

# Communications Strategy

HOPE VALE ABORIGINAL SHIRE COUNCIL

Tracey Wilson | Working Visions | March 2022



## Introduction

Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council with a population approximately 1200, is situated 46 km north-west of Cooktown, 370 km north of Cairns.

Council currently maintains a website and Facebook presence internally and since 2018 sought to establish a more robust communications framework to assist with communications and profiling Hope Vale Council to target audiences.

The Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council Communications Strategy (the “Strategy”) introduces a framework and managed communications strategy and is underpinned by a separate Action Plan which is an operational document developed to deliver media, communications and engagement activities.

The Strategy sits under the responsibility of the CEO.

## Aim: where do we want to be?

Quality information management is essential for all local authorities in order to ensure appropriate service delivery, coherent planning, evidence-based policymaking, customer satisfaction, value for money and access to resources. However, due to various reasons including the lack of available resources, Council has taken an ad hoc approach to information management over the years.

A good communication Strategy can play a significant role in the success of any Council program, project or initiative. It assists in identification of opportunities and also issues that have the potential to negatively impact Council.

Communication planning assists to:

- Clarify what needs to be communicated
- Clarify which audience/s are to be focused on, by identifying the best opportunities
- Determine communication vehicles which provide the best chance of reaching target audience/s
- Craft messages to heighten impact and produce maximum results
- Develop strategies for measuring each element of the entire Communications Strategy
- Establish timelines for the implementation of communication activities
- Review the results of communication activities to help manage Council’s communication effectiveness.

The Strategy’s aim is to introduce and maintain a simple to manage, but high-quality effective and efficient media and communications action strategy to engage with Hope Vale residents, internal and external stakeholders and potential investors and funders.

## Methodology

The Strategy’s framework encompasses a consistent approach to:

- Developing, maintaining and monitoring all Council’s social media assets.
- Managing Council’s communication tools, including newsletter, newspaper articles, website, information and promotional material.
- Supporting the broader public relations goals of Council, including advocacy on matters relating to Council’s strategic goals and broader regional matters.



- Providing communications assistance to all Council departments and managers.
- Improving communication between stakeholder groups and Council including media, government agencies.
- Enhancing local community involvement and attracting external stakeholder interest in local events.

The Strategy will be supported by an Action Plan which will form the “operational” basis from which the Strategy’s deliverables will be achieved. The Action Plan will be “owned” by the communications advisor and delivered in conjunction with Council management.

A Communications “plan on a page” will also be developed to provide a pictorial snapshot of activities for 2022 (refer attachment 2).

## Principles of good communication

Effective communication provides a strong foundation upon which Council can more effectively maintain and strengthen relationships with residents.

Effective communication can also:

- assist in building a positive reputation
- strengthen relationships with stakeholders
- generate community support and involvement
- provide a platform of strength from which to manage any crisis (e.g. disaster management and resilience)
- attract business and residents to the area
- highlight achievements
- improve staff morale and job satisfaction.

Tangibly, good communication practice can reduce costs and increase target stakeholder support, all of which make the day-to-day activities and long-term goals and aims easier to achieve.

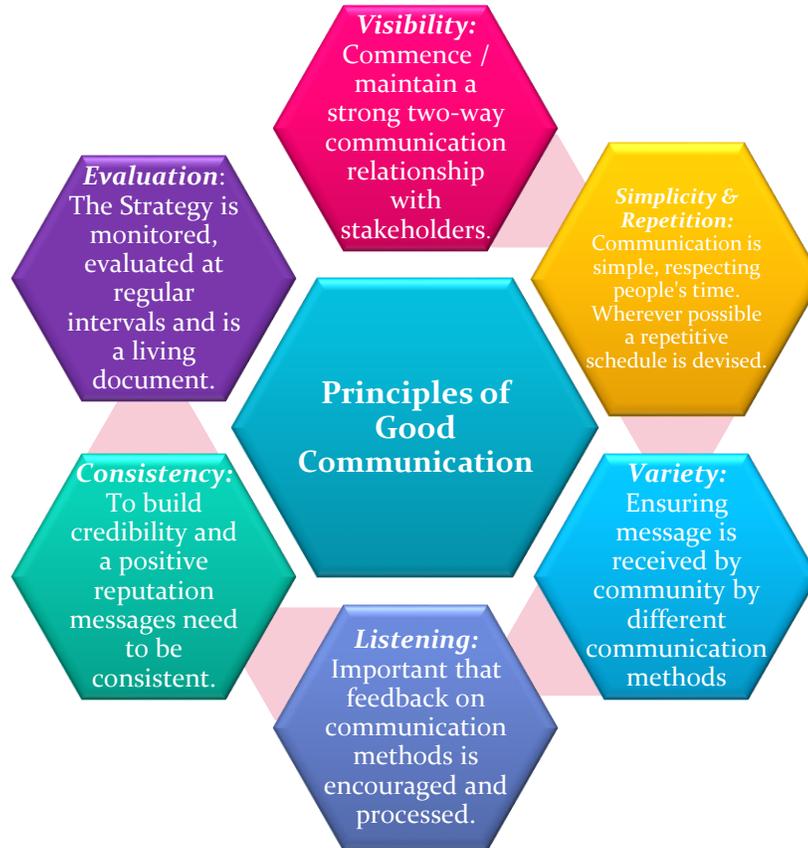
The Communications Strategy has been developed based upon the principles of good communication, namely:

- Visibility
- Simplicity & Repetition
- Variety
- Listening
- Consistency
- Evaluation.

Figure 1 below outlines the Principles of good communication.



Figure 1: Principles of good communication



**Visibility:** To commence or maintain a strong two-way communication relationship with stakeholders it is important to be visible as much as possible. Visibility leads to recognition and acceptance plus it allows residents to see the breadth and value of your work.

**Simplicity & Repetition:** People are busy with their lives whether at work or home. Communication must be simple and straight forward out of respect for people's time. 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 its audience will become.

**Variety:** To ensure a message is received by the target audience a number of different communication methods should be used. The more tools (website, newspapers, Facebook, etc) utilised, the wider the likely coverage will be.

**Listening:** Good (and effective) communication requires two parties - the giver and the receiver. If a message is sent, some type of response is usually expected. It is important that feedback on communication methods is encouraged and processed.

**Consistency:** To build credibility and a positive reputation messages need to be consistent. Messages should be 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 Strategy will be monitored and evaluated at regular intervals and is a living document.



## Informed community involvement

The Strategy will also provide opportunities for informed community involvement in Council's activities including:

- Commitment to the provision of culturally appropriate processes to encourage increased access by local residents to be informed of Council initiatives.
- Adherence to a policy and framework aimed at achieving meaningful communications.
- Fostering a council-wide culture of open communications and engagement.
- Providing critical information before, during and post natural and other disasters.

Figure 2, the “Communications Roadmap” outlines the pathway towards achieving targeted outcomes.

Figure 2 – HVASC Communications Roadmap





## Stakeholder Identification

When delivering messages, clarification around target audience is important. There are internal and an external public, who often can receive similar messaging with some distinct differences.

**Internal Stakeholders** consist of Councillors, staff, contractors, consultants.

**External Stakeholders** consist of federal and state ministers and elected representatives for Local Government, Traditional owner groups, neighbouring and other local authorities, government departments and agencies, FNQ Regional Organisation of Councils (IFNQROC), Torres and Cape Indigenous Councils Alliance Inc (TCICA), the ILF, the LGAQ, peak bodies, non-profit and community service providers, media, residents.

## Communication Channels, Tools, Strategy

A variety of channels will be utilised during 2022 to reach Council's target audience including:

**Council's website** – this will be re-modelled into a more attractive and contemporary platform during 2022 with various functions added to increase information flow and usage. Council has identified that the website is primarily used as a more formal information source by external stakeholders familiarising themselves with Hope Vale.

**Facebook** – Council currently maintains a Facebook page that has grown in popularity since its inception in 2018. In February 2020, 1760 people “like” the Facebook page, with 1,960 “followers”. In March 2022, there were 2,186 followers. The page is primarily used as an immediate information source for residents and Council and is a helpful tool for information dissemination and reach to residents. Residents have remained respectful whilst using the page and Council monitors the page, being mindful of the pitfalls of social media. In 202w there will be an action to provide more consistent messaging and content with more local staff having access to Posts, with the appropriate training.

A quarterly Communications Report to Council will be re-commenced in 2022 which highlights Facebook and other communications reach and outcomes and provide evaluation on communications activities.

**Media: messaging and releases** – media opportunities will be monitored and releases sent to targeted media outlets. Events from the event's calendar would be included in opportunities.

Project messaging developed as necessary and provided to Council.

**E-news via Mailchimp** – a Council e-news was commenced in August 2018. It is compiled monthly for distribution to interested stakeholders. A review of the stakeholder list will be undertaken in 2022 to ensure all stakeholders are being reached through this communications vehicle.

**Targeted advocacy** – this includes ways to showcase to higher level stakeholders Council's plans and ideas (e.g. economic development strategy) and highlight issues via meetings, workshops, and forums. This could also include talks from ‘champions’ and ‘success stories’ and case studies. Targets would include LGAQ, relevant Ministers, government agencies and other stakeholders as identified.



During 2022 case studies will be developed to use as “talking points” for Councillors and CEO/Directors.

Council will also develop a suite of advocacy documents which will highlight achievements, identify issues and opportunities. These will be used either independently of each other, and also brought together in a document which will be reviewed and updated annually.

**Hope Vale Council profile raising** – Progress has been made on previous recommendations via Council’s joining of FNQROC and Tourism Tropical North Qld. These regional memberships provide opportunities to raise Council’s profile in the wider region. In 2022, further action could be taken by attending Cairns/Cooktown and other regional networking meetings which have potential benefit and linkages to Council’s economic strategy and corporate Strategy. The “launch” of the revised Advance Hope Vale will provide another opportunity to highlight that Hope Vale is “ready for business and partnerships”.

There are also opportunities to develop more cost-effective videos, similar to Hope Vale road video which has been viewed over 7,000 times, and to capitalise on drone footage availability.

**Councillor profile raising** – as the new Councillors move into their third year, during 2022 a Councillor profile will be compiled and included on the website, Facebook page and newsletter, focussed on priorities and portfolios. Councillors will also be supported to supply photos and “lines” on their activities in the community and beyond for inclusion and building of their profile. Councillors undertook introductory media training during 2021 which could be expanded upon in 2022.

**Community Radio** – better use of local Hope Vale radio will be instigated with regular segments being pre-recorded around Council’s achievements, issues and ideas. The Mayor will be the primary spokesperson but a local radio “campaign” will be devised with guest speakers invited.

**Disaster information** – Council’s website, supported by Council’s Facebook page are the “go-to” places in times of natural or other disasters. Immediate information is placed on Facebook with viewers being steered towards the [Disaster information](#) page on Council’s website which have real-time links to relevant disaster, weather and emergency services pages. The electronic display will also be used in times of disaster for information dissemination.

**Covid information** – a new link was placed on Council’s website in early 2020 as a response to the massive information flow relating to Covid. The information is updated as necessary with the Disaster Manager (CEO) or other directors providing information to the Communications advisor.

**General community information** – better use of the electronic display will be organised to include general community updates and messages. This could include general Council information, pool opening hours, electricity outages, disaster information, community consultations etc.

Community information kept at Council reception will be monitored with Council staff being kept informed of any consultations or information to be disseminated.



## Key Messages

1. HVASC is a community-minded, inclusive organisation, delivering a range of services and programs for all members of the township.
2. Hope Vale is a great place to live, work, visit and invest
3. HVASC collaborates with a wide range of partners and supports initiatives which help deliver a positive, healthy lifestyle and a cohesive township.
4. HVASC listens and engages with issues identified by local residents and wider community.
5. HVASC is committed to openness, transparency and two-way communication with the community, council employees, elected representatives and other stakeholders.
7. HVASC collaborates with and advocates at all levels of government, creating partnerships to ensure the best outcomes for residents of the township.

## Target Audiences

Council's target audiences each have specific information and communications requirements. Different target audiences consume media in different ways, with digital and social media usage increasing across most target audience groups. Communications programs should be customised for each target audience group.

**Target audience 1** – The Hope Vale township – those who live, work, play and invest in the community.

**Target audience 2** – Businesses, retailers, business organisations and peak bodies.

**Target audience 3** – Non-Hope Vale residents – state-wide and interstate visitors, potential investors.

**Target audience 4** – Governments including the Queensland and Federal Governments and other local governments, including regional councils.

**Target audience 5** – Media – particularly targeting a monthly segment on local radio (ABC/Hope Vale radio).

## Strategy delivery

The Strategy will be delivered via the Communications Action Plan which will be updated quarterly (March, June, September, December) or as necessary to ensure issues and opportunity management is maintained.

The most recent version of the Plan is seen in attachment 1.

To assist in the development, implementation and delivery of the Strategy Council will investigate acquiring specialist media, communications, advocacy and engagement advice as required.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

A good Communications Strategy is not something that is static hence it's important to monitor its effectiveness in achieving the set aims and objectives, the messages communicated and the effectiveness of the channels and tools.



Initially an external consultant will be utilised to develop, introduce, embed and monitor the framework. This arrangement will be reviewed quarterly for efficiency and cost benefit.

The Strategy will be a “living document” with quarterly review of the Action Plan (see attachment 1).

Measurement tools will include:

- Resident’s and stakeholder knowledge about Council activities.
- how stakeholders found out about an activity.
- how effective communication was with a view to continuous improvement.

## Conclusion

This Strategy highlights ways to mitigate risks and issues around Council’s current approach to communications. The field of communications will continue to evolve in line with technological advancements and new and improved approaches in this digital age.

Council has a significant role in marketing the community as an attractive destination to live, work, visit and invest. With the assistance of appropriate communications, Council is better positioned to help the region to flourish. Investing in better communications is an investment in both Council and residents.

As the Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council intends to be portrayed in the best possible light and positioned as one of the best operating Councils in the country, the implementation of this Strategy will assist in achieving this goal.