# Project Management Fact Sheet:

## Developing a Project Communication Strategy

Version: 1.2, November 2008

**Department of Premier and Cabinet**

Tasmania
Explore the possibilities

Communication is a major component of a successful project. Without effective communication, Key Stakeholders in a project may miss out on vital information and may not understand why change is needed. The best way to approach communication is to develop a clearly planned approach or strategy.

## What is a Project Communication Strategy?

The aim of a Project Communication Strategy is to ensure ongoing commitment and support by all Key Stakeholders for all aspects of the project. It usually includes:

- Purpose of the Document/Plan – a brief statement about the plan and its intended use

- Background – a brief description of the background to the project and the outcomes to be achieved. This allows the Communication Strategy to exist as a stand-alone document

- Objective(s) - What the objective(s) of the Communication Strategy are

- Target Audience(s) - Who the target audience is for the Communication Strategy

- Key Messages - What the key messages are that you want stakeholders to understand and act upon

- Communication Tools - What Communication Tools have been identified as suitable for delivery throughout the project

- Communication Strategy Action Plan – an attachment to the Communication Strategy that identifies the Target Audience, Aims, Methods, Who, When and the Costs associated for each action

The strategies adopted may be formal, informal, detailed or broad, depending on the needs of the project (refer to the attached template for a *Communication Strategy Action Plan.*).

The document is usually maintained during the life of the project and may contain a marketing component aimed at those who will utilise the outputs from the project. For a large project, it may also be supported by an operational document known as the Communication Plan.

## What is a Communication Plan?

The Communication Plan is usually the working document that contains more detail about each strategy outlined in the Communication Strategy. For example, if presentations were to be provided throughout the state, the specific date, time, location, presenter(s), method of delivery and list of attendees would be documented in the Communication Plan rather than the Communication Strategy, as these details are usually subject to change.

## Why would you develop a Communication Strategy?

A Communication Strategy is developed to:

- raise awareness and understanding of the project throughout its development, in particular, how you intend to manage and communicate the key messages and content of the project to identified stakeholders and the target audiences

- provide the Project Sponsor, Steering Committee and senior management with a documented framework detailing which communication mechanisms/tools would be most appropriate for the identified stakeholders and target audiences

- ensure the communication of issues, implementation issues and project updates to key stakeholders

- provide a mechanism for seeking and acting on feedback to encourage the involvement of, and assist in 'selling' the project to, the Key Stakeholders

- identify the actions required for implementation of the strategy and associated costings

## When would you develop a Communication Strategy?

Approval to proceed to develop a Communication Strategy is usually obtained as a result of making an initial proposal (either verbal or written) to senior management, or directly as a result of a request from senior management.

The Communication Strategy:

- provides broad details of the background and outcomes of the project

- seeks endorsement of the approach and costing for the implementation of the strategy

## How do you develop a Communication Strategy?

For a large project, a Communication Strategy should be developed by conducting a number of meetings or brainstorming sessions involving (as a minimum) the Project Manager, Project Team members and key Departmental Communication/Media staff. For a small project, the Project Manager may develop the Communication Strategy.

## What you need before you start:

- Knowledge and understanding of the project

- Knowledge and understanding of the Key Stakeholders

- Knowledge and understanding of appropriate/types of communication methods

- Agreement to proceed with the development of the Communication Strategy from the Project Sponsor or senior management

## Optional:

- Any of the following optional documents – *Project Proposal*, *Project Business Case*, or *Project Business Plan*

- Departmental Project Management Guidelines

- Corporate/Business Plan for the Department/Business Unit

Based on the above information and the discussions held, the aim is to develop each of the following elements of the Communication Strategy and Action Plan:

- Target Audience

- Key Messages

- Communication Mechanisms/Tools

- Implementation Details – Who, When and Cost

## Who is the Target Audience?

The Target Audience is developed by examining the stakeholders for the project. These may have been defined using the table provided in the *Project Business Plan template* that has a list of classifications that may be adopted by a project to categorise groups of project stakeholders. Classifying stakeholders into groups allows communication strategies for like groups to be developed and implemented.

Page 3

Tasmanian Government Project Management Framework
Project Management Fact Sheet: Developing a Project Communication Strategy, Version: 1.2, November 2008

Think about each stakeholder group and identify the target audience within them. For example, a Review group, which comprises groups/organisations who need to review (or audit) the project and its outputs/outcomes. Stakeholders in this category could include Cabinet, Auditor General, Head of Agency, Probity Auditor, Technical Consultants, Budget Committee, Quality Consultants, or an Executive Management Group.

## What are the Key Messages for Stakeholders?

Identify the three or four key points you want stakeholders to understand and act upon

## Which Communication Tools are most suited?

There is a range of communication methods and tools that can be used to convey information to stakeholders. The most effective and appropriate tools may vary between stakeholders in the same project, or vary from one project to another and similarly, from one project phase to the next.

A variety of tools may be worth considering, including verbal, electronic and written. Examples of these different types of communication tools are provided in the *Tasmanian Government Project Management Guidelines.*

## What are the Implementation Details?

For each action in the Communication Strategy Action Plan, it is necessary to specify:

- Who will be responsible for implementing each action

- When the action must be implemented

- What are the costs associated with each action

## Who approves the Communication Strategy?

Approval for a Communication Strategy can be obtained from the Head of Agency, Corporate Client, Project Sponsor, Steering Committee or senior management. The size and public profile, however, will determine which of these persons or bodies should be approached. For example, for a small project, senior management and/or the Project Sponsor may approve the Communication Strategy. For a medium sized project, the Steering Committee may approve the strategy. And for a large project, the Communication Strategy may need to be approved by the Steering Committee, the Head of Agency, Inter Agency Steering Committee, Agency or whole of government Communications offices.

Once the Communication Strategy has been approved, it is important to:

- add the communication actions into the Project Plan with the appropriately assigned resource(s)

- add the costs for the communication actions into the Project Budget

## Where to get additional help

- Refer to the *Tasmanian Government Project Management Guidelines*

- Further information and resources are available from:

- www.communications.tas.gov.au

- www.egovernment.tas.gov.au

Page 4

Tasmanian Government Project Management Framework
Project Management Fact Sheet: Developing a Project Communication Strategy, Version: 1.2, November 2008

# Appendix - Project Communication Strategy Action Plan Example

***<Project Title> Communication Strategy Action Plan***

| Target Audience/ Stakeholder Group | Aim | Communication Tools | Who to Action? | By When? | Costs? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Identify the Target Audience by considering the following:<br><br>Who will benefit from the project?<br><br>Who are the Key Stakeholders?<br><br>Who are the stakeholder groups and the target audience within them? | What do you intend to communicate to the stakeholder(s) groups?<br><br>What are the key points stakeholder(s) groups need to understand and act upon? | What communication method /tools are most appropriate for the stakeholder(s) groups?<br><br>e.g. electronic, verbal written. | Who will be responsible for implementing each action? | When must the action be implemented? | What are the costs associated with each action? |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |