

Every voice makes a difference



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Government Communication Forum 2012
Recommendations

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**His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin
Muhammad Al Qasimi**

UAE Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah



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bin Sultan Al Qasimi**

Crown Prince and Deputy Ruler of Sharjah

Introduction

Under the guidance of His Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Mohamed Al Qasimi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah, Sharjah Media Centre launched the inaugural edition of the International Government Communication Forum (IGCF) in February 2012. A first-of-its-kind event, the forum aims to build a platform for better communication between governments and their stakeholders to support the government of Sharjah towards creating a participatory dialogue and to develop government communication mechanisms for the benefit of government institutions in the UAE and the wider Arab region.

The event witnesses the convergence of local, regional and global media experts, along with government thought leaders from all over the world in the emirate of Sharjah. IGCF is set as an event to benchmark Sharjah's media and communication mandate against global best practices. It aims to bring the latest professional standards of various governments' communication methods to the emirate to develop a collaborative and participatory dialogue with opinion leaders, heads of government institutions, and other officials.

The first edition of the forum, held under the theme "Every voice makes a difference", included a series of panel discussions and workshops that saw the participation of top media and communication experts and senior government officials.

Recommendations

Government Communication and Good Governance:

- The process of communication within government work must be a tool to achieve the principles of good governance. In this sense, government communication is considered a civil right that serves citizens' interests and gives them added value in dealing with the government sector.
- The role of government communication should go beyond communicating government messages to the public to expand the mechanism of government work so that it is open for the public to review government decisions, future plans and legislation, and to open feedback tools for public opinion as a partner in the decision-making process.
- Central teams responsible for monitoring the government communication process at the general level need to observe the performance of the government communication team in each entity, to ensure efficiency and quality.
- It is imperative to support government communication teams across various entities and grant them the administrative powers that enable them to access the government information necessary for them to do their job as required.

Government Communication and Credibility:

- Government communication is a key element in building trust between citizens and the government. Government communication teams are a source of information that the public relies on to obtain reliable information on important issues.
- Credibility of the government communication process requires balance in media messages directed to the public. This means not to focus on achievements and commendations and to refrain from concealment or denial of mistakes. It also means formulating messages from the point of view of the public, not from that of the government entity or official.

Recommendations

Government Communication and Crises:

- The role of government communication in national crises and emergencies has to be emphasised, with the need to manage crises according to plans prepared in advance to avoid the reactions and improvisation that lead to confusion in the delivery of government messages.
- Media communication needs to be intensified during critical times to control rumours and their negative impact on the national interest, and to help the community recover and overcome the risks of crises as soon as possible.
- Government communication in such situations has to be comprehensive across all channels of media communication, and has to carry messages understandable by all segments of society.
- It is imperative to commit to transparency, accuracy and credibility in providing information and not to conceal facts.

Government Communication between Ethics and Professionalism:

- The people in charge of the government communication process must follow the ethics and values that regulate their professional performance.
- According to latest theories in the field of media and communication, the appointment of charismatic communicators who boast an influential media presence and are qualified both academically and professionally is a main rule in government communication.
- Government communication practitioners have to be trained on an ongoing basis to keep abreast of media and communication developments.

Recommendations

Government Communication and Special Groups:

- It is important to accord special attention to persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups in society, including women, children and the elderly, and to launch communication campaigns specifically targeted at these groups to ensure that government messages reach them in a clear and understandable manner, commensurate with their abilities.
- Government communication messages directed at these groups must be focused on achieving greater empowerment and integration into society, while promoting concepts of support to all society groups in need of special care.

Government communication and national cadres:

- Government communication teams need to rely on well-trained national cadres who have national and institutional loyalty in the first place, and adopt the principle of "citizens first" in the provision of government services.
- It is recommended that an award for excellence in institutional communication be launched to serve as a field for competition and innovation in this area.

Government Communication.. UAE and GCC Model:

- Complementarity of federal and local government communication strategies is a necessity, as well as full coordination between federal and local entities in this field to enhance the GCC's role in realising the ambitions and hopes of peoples of the member states.
- It is required to open channels of participation and interaction between people of the GCC and decision-makers, and to build stronger mechanisms of coordination and cooperation within the concept of GCC citizenship.

Recommendations

Government Communication and the Media:

- The relationship between the media and government communication departments should be based primarily on credibility by government communication teams and on professionalism by the media.

Government Communication and Community Networks:

- It is imperative to emphasise the importance of social networks as a new government communication channel that adds value to the traditional one-way communication channels.
- A partnership has to be built between government entities and e-influencers, including well-known bloggers and tweeters, to help deliver government messages to the public effectively and credibly.
- Government officials and spokespersons must be urged to promote their interaction with the public across social media.
- It is important to develop training programmes and academic curricula to educate government PR and institutional communication teams on social networks and their impact on government mass communication.

Government Communication and the Private Sector:

- The private sector is required to adhere to the principle of social responsibility by supporting the strategic messages of government communication, and to include in its media campaigns the values and concepts that enshrine citizenship, instead of limiting such campaigns to consumer promotion and commercial marketing.

Government Communication and Innovative Initiatives:

- Government communication teams have to play a role in supporting and nurturing innovative initiatives in society, initiated by individuals or NGOs.