

Guidelines for Implementing the NSW Government Evaluation Framework for Advertising and Communications



Premier
& Cabinet

The NSW Government Evaluation Framework for strategic communication, incorporating the NSW Government Evaluation Model and the Evaluation Implementation Matrix for strategic communication, should be interpreted and applied noting the following guidelines.

1 All communication program or campaign¹ planning should start with **SMART communication objectives** – i.e., objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. SMART objectives are characterised by the following:

- **Specific** – communication objectives should contain numbers such as target volumes or percentages and dates (e.g., ‘to increase target audience awareness of the new land zoning laws to 75% or more by 30 June’ or ‘to gain 10,000 registrations by 1 December’);
- **Measurable** – three key features that make communication objectives measurable are (a) they should be specific as noted above; (b) baseline data should be available for post-program comparison (see Note 3); and (c) evaluation should be planned as part of strategic communication planning to ensure that necessary data collection is incorporated and budget is set aside;
- **Achievable** – formative research such as review of relevant literature and case studies (see Note 9) can identify whether the proposed communication objectives are realistic (e.g., have similar programs elsewhere achieved the intended results);
- **Relevant** – communication objectives must align with and support overarching organisation objectives. In addition, communication objectives should take account of the needs and interests of stakeholders and publics (see Note 2);
- **Time-bound** – the deadline for achievement of objectives should be stated.

2 **Communication objectives should directly support one or more government policies or priorities and/or organisation objectives.** In addition, corporate and social responsibility (CSR) requires that communication objectives **also should be developed with consideration of the needs and interests of stakeholders, publics, and society in general.** Communication objectives that serve the needs of an organisation, but disadvantage some stakeholders, publics, or sectors of society (e.g., social welfare or the environment) are not corporately or socially responsible. This holistic approach to setting communication objectives is illustrated by the bidirectional arrows in the framework.

3 **Baseline data** is important for evaluation of outcomes and impact (e.g., through pre- and post-program comparative analysis). For example, in the first example objective above, evaluation of increased target audience awareness will require data on pre-campaign levels of awareness. Collection of baseline data should be part of *formative* evaluation (i.e., *ex-ante*) conducted during the ‘inputs’ stage (see Note 4).

4 The identification of strategic communication in stages as inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact is based on program logic models that are widely-used in program planning and evaluation within public administration, education, and international development. For example:

- The NSW Government Evaluation Framework closely aligns with the five-stage *Kellogg Foundation program logic model*².
- The *University of Wisconsin Extension Program (UWEX) program logic model*³ separates outcomes into **short-term, medium-term, and long-term**, with long-term outcomes equating to impact. (See Note 6.)
- Similar program logic models have been developed and are used by the largest volunteer non-profit organisation in the United States, United Way⁴.

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These types of models can be **used for planning and evaluation of all types of strategic communication** including paid media advertising, media publicity, events, publications, Web sites, stakeholder engagement, and internal organisational communication, as well integrated campaigns – although different methods are used for evaluating different types of objectives at various stages. (See Note 14 and the accompanying Evaluation Implementation Matrix.)

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Some program logic models for communication use slightly different terms for the key stages.

For example, the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC) uses six-stages in the *AMEC Integrated Evaluation Framework* (inputs, activities, outputs, outtakes, outcomes, and impact) . ‘Outtakes’ is a term used in public relations literature to refer to short-term interim outcomes in the process of communication such as audience attention and awareness of messages. The NSW Government evaluation framework for strategic communication notes that ‘outcomes’ are graduated in terms of timing and salience from short-term to medium-term to long-term with different methods of evaluation applicable. What some refer to as ‘outtakes’ are incorporated within ‘short-term outcomes’ in the NSW Government evaluation framework for strategic communication.

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The stages of inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact, while often shown as separate elements for ease of illustration, are not discrete stages in a simple linear process. In reality, **the stages overlap**. For example, ‘activities’ continue during the stages of ‘outcomes’ and ‘impact’ to maintain effects. Also feedback and learning gained at each stage should be used to refine strategy and adjust tactics if necessary (see Note 8.)

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‘Feedback loops’ are vital elements of the model. For example, if audiences are not responding to an output such as advertising or an information Web site, it may be necessary to adjust strategy or even return to redesign some activities and outputs.

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The use of program logic models to identify the stages of strategic communication with feedback loops between stages highlights that **evaluation should be conducted progressively throughout programs** – not only at the end. Best practice recommends three types of evaluation:

- **Formative**, also referred to as ex-ante) conducted before programs begin (literature review, identifying baselines, gaining audience insights including channel preferences, and pre-testing are examples of formative evaluation);
- **Process** evaluation conducted during programs to track outputs and short-term outcomes;
- **Summative**, also referred to as ex-post, conducted after programs to evaluate outcomes and impact.⁶

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The program logic model-based NSW Government Evaluation Framework for strategic communication also draws on communication and media theories such as the steps of **information processing** identified by W. J. McGuire and the **communication-persuasion matrix**⁷. The AIDA model (attention, interest, desire, action) and similar models used in advertising is a derivative of McGuire’s steps, although the full list of steps in information processing is much more extensive including exposure, attention, understanding, liking, retention, consideration, acquiring skills or knowledge, attitude change, intention, action/behaviour, and advocacy⁸. All of these steps in communication are reflected in the NSW Government Evaluation Framework for strategic communication.

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The NSW Government Evaluation Framework for strategic communication also aligns with models in public relations and corporate communication that overview the process of planning and program management including the **RACE model** of PR planning, which stands for *research, action, communication, evaluation*⁹; the **ROPE model** which stands for *research, objectives, program/plan, evaluation*¹⁰; the expanded **RAISE model**¹¹, which advocates *research, adaptation, implementation, strategy, implementation*; and the **ROSIE model**¹², which slightly rearranges the stages as *research, objectives, strategies, implementation, evaluation*.

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Stakeholders, publics, and society are not only identified as ‘targets’ for information and/or persuasion in the NSW Government Evaluation Framework for strategic communication. The framework illustrates that:

- Stakeholders, publics, and society should be considered in setting communication objectives as recommended in Note 2 and during the ‘inputs’ stage of programs (e.g., understanding their needs, interests, preferred channels, etc.);
- Stakeholders, publics, and society will be ‘targets’ and receivers of information during the ‘activities’ and ‘outputs’ stages of programs, which are focussed on production, distribution, and exposure. During these stages, evaluation will necessarily quantify **what is distributed to stakeholders, publics, and society** (e.g., advertising, media publicity, Web site information, etc.) – hence there is a one-way arrow to stakeholders, publics, and society under ‘outputs’;
- However, communication ‘activities’ also should include dialogue, listening, collaboration, and relationship building. Evaluation of such activities should include identifying **the needs, concerns, and experiences of stakeholders, publics, and relevant sectors of society** in relation to the program and its messages. In evaluating ‘outcomes’ in particular, attention should focus on identifying the **response of stakeholders, publics, and relevant sectors of society**. Hence, a reversed one-way arrow under ‘outcomes’ indicates the importance of inviting and processing feedback and response from stakeholders, publics, and society;
- Whereas most evaluation frameworks and models highlight evaluation of impact only in terms of achievement of the objectives of the organisation, impact should be evaluated in terms of **impact on stakeholders, publics, and society** including any **unintended impacts** (positive or negative), not only intended impacts that serve the objectives and interests of the organisation. This bidirectional flow of impact is represented by a two-way arrow under ‘impact’.

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Whereas most evaluation frameworks and models also fail to include context as a major determining variable, the NSW Government Evaluation Framework for strategic communication highlights that **all stages of communication from setting objectives and planning to impact occur within a dynamic economic, social, cultural, and political context**. Context should be considered in:

- Setting objectives (e.g., are the objectives appropriate, relevant, and achievable in the circumstances); and
- Conducting evaluation – i.e., program **evaluation should include evaluation of context**. If the context changes, programs may need to be adjusted and sometimes objectives may need to be revised. For instance, if a major political event such as an election occurs, media and public focus will be diverted. Similarly, an economic recession can change government and public priorities. Evaluation of context should involve presentation of empirical data (i.e., evidence) to show the impact of context, not merely subjective claims.

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While the process of planning and evaluating strategic communication and the key concepts and principles involved are overviewed in the framework, **users should refer to the accompanying EVALUATION IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX for further detail of key steps, metrics and milestones, and methods of evaluation**. Under each of the stages in the framework (inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes (short-term to long-term), and impact), the matrix provides:

- A **brief description** / definition of what the stage involves;
- The **key steps** in each stage (such as planning, production, distribution, reception, awareness, engagement, interest, attitude change, etc.);
- **Examples** of things that typically occur at each stage (e.g., placing advertising and writing and issuing media releases are ‘outputs’, while Web page views, downloads, and inquiries are ‘short-term outcomes’ or ‘outtakes’);
- **Metrics and milestones** that can be collected or identified to provide empirical evidence of successful completion of each stage. In some cases, metrics (numbers) can be collected, such as media reach statistics, impressions, online views, etc. The term ‘milestones’ is used because in some cases numbers do not tell the story – e.g., strategic relationships might be demonstrated by signing of a partnership agreement or stakeholders agreeing to work collaboratively on a committee);
- **Methods** for generating evaluation data, including both formal and informal research methods and qualitative as well as quantitative research.

- 15** The Evaluation Implementation Matrix is a customised ‘matrix’ to help practitioners implement evaluation for all types of programs and for all levels of budget and time as follows:
- **The horizontal axis** – The progressive stages of strategic communication from ‘inputs’ to ‘impact’ are arranged in columns across the matrix from left to right. The aim of evaluation should be to progress as far to the right of the matrix as possible – ideally to evaluating impact;
 - **The vertical axis** – The metrics, milestones and methods are arranged from simple/basic/low cost at the top of the respective sections in the matrix to sophisticated/advanced methods at the bottom of each section. The aim of evaluation should be to go as deep as possible at each stage to generate the most reliable empirical evidence.
- 16** The Evaluation Implementation Matrix includes **more than 45 examples of strategic communication inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts; 45 examples of metrics and milestones that can demonstrate progress and results at each stage; and 35 examples of research methods (informal and formal; quantitative and qualitative) that can be used for evaluation of strategic communication.** (Some methods can be used for evaluating more than one type of activity.) Evaluation of most programs will use only a few of the metrics/milestones and methods listed. The purpose of this matrix is to:
- a Arrange various metrics/milestones and methods to show what is appropriate to each stage in the process of communication (the columns); and
 - b Show a ‘menu’ of options available in metrics/milestones and methods relevant to each stage from basic to advanced (the levels), with corresponding cost, time, and rigour implications.
- 17** All proposed NSW Government advertising campaigns costing more than \$50,000 in a 12-month period must be submitted for **Advertising Submission Peer Review** and approval using the *Advertising Submission and Report Template* [Web link].
- 18** All proposed NSW Government advertising campaigns costing more than \$1 million in a 12-month period must be submitted for **Advertising Submission Peer Review and Cabinet approval** using the *Advertising Submission and Report Template* [Web link].
- 19** An **Advertising Effectiveness Report** must be submitted within three (3) months of completion of all advertising campaigns costing \$50,000 or more in a 12-month period using the third section of the *Advertising Submission and Report Template* [Web link].
- 20** Strategic communication activities such as media relations and publicity, social media engagement, Web sites, events, publications, etc. also should be evaluated in accordance with these guidelines and reported in a form determined by the relevant Director of Communication.

Notes

- 1 The term ‘program’ is used after this point to include communication campaigns, projects, and programs including paid, earned, shared, and owned media, events, and other public communication activities.
- 2 Kellogg Foundation. (2004). *Logic Model Development Guide*. See <http://www.smartgivers.org/uploads/logicmodelguidepdf.pdf> (Original work published 1998)
- 3 Henert, E., Jones, L., & Taylor-Power, E. (2003). *Enhancing Program Performance with Logic Models*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Extension Program. See <http://fyi.uwex.edu/programdevelopment/logic-models>
- 4 Hatry, H., Houten, T., Plantz, M., & Greenway, M. (1996). *Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach*. Alexandria, VA: United Way of America.
- 5 Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC). (2016). Integrated Evaluation Framework. See <http://amecorg.com/amecframework>
- 6 Macnamara, J. (2017). *Evaluating Public Communication: Exploring New Models, Standards, and Best Practice*. London, UK: Routledge.
- 7 McGuire, W. (1985). Attitudes and attitude change. In G. Lindzey & E. Aronson (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology*, Vol. 2 (3rd ed., pp. 233–346). New York, NY: Random House.
- 8 McGuire, W. (2001). Input and output variables currently promising for constructing persuasive communications. In R. E. Rice & C. K. Atkin (Eds.), *Public Communication Campaigns* (3rd ed., pp. 22–48). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- 9 Marston, J. (1981). *Modern Public Relations*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- 10 Hendrix, J. (1995). *Public Relations Cases* (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- 11 Kendall, R. (1997). *Public Relations Campaign Strategies: Planning for Implementation* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Addison-Wesley.
- 12 Crifasi, S. (2000). Everything’s coming up rosie. *Public Relations Tactics*, 7(9), 14–15. New York, NY: Public Relations Society of America.