

Communications Issues

Issue 04

A Community Service of Harley House Consultants Inc.



Continuous Communications Evaluation (part 1 of 6)

Introduction

The *Government Communications Policy* states that institutions are responsible for integrating communications into the corporate management process and must... “monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of communications activities in relation to the objectives stated in communications plans”.

The Treasury Board of Canada Comptroller General document *Evaluating Departmental Communications-Information Programs* states that the need to evaluate communications activities and programs reflects a number of factors: the all-pervasive nature of communications activity in government departments; the large amount of expenditures allocated to this activity; the priority attached to the planning, execution and review of such activity by Cabinet; and, the importance of communications activity to the success of many government programs.

The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat Evaluation Policy states that managing for results is the prime responsibility of public service managers. The policy goes on to say that departments should embed the discipline of evaluation into the lifecycle management of policies, programs and initiatives to:

- develop results-based management and accountability frameworks for new or renewed policies, programs and initiatives;
- establish ongoing performance monitoring and performance measurement practices;
- evaluate issues related to the early implementation and administration of the policy, program or initiative, including those that are delivered through partnership arrangements (formative or mid-term evaluation); and
- evaluate issues related to relevance, results and cost-effectiveness.

The Harley House Approach

Just as the TBS states that departments should embed the discipline of evaluation into the lifecycle management of policies, programs and initiatives, Harley House Consultants Inc. stresses that the evaluation of communications should be embedded into the communications management cycle. That is, communications evaluation involves tracking the efficiency and effectiveness of communications programs and activities, as they are being planned, developed and delivered, as well as conducting post project evaluations.

The Benefits of Continuous Evaluation

The benefits of evaluating communications throughout the communications management process are:

- The end impact is likely to be more effective
- Proper planning, development and delivery are ensured
- It is possible to quickly determine the impact of the communications effort on the target audience and adjust the communications effort during delivery to maximize its effectiveness
- It provides an ongoing management control framework that leads to more effective decision making as well as more effective and efficient development and delivery of communications programs.

The Communications Management Process is based on the theory that effective communications can be achieved and maintained by following five simple steps, in an ongoing cycle of public environmental analysis, communications planning, development, delivery and evaluation:

Making Communicators Better Managers—Making Managers Better Communicators



2. Continuous Communications Evaluation (part 1 of 6)

Step 1. Undertake a Public Environmental Analysis so as to define the issues and opportunities that exist within the various internal and external audiences and benchmark the current situation.

Step 2. Interpret these issues and opportunities to senior management and formulate a communications plan/strategy that includes SMART (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, **T**imely) communications objectives.

Step 3. Develop a strategic public relations-communications program that integrates policy, objectives, messages and communications techniques, and pre-test its components so as to ensure maximum impact.

Step 4. Implement the strategy or plan and assess its impact and effects on target audiences so as to identify components that require course correction.

Step 5. Carry out a post-program evaluation of the effectiveness of the communications strategy so as to demonstrate the contribution to the organizations objectives and to document lessons learned.

In Conclusion:

At Harley House Consultants Inc., we believe in continuous evaluation. Over the next five editions of *Communications Issues*, we will explore how to embed evaluation into the communications management process. Each issue will provide the reader with a brief description of the evaluation process and include useful checklists. The next issue deals with Step 1 - Public Environmental Analysis.

For more information on how Harley House Consultants Inc. can assist you in:

- Managing internal and external relationships with key stakeholder groups; and
- Improving the effectiveness of your organization's communications and consultation programs,

Please contact Dale Harley at 613-882-5684, or email dale@harleyhouse.com

