725



ICURR Intergovernmental Committee on Urban
and Regional Research
Comité intergouvernemental de recherches
urbaines et régionales CIRUR