



NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF GOVERNMENT
ADMINISTRATION, REFORM AND CHURCH AFFAIRS

Central Government Communication Policy

Established by the Ministry of Government Administration and Reform
16 October 2009.





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”It is the responsibility of the authorities of the State to create conditions that facilitate open and enlightened public discourse.”

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Norway, Article 100, sixth paragraph.

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Communication for democracy and openness

Communication in modern times is demanding and exciting. This is also true for government employees. Every day government institutions, employees and managers are communicating with individuals and groups who are in contact with public authorities. The conditions for communication have changed considerably over the last few years. Today there are opportunities for direct dialogue and contact in a way that did not exist before. More than ever, good communication is a key to good quality in the public sector.

In 1993, the Central Government Information Policy was presented. As we in 2009 are introducing a new communication policy, the time is overdue for a revision. We have experienced a rapid and sweeping technological development, the quantity of information is greater than ever before, we have a more varied and diversified population, and the citizens have high expectations to the government. The new communication policy is marked by the many changes that have taken place over the last few years.

The purpose of the government communication policy is two-fold:

- 1) getting the message out to those who need it
- 2) establishing a dialogue between the citizens and the government

The government communication policy has as its fundamental values democracy, openness and participation. The government's communication should be characterized by openness. We shall have an active dialogue with the citizens on the development of our services and policies. Our communication policy should lay the foundation for democratic participation and public debate and provide for the citizens' ability to ensure their democratic rights.

In the encounter with citizens, organizations, businesses, other public enterprises and the media, government enterprises must compare their own communication practices to the objectives of the new policies. Government agencies should choose the policy instruments that to the greatest extent make it possible to reach the citizens. The communication policy will influence the implementation as well as the priorities of communication activities in the coming years. The agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi) will follow up on the policies and offer advice to the different government enterprises.

Oslo, 10.16.2009


Heidi Grande Røys

Introduction

The communication policy encompasses the central objectives and principles for the government's communication with citizens, businesses, non-governmental organizations and other public agencies.

The policy has three parts of equal importance:

Part 1 is the short version of the government communication policy; objectives, premises and principles. This is what we call "The government communication platform".

Part 2 is an elaboration of the principles, with a more detailed description of the principles in part 1. In the exercise of the communication policy, it is important to see the different principles coherently.

Part 3 is an elaboration of the policy in selected areas, describing more specifically some selected areas of special relevance for state agencies.

The term communication in this connection signifies a reciprocal exchange of information between two or several parties. The term information here means a one-sided communication of a message.

The term citizen is used for simplifying purposes. However, it is emphasized that in this connection, the term includes individuals as well as the business community, NGOs, organizations and other public enterprises. A number of public and government enterprises have business companies and organizations as some of their primary users.

This document is not intended as a manual in communication work. Hence, there is no referral to specific target groups for government communication.

Information and communication is not an objective per se, but one of several policy instruments being

used by the government in order to obtain its goals and solve its tasks in an efficient and satisfactory manner. These instruments (whether they be written documents, sound, pictures, film, design etc.) must be considered and used to the same extent as other types of instruments, like the financial, judicial and organizational ones.

The policy concerns all government administration agencies which are part of the state as a legal body. It does not concern enterprises which are legal entities on their own, even if they are fully or partly government owned. However, the ministries may decide whether the policy is going to concern independent enterprises within their areas of responsibility. The municipalities may, according to their own wishes, make use of the objectives and principles in the government communication policy and accommodate these to their own needs and use.

This policy document is intended as a starting point and framework for the formulation of local plans and strategies for information and communication. The target groups for this document are state managers and employees.

The Ministry of Government Administration and Reform (FAD) has the superior responsibility for this policy. The individual government agencies are responsible for the implementation of the policy. The different ministries are responsible for following up the enterprises within their sector. The Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi) is responsible for information, advice and counselling on the policy.

The government communication policy applies to any form of external communication.

The electronic version of this document can be found on: www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/fad.

Objectives and principles

1

The government communication platform

The aim

The aim of the central government communication policy is to secure that the citizens shall:

- get correct and clear information about their rights, responsibilities and opportunities
- have access to information about the government's activities
- be invited to participate in the formulation of policies, arrangements and services

The premises

The premises for reaching these objectives are that the government must:

- have knowledge about its target groups' needs, conditions and points of view
- participate in public debate and support increased democratic participation
- use a well-written and clear language that is understandable to everyone
- secure that public information and communication is reliable and coordinated
- communicate and inform in a goal-oriented and efficient way to make sure that the target groups are being reached
- efficiently and expediently exploit the opportunities offered by new technology and new channels
- show respect and accommodating attitudes in its communication activities

The principles

Principles for good communication:

Openness

In its communication with the citizens, the government shall be open, clear and accessible

Participation

The government shall take advice from affected citizens and involve them in the formulation of policies and services

Reaching all

The government shall see to it that relevant information reaches everyone concerned

Active

The government shall actively and in due time inform about rights, obligations and opportunities

Coherency

Government communication shall be perceived as comprehensive and coordinated

Principle for implementation:

Line management principle

Communication responsibility accompanies the case responsibility

Elaboration of the principles 2

Openness

The citizens shall meet a government that is open, clear and accessible

The **openness principle** means that the citizens shall meet an open and accessible government with a listening, accommodating and respectful attitude.

The language used by government agencies shall be correct, clear and understandable to anyone.

Government authorities shall create conditions for an open and enlightened public debate.

The government must emphasize a good dialogue with the media and secure transparency in its activities. The media are playing an important democratic role in this.

«The government shall accommodate its information and communication to the target groups»

Participation

The government shall consult affected citizens and involve them in the formulation of its policies.

The government depends upon a well functioning interaction with the citizens in order to further develop the public sector. It is important that the opinions of different groups are presented. This is a mark of a vivid democracy.

The participation principle means that the government provides an opportunity for the citizens to present their suggestions and opinions at physical and electronic meeting points.

Government agencies shall also actively involve the citizens in the shaping and formulation of policies, and in establishing, running, evaluating and developing systems and services.

In order to create good arenas for participation and involvement, government agencies must actively share their information with others and use different relevant channels and instruments to reach the relevant groups.

Those lacking competence or access to digital channels shall get the opportunity to participate through alternative channels and meeting places.

Those delivering input should be informed about the final decision. During public hearings all groups involved should have the opportunity to participate and be granted sufficient time for a reply.

Reaching all

The government shall make sure that relevant information reaches everyone concerned

The **reaching-all principle** means that the government shall include all concerned citizens and groups in its information activities.

The government shall accommodate its information and communication to the target groups.

In some connections it is sufficient just to make the information available so that the citizens may acquaint themselves with it on their own. In other connections a more targeted approach may be needed to reach the relevant target groups.

Government agencies shall be in the forefront as to including everyone, by adjusting their information and communication to the diversity among the citizens.

It must be taken into consideration that people have different needs and qualifications for receiving government information; based on language, culture, abilities, functional ability, lack of competence or access to digital channels. Hence, the government must formulate its information to make it easy to understand for the recipients in the different target groups, and make use of the channels and methods that are the most effective in reaching the different groups of people. This should be the case even if it would require special efforts. The latter is especially important for information concerning obligations and rights. The communication work shall be based on prevailing regulations and norms for universal design.



Active

The government shall actively and in due time inform about rights, obligations and opportunities

The **active principle** means that government agencies at any time shall make relevant information available, not necessitating demands for transparency.

Active information and communication about the citizens' rights, obligations and opportunities is a prerequisite for active democratic participation and a well functioning society.

Government agencies shall actively see to it that information is shared, or could be shared, with others; respecting prevailing regulations on copyright, personal privacy protection etc. Also, government enterprises shall actively re-use information from other government and private enterprises. In addition, the government shall make use of the most efficient communication channels.

The government shall also see to it that the citizens have access to information about the different plans and activities of each agency.

«Hence, information and communication has to be considered equal with other types of policy instruments to be employed in order to obtain agreed-upon objectives and performance demands»

Coherency principle

Government communication shall appear coherent and coordinated

The coherency principle means that government agencies shall coordinate their information and communication activities with other relevant government, municipal and private enterprises, in order to secure that the information appears coherently and coordinated to the recipient.

The individual agency and manager is responsible for making this happen, and the responsibility includes all information and communication activity.

Line principle

Communication responsibility accompanies case responsibility

The principle of line management means that the responsibility for information and communication follows the responsibility for the issue in question. Responsibility falls to line managers as well as individual staff members.

Hence, information and communication has to be considered equal with other types of policy instruments to be employed in order to obtain agreed-upon objectives and performance demands.

Information and communication should also be considered used in combination with other types of policy instruments.

«Government agencies shall actively see to it that information is shared, or could be shared, with others; respecting prevailing regulations on copyright, personal privacy protection etc.»



Elaboration of policy in selected areas

3

3.1 Management responsibility

It is a responsibility of the management to carry out the government's communication policy, and a special responsibility rests with the top managers.

Communication is a tool on line with other policy instruments to help the government reach its objectives and must be integrated in the work processes at an early stage.

Managers in state agencies are responsible for letting communication and information be used in a professional, economical way according to ethical standards, internally as well as externally. Managers must make certain that the communication policy is well known and carried out in the agency.

It is the management's responsibility that communication is used as a strategic instrument. The agency shall make sure that managers and leaders at all levels, as well as executive officers and front desk employees, have the necessary competence to secure high quality communication.

The management carries the responsibility for efficient coordination of the communication of each agency with adjoining enterprises, whether they be government, municipal or at times even private, when necessary.

See also Leadership in Norway's Civil Service, issued by the Ministry of Government Administration and Reform (2008).

More information may be obtained by contacting:

The Ministry of Government Administration and Reform (FAD): www.regjeringen.no/fad

Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi): www.difi.no



3.2 Information on rights, obligations and opportunities

The government shall see to it that every citizen within a reasonable time is informed about his or her rights, obligations and opportunities. Information and communication efforts should be planned based upon those who are affected. Government agencies shall make certain that it is clear where citizens should inquire to get information about their rights, obligations and opportunities. Information about opportunities includes access to knowledge that is relevant for each individual, as well as information about available options.

Government agencies shall see to it that all information is clear and understandable, that it is evident who is responsible for the information and that all necessary assistance and guidance is provided for. Guidance is important when different choices are available.

The citizens shall be informed about important steps and milestones in the proceedings between the government cabinet and parliament.

More information may be obtained by contacting:
Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi): www.difi.no

«It is the management's responsibility that communication is used as a strategic instrument»

3.3 Electronic communication

Electronic communication is to be the primary channel for the dialogue between the citizens and public agencies.

It should be based on current requirements for document formats and universal design. The government must see to it that citizens who are not able to make use of digital channels, do get corresponding information and an opportunity to participate through other, suitable channels.

It is important to take into account demands and considerations for personal privacy and information security for all electronic services. Coordination across agency borders and administration levels is a prerequisite for the creation of good and comprehensive electronic solutions for the citizens. Government agencies should have a high level of service and a satisfactory response time for electronic inquiries.

More information may be obtained by contacting:

The Ministry of Government Administration and Reform (FAD): www.regjeringen.no/fad

Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi): www.difi.no

«The government must see to it that citizens who are not able to make use of digital channels, do get corresponding information and an opportunity to participate through other, suitable channels»

«A diffused and unclear language in e.g. letters and official forms may lead to additional work, for the citizens as well as the government»

3.4 Language

The government shall make use of a language which is understandable to all relevant target groups. This should be the case for those being addressed by the government as well as for those who are contacting the government themselves.

Poor and diffused language in documents may cause loss of opportunities for the citizens to take advantage of their rights, obligations, state benefits and their active participation in society. A diffused and unclear language in e.g. letters and official forms may lead to additional work, for the citizens as well as the government.

The language in government documents should be correct, and government employees are supposed to follow prevailing rules for orthography and language use. For use of the Sami language, special rules apply. Government agencies must pay special attention to users of the Sami languages, in order to secure a good communication with Sami language users all over the country.

In order to reach the immigrant population with government information, every single agency shall consider whether it is sufficient to translate into English, or whether translations into other languages are needed as well. In cases in which language barriers exist, government enterprises should consider use of interpreters to secure good communication.

More information may be obtained by contacting:

Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi): www.difi.no

Norwegian Language Council: www.språkrådet.no

3.5 Trust

The trust in government agencies is dependent upon the services they deliver, their communication and how open, service-minded and user oriented they are perceived to be. The communication shall be reliable and ethically justifiable. Government agencies also have a responsibility to inform about their tasks, their organisation and results. They should be knowledgeable of how they are perceived by their surroundings and by their users.

Government enterprises shall be careful in using profiling efforts like e.g. sponsoring to further their own reputation. By sponsoring is meant direct or indirect economic support with the intention of profiling the state agency. For ordinary administrative bodies sponsoring is not allowed, unless a special permit from the sectoral ministry has been granted.

More information may be obtained by contacting:

Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi): www.difi.no



3.8 Crisis communication

Crisis communication is about supplying the citizens with rapid and specific information enabling them to cope with an unwanted incident in the best possible way. The communication shall make visible areas of responsibility, authority coordination as well as information on where to get further information and, if needed, assistance and support. The responsibility for the handling of the crisis rests with the enterprise having the responsibility for the subject area in a normal situation. Good crisis communication depends upon regular training as well as evaluation after real incidents.

More information may be obtained by contacting:

The Ministry of Justice: www.regjeringen.no/jd

The Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning (DSB): www.dsb.no

3.9 Campaigns

Campaigns may be an important instrument in order to disperse information and influence attitudes and behavior. Government agencies ready to start campaigns, should make inquiries beforehand to identify the challenges and communication needs.

The effect of campaigns should be evaluated.

Government authorities should examine the need very carefully before launching large campaigns and communication efforts with the purpose of changing behavior or attitudes. In such cases one always should consider involving the target groups in question from the very beginning.

More information may be obtained by contacting:

Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi): www.difi.no

«Government authorities should examine the need very carefully before launching large campaigns and communication efforts with the purpose of changing behavior or attitudes»

3.11 Political and administrative communication in the ministries

The Minister is the supreme leader of a ministry, politically as well as administratively. A ministry is always communicating on behalf of the minister.

In the same way as the departments within the ministry are assisting the minister in their professional areas, the communication unit gives professional assistance to the minister.

The communication unit in a ministry is part of the civil service.

More information may be obtained by contacting:

The Ministry of Government Administration and Reform (FAD): www.regjeringen.no/fad

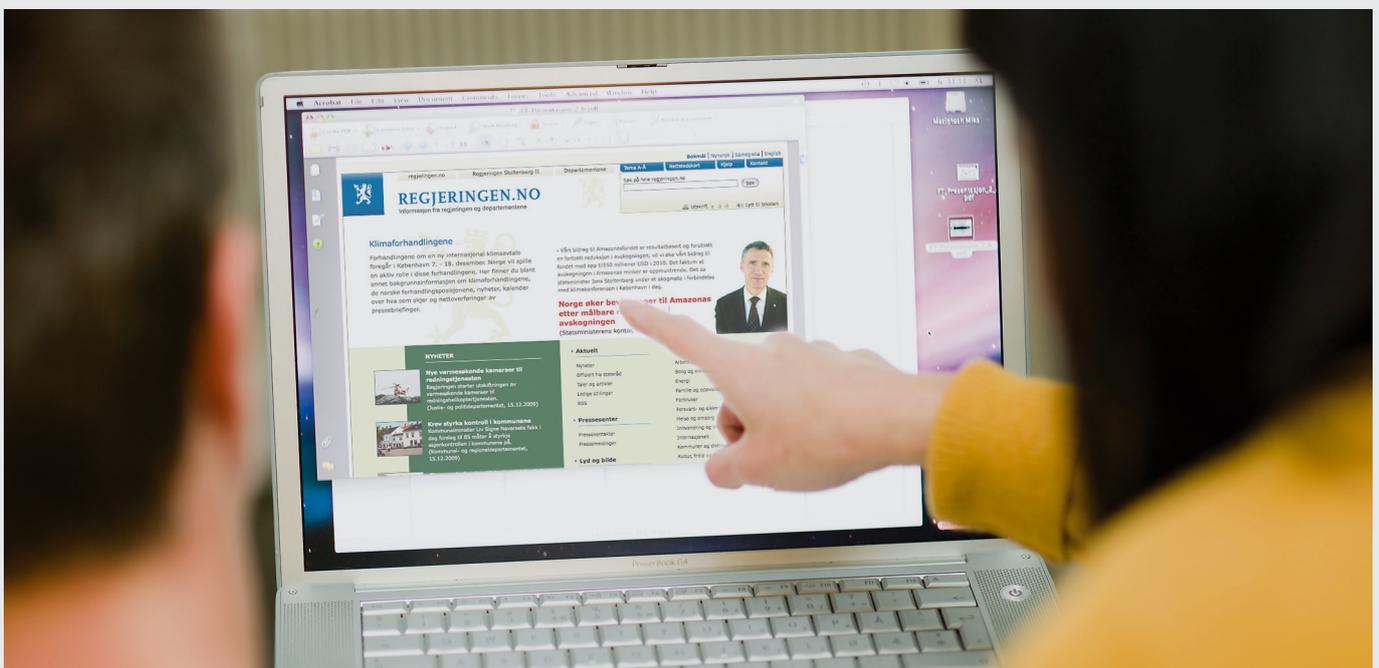
3.12 Internal communication

The communication between leadership, employees and their unions must be open, built on trust and mutual respect. Good internal communication about the objectives, strategies and priorities of the agency is necessary for good goal achievement. Good communication and dialogue with those affected is a precondition for successful processes of reform and readjustment.

Managers carry a special responsibility for good communication, while employees at all levels also have an independent responsibility to keep informed about their own agency and its areas of responsibility, as well as sharing information with others. A useful rule is to inform internally before doing it to the outside world.

More information may be obtained by contacting:

Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi): www.difi.no



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