



Province of the  
**EASTERN CAPE**  
EDUCATION

# **2021-2025 COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

building blocks for

**growth**  
Department of  
education

Communications Strategy 2021-2025



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The role of government communication is to ensure that all citizens receive information that will empower them to make informed decisions and choices. The South African Constitution refers to freedom of speech and access to information. Government must ensure that important information is always provided to all people and enable effective flow of information between government and its internal and external publics with the aim of facilitating participation, service delivery and informed decision-making and to build accountability and trust in government.

The Communications and Events Management Directorate has a responsibility to: -

- a) Develop, implement and monitor the implementation of internal and external communication and media policy instruments.
- b) Develop and maintain publications and other media for communication with stakeholders.
- c) Establish and maintain relationships with the media.

The Communications strategy, therefore, is developed to ensure that the ECDoE is able to achieve or implement policy directives on Communication at all levels of government spheres.

## 2. LEGISLATIVE MANDATE

- i) The South African Constitution, Act No. 108 of 1996 is the supreme law in the Republic of South Africa. Chapter 2 of the Constitution refers to the Bill of Rights for all citizens. Section 16 refers to Freedom of expression a) freedom of press and other media (b) freedom to receive and impart information and ideas c) freedom of artistic creativity and academic freedom.
- ii) Government Communication Policy – 2018 developed by Government Communication and Information systems (GCIS) serves as the custodian of government communications.
- iii) Integrated Provincial Communication Strategy Framework, 2019 – 24 which is a long-term strategy to cover the electoral cycle of the sixth (6<sup>th</sup>) administration to promote common communication agenda and ensure a co-ordinated and integrated communication of the impact of government programmes.
- iv) Eastern Cape Provincial Government's Communications Policy Document (2019) ensures that communication across the Province is coherent, reliable, ethical, open, encourages participation, is well co-ordinated, transformative,

professional, consistent, credible, effectively managed, impactful and meets the needs of all citizens.

### 3. BACKGROUND

The ECDOE Communications Strategy is anchored on the Eastern Cape Provincial Government's Communications Policy Document (2019) as well as the National Communications Policy Framework.

Secondly, the strategy has been developed in line with the Five-Year Strategic Plan (2020 – 2025) that sets out targets to be implemented by the ECDoE.

Thirdly, the Systems Transformation Plan 2019 – 2023 as one of the strategic documents in the Department has been considered. The strategy takes into account the four pillars or focus areas viz. capacity building; economic drive; 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution and Inclusive Education and Social Cohesion.

The mandate of the ECDoE is derived from the section 9 of the South Africa Constitution which summarily states that everyone has a right to basic education. The Eastern Cape Department of Education in ensuring that this right is protected, has a responsibility of providing quality basic education for all learners in the Eastern Cape Province and ensure that education is transformed and democratized in accordance with the values of human dignity, equality, human rights and freedom, non-racism and non-sexism.

The central recipients of the information from the ECDOE are the schools and the communities that they find themselves in. It can become a norm that the central recipients of information would be the media, but this is not the case. The provincial communication policy puts the citizenry at the heart of its policy. Thus, at the heart of our strategy as a department, are the learners, schools and communities.

Communication must also allow for residents to act on the information that they are receiving. The interaction that we want from communities and schools will also assist us in establishing whether our communication is achieving its intended goals.

Communication is also for the purpose of protecting the reputation of the ECDOE, as well as the dissemination of information around the ECDOE's programs. Effective communication is also multifaceted and layered, to speak to academics, schools and communities, analysts and other interested parties simultaneously.

### **3.1 BACKGROUND - COMMUNICATION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, the ECDOE proved that timeous communication can be used to alter perceptions, as well as keep our core constituency abreast of all developments. The Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically changed the way communications is done at all spheres of government. Strategically the following trends transpired as a learning curve for all involved: -

- Proliferation of Zoom & Teams
- Heightened usage of WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
- Heightened usage of digital and terrestrial media channels

### **4. AIM OF THE STRATEGY**

- To inform the work of the Communications Unit within the ECDOE, inclusive of Events, Public Relations & Marketing, Digital Media, Photo-Videography, Writing, Publications and any other relevant sections.
- To ensure alignment to the broader departmental strategic goals outlined in this document.
- To develop a plan of action aligned to the strategic priority areas, in order to counter the negative narratives and plant new positive narratives in the minds of Eastern Cape community and the country as a whole.
- To align our work as a department with the broader communications drive of the Eastern Cape Provincial Government.

### **5. TARGET AUDIENCE**

- Communications practitioners in the ECDOE and all other contributors towards communication materials
- Senior Leadership of the Department
- Learners
- Educators
- School Governing Bodies (SGBs)
- Education Stakeholders/ Role Players/Partners



## 6. KEY PRIORITY AREAS – STRATEGIC PLAN (2020-2025)

In terms of the Strategic Plan 2020- 2025, the Department has committed to prioritise improving performance in the following areas: -

- Ensuring learners benefit from provision of quality LTSM.
- Continuous support and development of educators and officials
- Leveraging ICT to streamline administration.
- Supporting socio-economic development and transformation.
- Growing relationships with key stakeholders in the sector.
- Mainstreaming the inclusive education drive of the ECDOE
- Access for more young people to Early Childhood Development.
- Infrastructure Development.
- Social Protection for the most vulnerable in our system.

## 7. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

The Province has over 5500 schools, with over 1,8 million learners in the system. There are serious infrastructure backlogs faced by the ECDoE. This is coupled with the slow pace in the implementation of the School Rationalization and Re-alignment Programme. This means that there are quite a number of small and unviable schools in the system which makes it difficult to resource and achieve quality education outcomes. The programme of opening new schools or finalised infrastructure projects does not receive as much attention as it should as it is the case with the dilapidated old schools in the province. The sanitation programme in schools remains a big challenge.

Over the past five years the Department has been achieving an increase in terms of percentage in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) Results. However, in 2020 the Department had experienced an 8.4% drop. This was a trend across the Country and can be attributed to the effects of Covid-19 pandemic. Out of 72 926 candidates that sat for the examinations, 49 691 passed (68,1%). The challenge currently is how the Department going to ensure that for 2021 academic year and subsequent years, the pass rate is increased.

The message of the department is often diluted by other events. The deaths of the HOD and Departmental Head of Communications posed a serious blow to communication efforts within the Department.

The allocation of budget for Communications Directorate remains one of the challenges faced by the Department. This has been exacerbated by budget cuts in the system due to Covid-19. This happens at a time while there is a need to deal with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and while more information needs to be disseminated.

The environment has also become even more hostile towards the Department. The initiative of providing e-Learning devices to learners tuned out to be an issue around tendering process, as a result the matter is still a court case. The Media outlets continue to give voice to naysayers and political opponents especially on the education sector.

## **8. KEY PRIORITY AREAS (2021-2025) – FOCAL POINTS FOR COMMUNICATION**

- Ensuring learners benefit from provision of quality Learner Teacher Support Material (LTSM).
- Highlight the timeous rollout of LTSM to learners and teachers and quality of the material.
- Continuous support and development of educators and officials.
- Highlight the HR programs for educators and officials; excellence in the ECDoE.
- Leveraging ICT to streamline administration. Showcase ICT infrastructure to enable e-Administration.
- Supporting socio-economic development and transformation.
- Thought leadership around the development of the province through education.
- Growing relationships with key stakeholders in the sector.
- Mainstreaming the inclusive education drive of the ECDoE.
- Communicating more effectively about the opportunities and achievements in the inclusive education space, not limited to special needs learners but mental health as well.
- Access for more young people to Early Childhood Development. Take cue from National DBE on this priority but showcase assistance of the department in conjunction with Social Development.
- Infrastructure Development. Showcase improvements to all infrastructure and educate citizens on rationalisation - Social Protection for the most vulnerable in our system.

## **9. ACHIEVEMENTS AS POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITY FOR COMMUNICATION**

The provincial education department is loaded with various potential opportunity areas. These should be utilized for communicating positive messages to the public. Recent achievements include, but not limited to: -

- A learner performing exceptionally well in the matric examinations of 2019, using the eye gaze technology (first matric examination).
- National award for district, in school nutrition programme – 2020/21.

- Boys and girls who outshine their peers in various cultural and sporting events, e.g. coding events, Indoni etc.
- Production of school furniture within the Province.
- Provision of ICT or e-learning devices for effective teaching and learning.

## 10. KEY RISKS & MITIGATIONS

- a) Political instability and or changes in Political Leadership. This has knock on effect on communication direction and imperatives for the term.

***More attention will be paid to department's wide initiatives that do not need to have the same individual/s present in order to continue.***

- b) Consistent negative publicity (hostile media) that renders the public apathetic to the work of the ECDoE on certain issues.

***Targeted intervention, especially to communities, that speaks to the heart of the issues; availing more time with the political head of the ECDoE to engage with education stakeholders and the media.***

- c) The effects of Covid-19 pandemic that could derail or hinder the 2021 academic year and beyond 2021. This will inevitably become a communications challenge.

***Seamless integration of e-services into the classroom, to allow for easier communication with learners. Use of other digital platforms to communicate departmental messages to stakeholders.***

- d) Court cases not going in favour of the department, leaving negative publicity in the media.

***Allocation of more financial resources to come up with crisis communications intervention in order to counter the narrative fiercely.***

- e) Reduced budgets for the communications imperative/mandate in the department.

***Engage more cost-effective ways of communication e.g. use of digital communication platforms that are readily available in the Department.***

## 11. BUDGET ALLOCATION

In terms of GCIS policy, adequate resources 1 – 5% of the Department's budget must be allocated to the Communication function. This should be based on the strategic plan and the size of the Department. The budget must be ring-fenced for this purpose.



## 12. SUCCESS METRICS

It will be clear that the strategy is fully operational and achieving its intended aims if the following occur: -

- i) Synchronised and consistent communication across various platforms on all issues that the department has identified as key priority areas.
- ii) Harmonisation of the various units and the work of the Communications Unit in a more consistent way, to include communications work as an integral part of most, if not all SOPs in the department.
- iii) The establishment and running of the departmental Communications Forum, with its weekly meeting to enable information sharing and planning.
- iv) Seamless co-ordination amongst the unit of responsibilities and leveraging co-operation to achieve even greater impact and interaction with people of the province.
- v) All stakeholders being the champions for the programs of the department.

## 13. FAILURE INDICATORS

It will be clear that the strategy is not operational and not achieving its intended aims if the following occur: -

- i) Disjointed and poor communication across various platforms on issues that the department has identified as key priority areas (Breakdown leading to lack of information).
- ii) Mixed signals being sent out due to silo working mentality of the different units in the department, which renders communication efforts redundant (Misinformation to the public).
- iii) The continued ignorance of the communications unit to events and programs of the department (Not enough publicity or brand visibility).
- iv) Haphazard and uneven distribution of duties within the department, with the same cohort of employees being leaned on to perform and carry the department.
- v) Learners and communities are the biggest naysayers for the programs of the department (Facilitates teacher and learner apathy on programs).

#### 14. INNOVATION: THEMATIC FOCUS

MONTH	FOCUS AREA
January	Release of NSC Results; Back to School (SNP; Scholar transport; Infrastructure provisioning; LTSM)
February	School Sport
March	School Sport; Human Rights Month
April	Cultural Activities
May	Teacher Development/ Capacity Building Programs
June	Half-Year Examinations, Youth Month
July	Learner Excellence/Principal Recognition
August	Celebration of Women in Education
September	Heritage Month; Language Policy Implementation; Trial Examinations
October	Celebration of Teacher's Month/Scholar Transport
November	Disability Week, Writing of Final Examinations (Grade 12)
December	Highlights for the year

#### 15. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

##### 15.1 STRATEGIC ROLE: MEMBER OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL (MEC)

- The MEC serves as one of the government-appointed spokespersons for the department and its programs. This role should be engaged with at the level of achievements and identification of opportunities. At a strategic level, the MEC is the bringer of good news while the SG is "straightener of crooked facts".



- The MEC will be expected to give political covering to the communications strategy and the unit as it implements the said strategy. The MEC ensures alignment to the provincial political goals that form part of the MEC's performance agreements.
- The MEC must be supported by the Communications Unit to enable fact sheets, talking points to be developed on any issue within the ECDOE purview.
- The MEC must appoint the Media Liaison Officer (MLO).

## **15.2 STRATEGIC ROLE: HEAD OF DEPARTMENT (HoD)**

- The HoD is the champion of the Communications Strategy and chief overseer of its implementation.
- The HoD would be expected to guide the drafting of the thematic focus areas and the key priority area project plans and capacitate the Communications Unit to enable work to be done.
- The HoD also serves as one of the government-appointed spokespersons for the department and its programs. This role should be engaged with at the level of implementation of projects and troubleshooting, where necessary.
- The HoD must be supported by the Communications Unit to enable fact sheets, talking points to be developed on any issue within the ECDOE purview.
- The HoD must ensure that there is adequate budget for communication activities.
- Ensure that the Communication strategies are approved and implemented.
- Provides oversight function to the HoC function.

## **15.3 STRATEGIC ROLE: HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS (HoC)**

- The Head of Communications (HoC) is the Chief Implementation Agent of the communications strategy and plan, also noting that upon adoption, the Head of Communications will also be responsible for the division of tasks in order to operationalise the strategy.



- The HoC leads the drafting of the thematic focus areas and the key priority area project plans and capacitate the Communications Unit to enable work to be done.
- The HoC will also be expected to lead the development of crisis communication strategy to quell any untoward publicity.
- The HoC also serves as the final strategic authority on all material that the department produces, whether visual, written or otherwise.
- The HoC also serves as one of the government-appointed spokespersons for the department and its programs. This role should be engaged with at the level of implementation of projects and troubleshooting, where necessary.
- The HoC must be supported by the Communications Unit to enable fact sheets, talking points to be developed on any issue within the ECDOE purview.
- Work with the MLO to develop and implement strategies that will enhance the reputation of the political principal and the Department.
- Ensures that the Department is informed of the Communication's Policy.
- Ensures that all communicators are capacitated on their roles and responsibilities.
- Participates in all strategic Departmental meetings.
- Ensure the assessment of annual communication strategic plans and make adjustments where necessary.
- Monitors communication deliverables and report on progress and impact.

#### **15.4 STRATEGIC ROLE: MEDIA LIAISON OFFICER (MLO)**

- Champion of the synergy between the political terrain and the communication needed to traverse that space, in the education sector. Advisor to the MEC on communication matters and a key bridge between the MEC's Office and the departmental Communications Unit.
- Co-Chair of the Communications Forum, in order to give marching orders from MEC's Office, in conjunction with SG's Office on communication imperatives for the week or month or thematic time.
- Chief implementor of the crisis communications plans that are drafted, in consultation with critical stakeholders to enable smooth engagement.





- Main support structure for the MEC, in terms of communication needs that may arise.
- Enhance the public image of the political principal and manages media liaison for the MEC's office.
- Strengthen relationships with the media leading to increased profiling of the Hon. MEC.
- Contributes towards the development of an integrated communication strategy and plan, particularly the MEC's media engagement strategy and plan.
- Collaborates with the HoC to ensure that all communication objectives are achieved within the Department.
- Oversee the development of communications materials in support of the MEC's outreach services.
- Monitors the print, broadcast and online media reports so as to be able to respond effectively to issues within the communication environment.

## 16. OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

- a) Strong Communication
- b) Access to information
- c) Accountability
- d) Performance Management
- e) Improved Audit Outcomes
- f) Freedom of Expression

## 17. STRATEGIC DIRECTION

- Hostile media forces in any publication or show will not be treated with the same negative energy, but attempts will be made to persuade them to change their narrative.
- The agreement and synergy between the ECDOE and the Premier's Office are a critical tool, to be utilised for dissemination of information as well as support when attacked.
- The ECDoE continues to pride itself on excellence in everything that it does, in line with brand protection and reputation management principles.



### 17.1 STRATEGIC DIRECTION: DIGITAL MEDIA

The presence of the ECDOE on various digital platforms serves as a strategic positive communications purpose and used in that way, through the action plans that will be drafted emanating from this strategy. Digital Media is: -

- A strategic tool, to be used in the dissemination of opinions, information and countering of incorrect narratives in the media space.
- An immediate and effective means to communicate the priority or message of the department in real time on any topic.
- A tool to showcase the development of our learners and educators, as well as our officials, in the quest to build an army of capable and dedicated residents of the Eastern Cape.
- Synchronicity, not sameness, is required for the platforms, as the ECDOE navigates which audiences to prioritise on which platform and at which time. These will include the use of audio recordings, videos, electronic documentation/posters, electronic newsletters, social media channels and Departmental website.

### 17.2 STRATEGIC DIRECTION: BROADCASTING

The relationship that exists between the ECDOE as well as various broadcast houses, is necessary for healthy journalism. The strategic direction that will be taken on broadcasting includes: -

- The prioritisation of community media e.g. Local Community Radio Stations and television at all events and programs of the ECDOE. This is to encourage this media type's growth and standing in the broader society. This also serves as a primary method to engage with different communities where they are in the province.
- The public broadcaster will also be utilised on certain occasions to reach wider audiences, along with private broadcasters.

### 17.3 STRATEGIC DIRECTION: NEWSPAPERS

- The consistent barrage of attack on the ECDOE that emanates from commercial newspapers has been a source of concern for the department. However, freedom of press is one of the principles enshrined in the Constitution.
- More emphasis will be on the prioritization of Community media when it comes to ad spend in newspapers, as this will allow us to communicate our points clearly, without dilution in the same newspapers. National media will be considered on aspects of requiring attention at that level.





- This is also a sector that is approaching its logical conclusion based on global trends. More thought needs to be given to the permutations or differentiated approach on newspapers in general.

#### **17.4 STRATEGIC DIRECTION: INTERNAL COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS**

- The communication between top management and educators, learners, other officials, is crucial to the success of this communications strategy. The aim is to keep all employees informed and mobilised to participate in the implementation of the Department's programmes/projects for the realization of its goals. Secondly, to establish a culture that is built on the values and principles of Batho-Pele.
- Priority has got to be given to the creation or resuscitation of internal communication platforms. This will speed up getting all internal stakeholders on track.
- A critical SOP in this regard is to ensure that before there is any press briefing that educators, learners, officials know what the content of the briefing is, to facilitate word of mouth interaction and further dissemination.
- The internal communications platform is also to be used as a tool to further the objectives of the department's HR – at a strategic level. Critical information can be shared on this tool, as well as enabling the department's key imperatives of improved ICT infrastructure for the establishment of e-Administration capacity. These platforms include, emails, bulk SMSs, general staff meetings, notice boards, internal newsletters, suggestion boxes and intranet.

#### **17.5 KEY STRATEGIC DIRECTION: BRANDING**

- The implementation of the corporate identity manual on Departmental Brand is very crucial in communication function.
- The co-ordination and the provision of Departmental marketing materials in government and related events is one of the key elements for improving the image of the Department i.e. provision of communication events management services. This includes provision of the Department's branding and all related responsibilities i.e. utilization of valid departmental colour pantones, schemes and representation in the development of all departmental materials (Banners, clothing, paraphernalia, letterheads, equipment, vehicles, signage, newsletters, adverts).



## 18. OUTREACH PROGRAMMES

- The Unit in conjunction with the Political Office and Stakeholder Management will continue to pursue the agenda of stakeholder engagement to advocate various programmes and policy changes within the Department. This will be done through recognized Departmental structures at all levels viz. District Education Forums (DEF), Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC) Committees and the Eastern Cape Education Advisory Council (ECEAC).
- Consideration will also be given to all role-players (Individuals, NGOs/NPOs) who contribute positively on all educational matters and towards the improvement of quality education outcomes.

## 19. CRISIS COMMUNICATION

- Government institutions should strive to avoid a crisis that may lead to negative consequences. Should such a crisis arise, the HoC must: -
  - i) Be notified immediately of such crisis that has emerged.
  - ii) Gather and verify information about the crisis, assess the severity and consider whether it should be escalated to OTP for leadership or managed at the Departmental level.
  - iii) Be given authority to take action immediately under guidance, until a broader decision can be made about how the Department should proceed.
  - iv) Form part of the Crisis Committee and establish permanent representation.
  - v) Be responsible for developing the Communications Crisis Strategy and tactics on how information should be released, who must speak for the Department on the issue.
  - vi) Identify the target audience with whom the message will be communicated and the platforms to be used.
  - vii) Communicate facts quickly, accurately and be open and accessible to all audiences, although mindful of confidentiality and legal and privacy considerations.

## 20. EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION

- Whenever practical, the HoC, working with the relevant line manager and Human Resources must inform departmental employees of the issues relating to the crisis, using the established internal communication channels before or simultaneously with the details being released to external audiences.





## 21. AREAS OF VULNERABILITY

- The Eastern Cape Department of Education is faced with negative publicity on a number of areas. These include but not limited to: -
  - a) Infrastructural Issues. The Department has huge backlogs on infrastructure matters which include eradication of mud schools and provision of water and sanitation.
  - b) School Rationalization, Re-alignment and Merger of small and unviable schools which pose a challenge on the available resources of the Department.
  - c) Human Resource challenges. The Department has a history of not being able to attend to HR matters at a rate at which it is required to. This creates a lot of frustration on all beneficiaries who are supposed to get the best service delivery but in vain, hence they resort to other means of pushing their pleas and cries to the media.
- The HoC has to develop a Communications Plan that will deal with all unplanned communication. Media monitoring and pro-active communication has to be implemented to counter-act the damage caused by negative publicity.

## 22. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- The HoC must monitor international, national and regional print, broadcast and online media on a daily basis and maintain regular contact with the MEC and

HoD advising the leadership on emerging issues that may lead to a reputation crisis. The HoC has a responsibility of ensuring -

- i) Establishment of the Communications Forum for planning and regular meetings.
  - ii) Constant updates on all Departmental Programmes to the public.
  - iii) Constant updates of our communication platforms.
  - iv) Utilization of all communication platforms for optimum publicity.
- The Communication Strategy is a five-year plan, in line with the Strategic Plan of the Department and will be assessed annually for its effectiveness and alignment with Departmental priorities.

Approved by the Superintendent-General

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*[Handwritten signature]*  
*23/06/2021*