Communications Plan Preparation Guidelines

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.   INTRODUCTION

Recommended text:
This introduction provides the purpose and scope of this document, the objectives of communications activities, and the assumptions and constraints used during the development of this document.

1.1   Purpose of this Document

Instruction:
This section outlines the purpose of the Communications Plan.

Recommended text:
This Communications Plan outlines the overall approach for communicating with stakeholders about **<insert project name>.** It outlines key messages, describes key stakeholders, and describes communications activities and how their success will be evaluated. It also provides a communications budget and schedule.

1.2   Scope of this Document

Instruction:
This section outlines the scope of the Communications Plan. For example, if the plan only covers internal communications for a particular phase of a project or excludes certain activities that will be done by another party, that information should be provided here.

Example:
This Communication Plan contains communications activities and events for all internal and external stakeholders for Phase 3 of the ABC Project at Ministry X. It does not include communications activities for future phases.

1.3   Project Background

Instruction:
This section provides a brief background on the project being supported by this Communications Plan. Keep this section brief -- half a page or less. Try to avoid writing new content for this section: a brief project background should be available in the Project Definition Document, Project Business Case, or Project Plan if one of these documents was written. Using text from these documents will promote consistency and prevent rework.

1.4   Communications Objectives

Instruction:
This section lists the main objectives of communications activities.

Examples:
- Building awareness and understanding of the ABC project.
- Encouraging stakeholders to get involved in the project.
- Encouraging stakeholders to be enthusiastic about the changes the project will bring about, including improved customer service, new processes and technology, and training for staff.
- Positioning the agency as an efficient, effective, world class organization with the general public.

1.5   Assumptions and Constraints

Instruction:
This section lists the assumptions and constraints specific to communications. This section does not restate the assumptions and constraints of the entire project. An assumption is a circumstance or event outside the project

that can affect its success and that the authors of this plan believe will happen. Constraints are restrictions or boundaries placed upon the project that limit the choices of the project team.

Examples of Assumptions:
- Media relations support will be provided by Ministry ABC's Public Relations Department.
- The project website will be launched on June 27, 2007.
- Development of a brand / visual identity will be outsourced to a marketing firm.

Examples of Constraints:
- The Ministry ABC logo will appear on all communications materials.
- All communications materials will be available in Arabic, English, and Urdu.
- Maximum budget for brand / visual identity is QAR 60,000.

2. COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Recommended text:
This Communications Plan outlines project key messages, branding and visual identity considerations, stakeholder needs, and planned communications events and activities. All activities are summarized in a Communications Schedule and Budget attached as appendices to this document.

2.1 Key Messages

Instruction:
Key messages are the three or four most important statements about a project the team wishes to share with stakeholders. They should communicate both key facts and motive.

Depending on the project, it may be important to both repeat some key messages over the life of the project, and introduce new messages as the project evolves.

In considering messages over the life of the project, you may wish to consider some of the following:
- Beginning of the project:
  – Project benefits or business value, sometimes known as the "case for change".
  – Basic information about the project: who, what, when, where, why, how?
- Middle of the project:
  – Status of work.
  – Key findings of studies or pilots.
  – Benefits realized to date.
  – Next steps.
- End of project:
  – Measures of project success.
  – Recognition of the stakeholders and team.

Examples:
- The project will support greater efficiency by reducing program costs by 20%.
- The project will improve customer service by reducing wait times from 2 days to 2 hours.
- The project will help develop skills through comprehensive training to staff on new processes.
- The project helps the agency meet its customer service goals as outlined in the agency Business Plan.
- The project will allow the agency to meet or exceed the performance standards of leading organizations worldwide.
- The project will modernize operations by making key customer services available online in 2007.

2.2   Branding and Visual Identity

Instruction:
If a brand or visual identity is being developed for the project, this section summarizes related activities and any known requirements. These requirements could include such things as specific instructions on colors, logos, or the need for the logo and tagline to work in different languages.

If a brand or visual identity already exists for the project, this section provides a brief description of it and confirms that communications activities will be consistent with this visual identity.

A brand or visual identity usually consists of the following:
- Logo
- Tagline
- Guidelines for use of the logo, tagline, and associated color schemes and fonts
- Standard artwork to be used in communications, such as pictures or drawings

2.3   Audience Analysis

Instruction:
This section provides objectives and key messages for each audience. It also lists the recommended communications vehicles and feedback mechanisms.

For each audience, ask:
- What are your objectives with this audience?
- Which key messages are appropriate for this audience?
    - Remember that stakeholders are interested in how your project affects them.
- Which communications vehicles and feedback mechanisms are appropriate for this audience?
    - Research current vehicles: regular meetings, existing newsletters, planned conferences.
    - Research stakeholder's preferences: email, written communications, face-to-face.
    - Create new communications vehicles and feedback mechanisms only if required.

Example:

Stakeholder	Objective	Key Messages	Communication Vehicles	Feedback Mechanisms
Internal Stakeholders				
Frontline Staff	Accept and support changes to processes and technology Actively encourage customers to use online services	The project will reduce customer waiting times from two days to two hours. The project will provide comprehensive training to staff on new processes. The project helps the agency meet its customer service goals as outlined in the agency Business Plan.	Team meetings Newsletter Townhall meetings Training sessions Posters in lobby	▪ Fax number to send input ▪ Suggestion box ▪ Team meetings ▪ Townhall meetings
External Stakeholders				
Customers	Use online services	With the implementation of this project, agency customer service will meet or exceed the performance standards of leading organizations worldwide. Key customer services will be available online in 2007. Online services will be private and secure.	Customer mail-out Posters in lobby Newspaper articles	▪ Email address ▪ Customer satisfaction survey ▪ Complaints department

2.4   Communication Activities and Events

Instruction:

This section lists the project's communications activities and events. It first itemizes Standing Activities and Events, which happen repeatedly and may include regular meetings, regular status reports, or the periodic release of a newsletter publication. It also itemizes Special Activities and Events, which often happen only once, and may include such things as a project launch meeting with stakeholders.

2.5   Evaluating Communication Effectiveness

Instruction:

This section describes how the team will assess whether or not communications activities and events are meeting their objectives and whether or not the overall communications objectives are being achieved.

Evaluating an audience's awareness or understanding of a project can be done by asking participants to fill out evaluation forms after an event, conducting surveys, and having conversations with individual stakeholders. If the goal of a communications event is to effect audience behavior, such as using a new website or visibly supporting the project by speaking at an event, this behavior can be observed and measured.

2.6   Roles and Responsibilities

Instruction:

This section outlines the roles and responsibilities of staff undertaking communications activities. It should align with the overall project organization chart and role descriptions as outlined in the Project Plan and provide more detail.

Tips:
- Use this section to clarify approval authority for communications activities. For example, the project team may be free to communicate within the organization with minimal approval, but all external communications will have to be approved by the sponsor.
- In addition to the table in the template, it may be useful to include an organizational chart.

APPENDIX A: COMMUNICATIONS BUDGET

Instruction:
Insert here a budget for communications activities. This budget should be consistent with the overall Project Budget but provide more detail on the cost of communications activities such as designing and printing materials and hosting events.

APPENDIX B: COMMUNICATIONS SCHEDULE

Instruction:
Insert here a schedule for communications activities. It must be consistent with the overall Project Schedule, but it should include more detail on the timing of communications activities and events.