



***Adopted: 19 December 2012***

***Resolution: 520/12***

## **TENTERFIELD SHIRE COUNCIL COMMUNICATION PLAN**

### **The Benefits of Communication**

Effective communication provides a strong foundation upon which Councils can more effectively develop and maintain the community's assets.

If aligned with Council's operating goals and plans, effective communication can increase the speed at which we achieve these goals.

Effective communication with the community can provide the following benefits –

- Assists in building a positive reputation;
- Strengthens and bonds relationships with stakeholders;
- Generates community support and involvement;
- Improves customer satisfaction levels;
- Provides a platform of strength from which to manage any crisis;
- Attracts business and residents to the area;
- Improves staff morale and job satisfaction.

Easy to understand, good communication practice can reduce costs and increase community support. All of which make the day-to-day activities and long term goals and aims easier to achieve.

### **Principles of Good Communication**

#### **Visibility**

To commence or maintain a strong two-way communication relationship with the community it is important that Council activities are visible as much as possible. Visibility leads to recognition and acceptance plus it allows the community to see the breadth and value of Council's activities.

#### **Simplicity**

The community is busy with many aspects of their lives whether at work or home. Communication must be simple and straight forward.

## **Repetition**

Wherever possible a repetitive schedule should be devised for message placement to ensure it receives community consideration. The more a message is repeated the wider the audience will become.

## **Value**

Ensuring a message has a reasonable level of value for the recipient is paramount to gain their attention and interest. The rule of thumb here is that Council operating in a bureaucracy hold little value to the community but how the bureaucracy affects the community hold a high level of value. Therefore, messages should be structured with the community effect as their foundation.

## **Variety**

To ensure a message is received by the community at large it needs to be placed in a number of different communication mediums. The more mediums (website, newspapers, direct mail, On-hold phone messages) it appears in the wider its likely coverage will be.

## **Listening**

Good (and effective) communication requires two parties - the giver and the receiver. If you send a message you must also expect to receive some form of response at times. It is important that feedback on all issues is encouraged and processed. Nothing will dampen the community's enthusiasm quicker than the belief that they are not being listened to.

## **Consistency**

To build credibility and a positive reputation messages need to be consistent. If your messages are ALWAYS simple, hold a value for the recipient, encourage feedback and are placed in a variety of different places they will generate interest and earn respect at an increasing level each time they are placed.

## **Evaluation**

The only accurate way of knowing if your communication is good or not is to evaluate its effectiveness (and the best way to do that is to set a goal for each one and then evaluate if it has been achieved).

## **Community Stakeholder Groups**

In any community a number of different stakeholder groups exist, all of whom probably have different communication needs and expectations.

Whilst it may not be possible to meet all of these it is important that the Council's Communication system has a good balance and understanding of who the groups are.

Tenterfield Shire Community Stakeholder Groups can broadly be defined as:

Town residents  
Village residents  
Rural Residents

Farmers/primary producers  
Services Clubs  
Sporting groups  
Heritage, Art and Cultural Groups  
Educational Groups  
Ratepayers/Progress Associations  
Business, Tourism Operators and Industry community

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders  
Youth  
Children  
Aged  
People with a disability  
Women  
People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD).

## **Council's Branding**

It is important to ensure that the community is informed about Council and its activities so it is in all our interests to:

- Generate greater understanding of and support for Council activities;
- Increase community awareness of Council responsibilities;
- Increase community interest in Council activities;
- Improve community understanding of Local Government Governance and staff professionalism.

## **Communication Mediums**

What you say, how you say it and what communication medium you say it with all require equal consideration when trying to find the right balance between cost and effectiveness, consistency and repetition.

A further consideration is the impact communication can have and the fundamental requirement to ensure that you 'walk the talk'. A danger exists that Council's words are louder than their actions. Such a situation would quickly deem communication ineffective and create a strong negative reputation that may take quite some time to heal.

Another support consideration is 'visibility'. As a foundation it is good practice to ensure, where appropriate, that Council's activities are highly visible - telling your community about the good work Council is doing on their behalf is a positive initiative but showing them your work in action is ultimately more powerful.

And remember, the whole of an organisation is responsible for communication and service standards.

A number of tried and tested communication mediums can be used by Local Government however the speed at which consumers are adopting new media requires constant consideration of available alternatives.

Evaluating the impact of the communications mediums used will provide the most accurate view of what return upon investment can be achieved by different methods.

Different audiences/stakeholders will access and use different communication mediums. It should also be noted that different communities will respond to messages and mediums used in quite varied manners. Nevertheless here's a quick guide to each potential communication medium:

## **Customer Service**

### *Outline*

All customer interactions (by any medium) communicate a powerful message. Done well the message is positive, done poorly and the message is negative and may then take some time and effort to adjust.

As no amount of communication can overcome poor customer service experiences it is important that high standards are set, monitored and maintained to support and communication activities, especially if the communication creates a community spotlight.

### *Strengths*

Can create a strong level of community support (can even adjust negative attitudes or opinions)

### *Weaknesses*

Needs to be constantly of a high level

## **Visibility**

### *Outline*

Creating community awareness of the work undertaken by the inclusion or addition of signage on Council equipment, vehicles, facilities etc. Note the message must extend beyond just a name or logo listing and include a statement of achievement: *"This facility is provided by and(or) maintained by your Tenterfield Shire Council"*.

### *Strengths*

Can be portable and therefore changeable

Easy to know where and when to place

Can be manipulated to suit project status and available budgets

### *Weaknesses*

Places Council workers 'on show' and therefore high customer service standards must be maintained

May generate additional enquiries or complaints from people previously unaware of Council's responsibility

Where signage is permanent the facility must be maintained to a high standard

## **Websites**

### *Outline*

A good Council website should both provide information about Council, its services and the area it represents plus provide the ability for visitors to conduct Council business online (i.e. make payments, answer FAQs, book activities). It should also provide interaction opportunities.

### *Strengths*

Can be regularly updated using internal resources.

Can be easily accessed by anyone, anytime.

Allows extensive information to be displayed.

Can reduce Council costs and resources (if well structured).

### *Weaknesses*

Can be initially expensive.

Requires constant monitoring and updating.

Must be accurate at all times.

## **Newspaper Column**

### *Outline*

Paid advertising space that is used to place editorial style messages - usually regularly.

### *Strengths*

Allows Councils to structure the messages.

Cannot be adjusted by any third party.

Can access large readership numbers.

### *Weaknesses*

May not achieve high readership levels.

Can be costly.

Is surrounded by other messages demanding reader attention.

## **Annual Reports**

### *Outline*

A legislatively comprehensive requirement.

A printed summary of the year's activities, achievements and financial performance may be of interest.

### *Strengths*

Structured to a known format.

Can provide a comprehensive insight into Council and its operations.

### *Weaknesses*

Little content flexibility  
Offers limited tangible return on investment

## **Promotional Brochures**

### *Outline*

Printed information insights on a variety of topics.

### *Strengths*

Is a familiar communication medium with the community  
Flexible format choices  
Easy to distribute  
Wide market appeal  
Can be inexpensive to produce

### *Weaknesses*

No room for alteration once printed  
Needs to be manually distributed

## **Council Newsletter**

### *Outline*

Regular newspaper style publication distributed to residents

### *Strengths*

Huge content flexibility  
Allows Council to place content unedited

### *Weaknesses*

Can be costly to produce and distribute  
Requires large amount of content and can be time consuming  
Content must be accurate and regularity achieved

## **Signage**

### *Outline*

Visual graphics created to display information (most notably, but not only, directional)

### *Strengths*

Placement opportunities abound  
High longevity with little maintenance needs  
Can be placed at sites that other communication forms cannot access  
Offer strong stand out and awareness levels

### *Weaknesses*

Can have space limitations for messages  
Can be expensive to replace/update

## **Community Notice Boards**

### *Outline*

An open noticeboard that anyone can access within the community to view.

### *Strengths*

Can be managed through the ratepayers association or other reliable group.

### *Weaknesses*

Needs good profile locations (and quality content)

Can be abused if not monitored and content may be seen as being Council endorsed.

## **Events**

### *Outline*

Any activity that is open to community access (including online events)

### *Strengths*

Strong interactivity opportunities

Places Council within the community

### *Weaknesses*

Can be expensive

Reduces ability to manage interactions

## **Media Releases**

### *Outline*

Unpaid media exposure (sometimes driven by a Council, other times initiated by the media) of newsworthy stories

### *Strengths*

Third party content (therefore often attracts greater interest and belief)

May provide access to large market

Low cost (although time and resources strain may be high)

### *Weaknesses*

Content dictated by media outlet

Often info required within tight deadlines

## **New Media** (Twitter, Facebook, Linked In etc)

### *Outline*

Electronic media and social media forums that provide (usually online) exposure and message placement opportunities

Due to the fast moving and almost ever-changing structures of the new media outlets it is suggested to first refer to for up-to-date new media usage guidelines as may be issued by Division of Local Government

## **Public Meetings**

### *Outline*

Formal or informal meetings that are open to the public

### *Strengths*

Provides strong interaction opportunities

Often provide a barometer of the interest and opinions of the community on specific issues

Provide a good platform to gather feedback

### *Weaknesses*

Can be hijacked by vocal minorities

Can be time consuming and resource rich

## **Personal Contact**

### *Outline*

Any form of personal interaction between Council staff and representatives and the community

### *Strengths*

Provides strong interaction opportunities

Allows issues to be (sometimes) immediately resolved

Has strong impact on community

### *Weaknesses*

Requires skilful negotiation at times

Can be time consuming

## **Direct Mail**

### *Outline*

Bulk mail-out of communication messages via hard copy or electronic means

### *Strengths*

High exposure with minimal resource requirements

Can be quickly prepared and distributed (especially electronically)

Flexible message formats

### *Weaknesses*

Often has low readership/response levels

## **Uniforms**

### *Outline*

Any consistent clothing or body 'art' that promotes Council or its operations

### *Strengths*

Strong conversation starter

Large message application area

Has strong personal characteristics

Communicates with community and staff

*Weaknesses*

Can look unprofessional if uniform is not maintained.

**Rate Notices**

*Outline*

Any form of promotional material included with rates notice mailout

*Strengths*

Provides access to all ratepayers

Provides a timely opportunity to outline how Council rates are used

*Weaknesses*

Is enclosed with a request for payment (the rate notice)

Limited to rate payers only

Can be criticised as propaganda

**Presentations**

*Outline*

Any opportunity to address a group of people

*Strengths*

Message managed by presenter

Portable and flexible

*Weaknesses*

Requires experienced, skilled or trained personnel

Audience often limited by venue size/location

**Internal Communication Plan**

*Outline*

A formal plan of approach addressing internal communications

*Strengths*

Provides a single focus and ready reference

Can generate greater consistency

Encourages wide usage/involvement

Improves evaluation accuracy

*Weaknesses*

Can be difficult to develop

**Communication Guidelines**

The following key guidelines will assist you with frequent and 'popular' Local Government communications -

## **Community engagement**

The key is to provide incentives for 'attendance/involvement'.

Your message should have a strong message about the benefits of attendance/involvement and feedback/input methods must be simple to access and easy to complete. They should also be as convenient as possible for the community.

If possible include an exclusive that can only be accessed at the 'meeting' or via the community engagement process.

Council will incorporate all Community Engagement outcomes in the Operational Plan or other plans as relevant.

## **Publicising events**

Include specific event segments of traditional and new media where people are looking for 'things to do'.

Ensure the fundamental event details are clear, accurate and prominent (date, time, location etc).

Run your communication campaign with plenty of time for people to consider attendance and to overcome the probability of being unavailable. Sometimes it may be useful to run two campaigns - one to generate initial interest and commitment and the next to secure attendance.

## **Announcing new services**

Frequency of message placement is important to allow awareness to grow. Also ensure that users of the new services are encouraged to generate word of mouth support.

## **Complaints management**

Ensure you have a clear policy of dealing with complaints and make it easily accessible to everyone.

Train staff in dealing with complaints and the often emotion charged interactions that occur.

Being practical yet fair and firm is crucial.

## **Internal/employee communication**

Remember communication is a two way street and therefore opportunities for staff interaction should form part of the foundations. Constantly encourage and access feedback to ensure content and frequency are set at the right levels.

## **Employment advertising**

As with all mainstream media advertising it is important to be aware that the market for your message will extend beyond just those you seek to employ. Use the opportunity to promote Council and its strengths.

Research the most effective advertising medium(s) and schedule yours accordingly

## **Communication and Planning**

A good Communication Plan can play a significant role in the success of any program, project or initiative of your Council.

It helps by organising your communications with a written schedule for actions and activities: what, how, when, where, and to whom you should be communicating.

By using a Communication Plan you will be more likely to identify and take advantage of opportunities as well as identify and counter issues that have the potential to negatively impact your Council.

Councils that use their Communication Plan most effectively look to their Plan to help with day to-day decisions about communications. This encourages greater focus and effectiveness.

In summary, the Communication Plan will help Council to:

- Clarify what it needs to communicate;
- Clarify which audience/s are to be focused on, by identifying the best opportunities;
- Determine communication mediums that will provide you with the best chance of reaching your audience/s;
- Craft its messages to heighten impact and produce maximum results;
- Establish timelines for the implementation of your communication activities;
- Review the results of your communication activities to help manage your Council's communication effectiveness.

## STEPS TO TAKE FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

### 1. Identify Council's Strategic Direction related to Communication

Where are we now?                      Where would we like to be?

**Tenterfield Shire Council's Strategic Objective is:**

***Ensure Council's Communications are effective and accessible (6.2c)***

How can we get there?

### 2. What is the key message(s) that you wish to communicate?

When developing your key messages you need to think about issues such as:

- What outcomes your messages are intended to achieve (e.g. behaviour change or attitude change or both)
- How your audience/s currently think about the issue/initiative/program issue
- Whether your task is to educate, remind, reassure, worry or even challenge your target audience/s
- The 'benefit' of your messages to your audience/s (consider "What's in it for me?" from their perspective)
- Ensuring your messages are clear and very easy to understand

### 3. Identify who the target audience is – stakeholder analysis.

### 4. What communication strategies and medium should you use (see list of communication mediums)?

Think about the following issues:

- Who needs to be consulted (forewarned) before going ahead with your communication?
- Whether the communication may lead to any controversy or significant demand increases on particular Council resources/assets (e.g. front counter or other Council staff) and how this may be managed effectively.

Communication methods relate more to the mediums you will take to get your messages across (e.g. *Council newsletter, brochures, signage, advertising*)

Your choices should be influenced by:

- Where/who/what your audience/s are (i.e. demographics)
- How well any medium 'reaches' your intended audience/s
- The preferred medium of your intended audience/s
- Complexity of your message
- Whether you wish to create dialogue with your audience/s or simply provide information
- Associated costs

### 5. Evaluation or success measurement is about examining how well your communication strategies have achieved your overall aims.

## COMMUNICATION PLAN

### Planning template

#### Strategic objective

***Ensure Council's Communications are effective and accessible (6.2c)***

Key message(s)	Identify stakeholder group	Communication Medium Time/date	Identify other staff involvement	Evaluation

## Action Plan for improved communication across the Shire

Note: Council will aim to provide a subscribe/unsubscribe service on its website for the community to supply an email address. Those subscribing to the email address will be sent an email when any community notifications are issued. This will apply to the entire Shire.

### Tenterfield Town

Key Message	Identify Stakeholder Group	Communication Medium Time/date	Action	Target
Public Notice	Shire Residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Papers</li> <li>Radio Stations</li> <li>Letter Box Drop – Large Print</li> <li>Websites</li> <li>Notice Board at Post Office</li> <li>Community Notice Boards</li> </ul>	Staff to take mediums into account when planning to distribute public notices.	Ongoing
Public Meeting	Tenterfield Town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Radio – Repeat 2 weeks Prior</li> <li>Tenterfield Paper x 2</li> <li>Letter Box drop x 1</li> </ul>	<p>Local Radio to be contacted when Public forums are scheduled 2 weeks in advance.</p> <p>Staff to monitor costs for local paper notices and letter box drops each financial year.</p>	Ongoing
Event - 1 year ahead	Town, Village or Rural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotional Brochures</li> <li>Tourist Centres</li> <li>TV</li> <li>Radio</li> <li>Community Groups &amp; Businesses</li> <li>Posters in shop windows &amp; Villages</li> <li>Local Papers</li> <li>Town crier</li> </ul>	<p>Not all events will be known 1 year in advance – however annual events can be announced early in the financial year.</p> <p>Staff to investigate the options of mediums listed for costs and resourcing.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>By March 13</p>

## Northern Region

Key Message	Identify Stakeholder Group	Communication Medium Time/date	Action	Target
Public Notice – 4 Weeks	Urbenville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Progress association</li> <li>Southern Free Times</li> <li>Community Board</li> <li>Council Provides a number of copies of the T/Star and leaves in local/Community Hall</li> <li>TSC Website</li> </ul>	<p>Council will provide 4 weeks notice where possible.</p> <p>All mediums to be considered when placing public notices.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
	Liston	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stanthorpe Border Post</li> <li>Southern Free Times</li> <li>Notice Board</li> </ul>	<p>Investigate the cost of advertising in the Stanthorpe Border Post.</p> <p>Mediums to be considered when placing public notices.</p>	<p>By Dec 12</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
	Legume	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council Provides a number of copies of the T/Star and leaves in local/Community Hall</li> <li>TSC Website</li> </ul>	<p>Investigate copies of the Tenterfield Star to be provided to Liston, Legume and Urbenville.</p>	By Dec 12
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Warwick Daily</li> <li>Southern Free Times</li> <li>Notice Board</li> <li>Progress Association</li> <li>Council Provides a number of copies of the T/Star and</li> </ul>	<p>Investigate the cost of advertising in the Warwick Daily.</p> <p>Council develops an e-mail list of progress association/hall committee contacts.</p>	<p>By Dec 12</p> <p>By Dec 12</p>



Key Message	Identify Stakeholder Group	Communication Medium Time/date	Action	Target
	Legume	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hall</li> <li>TSC Website</li> <li>Council &amp; Local Networking</li> <li>Notice Board</li> <li>Progress Association</li> <li>Direct Mail out</li> <li>Council Provides a number of copies of the T/Star and leaves in local/Community Hall</li> <li>TSC Website</li> </ul>	Consider the various mediums.	Ongoing
	Jennings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pub</li> <li>T/Star</li> <li>Southern Free Times</li> <li>Notice Board</li> </ul>	Make contact with the publican to ascertain if the pub can be part of public messages from Council to the community.	By Dec 12
Event - 4 Weeks	Urbenville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TSC Website</li> <li>Organising Body</li> <li>Notice Boards</li> <li>T/Star</li> <li>Southern Free Times</li> <li>Progress Association</li> </ul>	Consider the various mediums.	Ongoing
	Liston	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TSC Website</li> <li>Organising Body</li> <li>Notice Boards</li> </ul>	Consider the various mediums. Investigate the possibility to have an organising group.	Ongoing

Key Message	Identify Stakeholder Group	Communication Medium Time/date	Action	Target
	Legume	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• T/Star</li> <li>• Southern Free Times</li> <li>• Progress Association</li> </ul>		
	Jennings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TSC Website</li> <li>• Organising Body</li> <li>• Notice Boards</li> <li>• T/Star</li> <li>• Southern Free Times</li> <li>• Progress Association</li> </ul>	Consider the various mediums. Investigate the possibility to have an organising group.	Ongoing
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pub</li> <li>• T/Star</li> <li>• Southern Free Times</li> <li>• Notice Board</li> </ul>	Make contact with the publican to ascertain if the pub can be part of public messages from Council to the community.	

## Western Region

Key Message	Identify Stakeholder Group	Communication Medium Time/date	Action	Target
Public Notice – 4 Weeks	Mingoola	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notice in Produce Store</li> <li>• Radio</li> <li>• Email Tree through the Progress Association</li> <li>• Facebook Page</li> </ul>	<p>Four weeks' notice may not be possible at all times.</p> <p>Make contact with the Produce Store.</p> <p>Make contact with the Progress Association in regards to an Email tree.</p> <p>Face book page to be investigated</p>	<p>By Dec 12</p> <p>By Dec 12</p> <p>Operational Plan 2013/14</p>
	Torrington	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not Mail Drop on weekends or Tuesdays as junk mail gets delivered on those days.</li> <li>• TSC Website</li> <li>• Email Tree</li> <li>• Friday Hall Meeting</li> <li>• Facebook page</li> <li>• Local Radio</li> <li>• Flyer notice through mail run</li> <li>• Do not Mail Drop on weekends or Tuesdays as junk mail gets delivered on those days.</li> <li>• TSC Website</li> </ul>	<p>Staff to take into account when arranging for letter box drops.</p> <p>Make contact with the Hall committee in regards to an Email tree and Friday Hall meeting</p> <p>Face book page to be investigated</p> <p>Staff to take into account when arranging for letter box drops.</p>	<p>By Dec 12</p> <p>Operational Plan 2013/14</p>



Key Message	Identify Stakeholder Group	Communication Medium Time/date	Action	Target
		<p>those days.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Radio</li> <li>• TSC Website</li> <li>• Southern Free Times</li> <li>• T/Star</li> </ul>		

## Eastern Region

Key Message	Identify Stakeholder Group	Communication Medium Time/date	Action	Target
Public Notice	Drake & Surrounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Radio – Immediately</li> <li>• Public Display – 1 month</li> <li>• TSC Website – 1-2 Weeks</li> <li>• Paper – 4 weeks</li> <li>• Electronic Mailing List</li> <li>• Drake School Weekly Newsletter</li> <li>• Facebook</li> <li>• Twitter</li> <li>• SMS – Fire Warning</li> </ul>		
Public Meeting	Drake & Surrounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Radio – Immediately</li> <li>• Public Display – 1 month</li> <li>• TSC Website – 1-2 Weeks</li> <li>• Paper – 4 weeks</li> <li>• Electronic Mailing List</li> <li>• Drake School Weekly Newsletter</li> <li>• Facebook</li> </ul>		

Key Message	Identify Stakeholder Group	Communication Medium Time/date	Action	Target
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Twitter</li> <li>• SMS – Fire Warning</li> <li>• Mail with Rates – 3 months</li> </ul>		
Event	Drake & Surrounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Media &amp; Guerilla marketing</li> <li>• Schools &amp; Pubs – 2-3 Months</li> <li>• Community Groups</li> <li>• General Council Ads – 1 month</li> <li>• Press Release – 3-6 Months</li> <li>• Country Style</li> <li>• Border Living</li> <li>• Tourist Association</li> <li>• Drake School Weekly Newsletter</li> <li>• Promotional Vouchers to Local Businesses</li> <li>• Branding – long term repeat events</li> </ul>	Staff to investigate mediums, expenses and staff resourcing as to what is possible.	By March 13