COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Merafong City Local Municipality

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INTRODUCTION

This version of the strategy was compiled by the Corporate Communications Section under Corporate Shared Services.

The strategy identifies key communication objectives and outlines strategic and tactical actions required to achieve the objectives of Merafong City Local Municipality (MCLM).

It is important that implementation of the strategy be promoted through communications and that progress made in implementing the strategic agenda be profiled, as and when MCLM meet the targets set with respect to the expansion of access to basic services, strengthening of ward committees and the implementation of municipal indigent policy, local economic development, fighting crime and corruption and so on.

It is also based on Chapter 4 of the Municipality Systems Act that the municipality must create conditions for communities to partake in its affairs. It will also serve as a broad framework to inform communications programmes for the municipality. As the legislated sphere of government, the municipality has a responsibility of leading this drive through an effective Communications Strategy, which talks to that of the West Rand District Municipality, Gauteng Province and eventually THE KEY PRIORITIES of the National Government.

BACKGROUND

(MCLM) is a public organisation established based on Chapter 7 of the Constitution which deals with local government. The local government sphere is divided into three categories, metro municipalities, district municipalities and local municipalities. Merafong City, taking the local municipality form, is primarily responsible for providing basic or essential services to communities its serve on daily basis.

To enable timely and sustainable services to its communities, MCLM is guided by its vision to provide "A prosperous, sustainable and community- oriented City" and community in Merafong City. The Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 2000 (Act No. 32 of 200) regulates the establishment of internal systems that enables municipalities to provide unrestricted access to essential services to local communities and to enable the economic and social upliftment of such communities.

Communications, being one of the services provided by the section Corporate Communication, is thus one of the internal systems playing a supportive role in enabling Merafong City to meet its goals. For MCLM to systematically provide essential services to local communities, a realistic external communications strategy needs to be in place. Merafong City communities, sectors and other stakeholders need to be timely and accurately informed of the city's progress and on service delivery achievements. The strategy also enables the municipality to comply with the Access to Information Act (Act 32 of 1996), which ensures that everyone has the right to access to information held by the state. This document being a **Five**-year communication strategy, will be updated annually for proper alignment with each year's government message and the National Communication Strategy compiled by GCIS.

This document supports the strategic goals, objectives, framework and strategic thrusts from the local government manifesto.

The strategy will serve to assist the municipality to:

- Provide strategic leadership and direction to the municipality and society
- Driving execution and delivery through enhanced policy coordination;
- Ensuring effective communication and stakeholder interfaces with communities and key sectors of society;
- Promoting transformation and inclusion of society in the economy
- Provide quality services to the community and
- Provide sustainable governance and good practices to the community

OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of the strategy is to ensure that all Merafong City communities have an unrestricted and timely access to accurate information. This document acts as a guideline for raising awareness about municipality's strategic plans, programmes, and achievements and encourage understanding of MCLM's roles and programmes, on all communities and sector groups. The strategy serves as a framework that the municipality will employ to meet the following:

- Fulfil constitutional and legal mandate and obligation of deepening democracy
- Encourage public participation in government processes and policies
- Encourage communication between the municipality and sector departments including amongst others community based organisations, traditional authorities and other important stakeholders
- Co-ordination of government programmes national, provincial, local and parastatals through Inter-Governmental Relations framework communications
- To develop and maintain correct public perception on government services
- To maintain good relations with the media by forging good relations/rapport
- To publicise MCLM's programmes of action (POA) as advised by the Executive Mayor
- To meet information needs of all stakeholders (communities, sector groups, investors etc)
- To create a communication platform between the municipality and its communities
- To raise awareness about the city's basic services that the council is rendering to communities
- To inform Merafong City employees about the strategic direction of the city

- To develop, implement and promote municipal corporate identity

- To enable the municipality to communicate effectively and efficiently both internally and externally.

- Develop coherent and coordinated messages that are understood by the municipal constituency.

- Improve the municipality's capacity to market itself, its services and build a positive image.

- Ensure that there is a genuine two-way communication between the municipality and the public.

- Ensure that the right communication methods and media are employed to deliver messages to the target audience.

- Help municipality to respond adequately and appropriately to prevailing conditions within its environment.

This Communication Strategy is based on the following guidelines:

a) Section 32 (1) of the constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act of 108 of 1996

b) The National Government Information System (GCIS) framework, amongst others

> ➤ Government Communicator's handbook

> ➤ Research guidelines for government communicators

> ➤ The State of the Nation Address (SONA) by the president

c) Gauteng City Region Communications Strategy Framework for 2020– 2025

d) Municipal strategic planning that was held in 2017

e) The State of the Province Address (SOPA) by the premier that was held on 22 February 2022

f) Provincial communication conference co-ordinated by South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and Provincial Government

g) Promotion of access to information Act of 2000 (Act 2 of 2000) and

h) Any other guideline as may be provided by the government from time to time.

ENVIRONMENT

In a democratic society, all communities irrespective of their geographical location or social status are entitled to access to essential or basic services which should be provided by local municipalities. MCLM ensures that its communities are afforded such essential services, including but not limited to land and descend housing, water and sanitation, health services, infrastructure development, economic development and recreational facilities.

Corporate Communication is mandated to ensure that communities are informed of services offered by the municipality. Therefore, this strategy identifies communication tools MCLM will use to raise awareness of its services and programmes, inform the community about MCLM challenges and achievements, and timely inform communities about socio-economic opportunities. This documents also seeks to identify channels of communication which the municipality can use to communicate urgent messages or emergencies.

MESSAGES AND THEMES TO BE COMMUNICATED

- To fight poverty and create jobs by growing the economy
- Together improving service delivery and developing communities
- Together growing the economy and creating jobs
- To provide an integrated Municipal Governance System for improved quality of life for all communities in Merafong City
- Government's annual key messages and themes
- Strategic goals, objectives framework, strategic thrust from the local government manifesto
- External communication of the council's key deliverables, i.e., IDP projects to the community
- Roll-out of basic services (housing, socio-economic services, sanitation, etc)
- Positioning of Merafong City as a competitive and leading edge community driven organisation (especially with regard to strategic objectives such as good governance, social development, environmental stability, economic growth and development, people management)
- Exhibition stands that will showcase the city's key service offerings to tourists, businesses and the community
- Positioning and promoting the strengths and depths of Merafong City's leadership (Merafong City as supported by the national and the provincial government)
- Positioning of Merafong City as a leading Local Municipality model government organisation (through print and electronic media advertisements)

TARGET AUDIENCE

- MCLM communities
- Rates payers
- Business forums
- NGOs
- Regional and national media

- MCLM employees
- Organized formations (People with disabilities, Women organizations, Youth, Religious and Political leaders)
- Potential investors
- Government departments

STRATEGIC STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS

MCLM should engage on an ongoing basis with its stakeholders to ensure that they are kept abreast of developments, projects and challenges of the municipality. Consistent attention to this will enhance an understanding of the role and functions of MCLM. MCLM has internal and external stakeholders.

Internal stakeholders:

- Employees
- Office of the Municipal Manager
- Office of the Mayor
- All Departments

External stakeholders:

- Business sector
- Provincial Government
- National Government
- Consultative Forums (Mayoral IDPs, Communication Forums)
- SALGA
- Religious leaders
- Women Organisation
- Community at large

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS TO BE USED

Channels can be generally defined as "a physical means of carrying a signal"

Example of channels:

- Conventional Mass Media- radio, television, print and outdoor
- Unconventional Media- group communication, road shows and Izimbizo

The communication Unit will:

- Use impersonal communication e.g., advertising and public relations, usage of print and electronic media such as the press, and radio to create awareness

- Personal communications e.g., face to face meetings with community members, ward committees, IDPs, Church representatives, Youth, elderly people, disabled people etc.

Tools	Rationale
1.Website and intranet	The interactive intranet will serve as an internal communications network to enhance the communication channels within all departments of Merafong City. It will enable us to disseminate information more effectively/accurately. This also is intended to help create an environment of transparency in the process from employee's point of view. Website is key to project municipal projects and legislative documents to the external stakeholders
2. Newsletters (Internal newsletter and external newsletter	The internal and external newsletters are the chosen mediums for establishing and maintaining a primary communications link with the internal and external public. It allows for the precise management of information delivery and is an outstanding cost effective tool. The tone of the newsletters will encourage management and employees' interaction through letters to the editor, through articles which they may contribute etc. This strategy is vital in building an environment of inclusion and participation by all employees who are not directly involved in projects. It represents the most efficient way of reaching the majority if not all employees and community members that are being targeted.
3. Customer focus groups	Direct face-to-face interaction adds to the credibility of the information being communicated. This allows stakeholders to see that an attempt is being made to include them. As a result, confidence in the implementers will be built/reinforced especially when the majority are unknown by most community members.
4. Brochures/booklets	Design and print informative city brochures and booklets.
5. IDP road shows	Communicate and conduct IDP road-shows to the community. Such meetings will be populated through loud hailing, distribution of posters and flyers.
6. Local newspaper adverts	Inform and alert all stakeholders about the city's plans, programmes, challenges, opportunities etc.
7. Media liaison services	Inform and alert local and national media through press releases, media alerts and interviews, about the city's plans, programmes, challenges, opportunities etc.

8. Municipal statements	Communicate with communities and rates payers about the city's notices, plans, opportunities, events etc.
9. Pamphlets, flyers and posters	Communicate with communities about the city's forthcoming plans, opportunities, events etc.
10. Mainstream newspaper adverts	Use of national newspapers to raise awareness, inform public or notify
11. Social Media	Use of social media as the fastest mode of communication i.e. Facebook, WhatsApp etc.

COMMUNICATION APPROACH

Corporate and Business Customers

- Strategic use of business forums to communicate the organisation's corporate objectives
- Effective communication of the city's incentive schemes for the business sector
- Create business section in the municipal publication
- Provide business with mid-term reports, IDP booklets, annual report etc.
- Communication support for the city's project launches
- Liaison with church leaders and community organisation on municipal and community matters

Residential Communities

- Management of municipal issues through the strategic use of residential customer forums and support of customer facing staff
- Utilisation of print material to communicate basic services to residential customers
- Relationship building with MCLM youth (create a link between youth desk and Merafong City youth by introducing available projects.)
- Communication support for project launches

National and provincial government

- Management of economic Issues through information sharing with the national and provincial governments
- Liaison with all the regulatory bodies departments of health, water, etc.

Opinion Formers

- Issue management through presentations to Merafong City Chambers of Commerce (MCCI) and other professional associations
- Publicizing MCLM IDP
- Creation of networking opportunities

Media Relations (News and editorial coverage)

- Influence perceptions through information sharing (through interviews, press releases)

- Relationship building through interaction between the Mayors Office, Mayoral Committee and targeted journalists (briefing sessions and one-on-one off the record briefings)

Media Publicity (Magazines, surveys, features and guest columns)

- Influence perceptions through information sharing, the publicising of success stories and achievements,

- Compilation of brochures, for potential investors

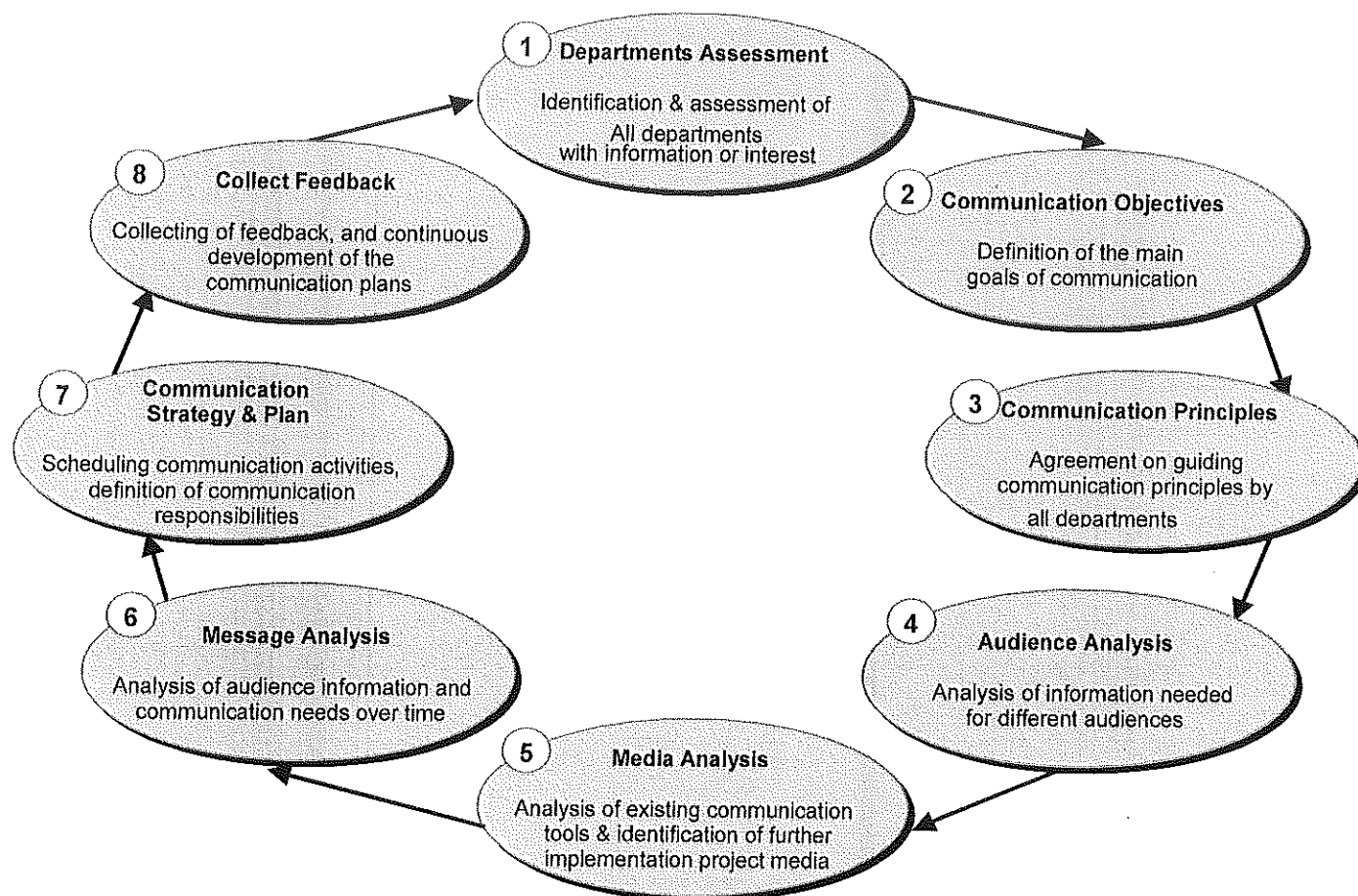- The profiling of MCLM Executive Mayor, Mayoral Committee and Departments

Management of Corporate Identity

- Branding of all Merafong City communiqué, assets and properties

- Training of staff members on corporate identity

- Branding of events and promotions (IDP and other special events)

- Branding of the city

Media analysis and communication research

- Synopsis of media coverage and clippings

- Weekly and monthly media analysis reports

- Maintenance of key stakeholder database

- Research into the effectiveness of communication strategies

- Regular feedback will be sought regarding the approach, development, and delivery of all communication messages.

COMMUNICATION MODEL

1 Departments Assessment

Identification & assessment of
All departments
with information or interest

2 Communication Objectives

Definition of the main
goals of communication

8 Collect Feedback

Collecting of feedback, and continuous
development of the
communication plans

3 Communication Principles

Agreement on guiding
communication principles by
all departments

**7 Communication
Strategy & Plan**

Scheduling communication activities,
definition of communication
responsibilities

4 Audience Analysis

Analysis of information needed
for different audiences

6 Message Analysis

Analysis of audience information and
communication needs over time

5 Media Analysis

Analysis of existing communication
tools & identification of further
implementation project media

COMMUNICATION TIME TABLE

Key Message	Audience	Media	Frequency
• General communication	All stakeholders	o Website	o Day-to-day
		o Call and Contact Centre	o Day-to-day
		o Municipal statements	o When requested by other service units
		o External newsletter	o Quarterly
		o Education and awareness campaigns	o As per calendar of events
		o IDP roadshows	o Quarterly
		o Notice boards	o When requested by other service units
		o Print media (newspapers, magazine)	o When requested by other service units
		o Brochures/booklets	o Annual
		o Internal newsletter	o Quarterly
		o WhatsApp and Facebook	o Day-to-day
		o Salary advises and internal e-mails	o When requested by other service units

DESIRED OUTCOMES OF COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

Communication Objective	Desired Outcome
Increase visibility and build awareness of all projects throughout, within and outside Merafong City borders	o All identified stakeholders have a general awareness of the city campaigns and the benefits that it can provide to our community o Stakeholders are receptive to and supportive to the visions of the future
Enable the communication team to become active and effective advocates of communication plans	o Recognition of the communication team members as credible resource for dissemination of information
Develop, deliver and reinforce key messages to all external stakeholders (e.g. community and business)	o Well informed community members o Visible support by MCLM
Develop the foundation for a dynamic, open and continuously improving communication	o Communication messages are timely, relevant and responsive to the community
Increase level of understanding of free basic service offerings by the city and IDP projects within the community members of Merafong City	o Community members recognise benefits offered by the council. o Community members begin to realise the value added services offered by the council
Promote a culture for information transfer among the staff members	o Employees take ownership of information sharing and dissemination o Employees become Merafong City ambassadors
Sustain project momentum by recognising and communicating achievements and milestones	o External stakeholders share in the sense of accomplishment, stay involved and enlightened
Co-ordination and development of integrated calendar of events and year plan	o Development of an inclusive calendar of events
Continue to partner with all directorates in terms of creating awareness and implementation of projects to develop, deliver and reinforce key messages to the community and other stakeholders	o Armed with knowledge about the activities and progress of IDP projects, mayoral projects and other basic services offered to the community
Develop and promote Merafong City Corporate Identity Manual	o Creation of a Merafong City brand or corporate image

STRATEGIC EMPHASIS

Prioritisation of Merafong City brand

- Having a strong brand is a form of communication itself

- Position the city as the place to live, study, work and play; as well as the preferred destination for investment, tourism, events hosting and competitive sports is pivotal to achieving the vision of the greater Gauteng City Region.

Managing the reputation of the municipality

- The municipality's reputation is shaped by commitments, expectations and performance against the Programme of Action. Reputation management, therefore, identifies and closes the gaps between expectations, commitments and performance

- As part of managing its reputation, the municipality must ensure that there is a regular flow of information about its programmes. Where challenges are experienced, action be taken to overcome challenges and progress made must be communicated

- There must be consistency in messaging regardless of the number of people who are involved in conveying the message

- All communication must be truthful. People must never have reason to doubt the truthfulness of the municipal communication

- Reputation management extends beyond the ambit of communications. Repairing damaged reputation may therefore require a lot more than making public statements.

COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

Merafong City's community segmentation stretches from the low-income group to the high income group, this therefore calls for tailoring of communication tools to be used to communicate with the different groups. The following were identified as communications challenges affecting the external communication process between the municipality and the community.

- Budgetary/Financial constraints
- Negative perception about the municipality
- Illiteracy
- Digital divide
- Presence in national and provincial events
- Departments operating in silos
- Clarification of roles within the municipality
- Media interests – (denting the image of the municipality)

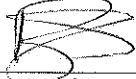- Lack of institutional capacity to publish internal/external newsletters, pamphlets, flyers and brochures

CONCLUSION

Our vision of the communication strategy is to ensure effective and efficient communication plans/programmes, which are realistic, measurable and achievable within the allocated time frame, through our own communication programme.
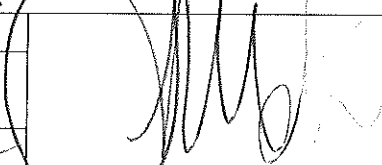
- To be effective in creating a culture of continuous and credible communication throughout the organisation
- To understand the organisation's vision and mission statement and be committed to them
- To understand the key elements of the organisation's communication strategy
- To improve communication skills
- To apply communication skills to practical day to day business situations on the job
- To be able to use high compelling and creative ways to deliver a message

APPROVALS

1. ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES

NAME	B. MAZIBUKO
SIGNATURE	
DATE	20/05/2022

2. ACTING MUNICIPAL MANAGER

NAME	S. MDLETSHE
SIGNATURE	
DATE	24/05/2022