Communication policy for the Government Offices

Introduction

This policy is aimed at employees of the Government Offices and serves as guidance in day-to-day work. It is the common starting point for the Government Offices’ communication activities and for ministries when formulating their communication goals and strategies. The policy covers both internal and external communication. Naturally, it does not affect the constitutionally protected freedom of communication.

Why the Government Offices needs to communicate

The Government governs the realm. The task of the Government Offices is to prepare government business and assist the Government and ministers in their other activities. This is set out in the Instrument of Government. The overall goal of the Government Offices is to be an effective and competent instrument for the Government in its task of governing the realm and implementing its policies. Communication has an important role in this.

The Government Offices is to base its work on the fundamental values of central government administration, namely democracy, the rule of law and efficiency. Democratic governance requires communication. How well a democracy functions is determined to a great extent by the knowledge of citizens and their access to facts, assessments of consequences, positions and arguments. Transparency, knowledge and dialogue help create understanding and legitimacy. The citizens are our employers. It should therefore be possible for them to have insight into the activities of the Government Offices. In other words, the Government Offices has a democratic responsibility to communicate externally.
There are also requirements regarding government agencies’ external communication, such as the principle of public access to official documents (including the rules on public access to official documents), the Language Act’s requirement of simple, comprehensible and considered writing, and regulations on making information accessible to people with disabilities. Another example is the Instrument of Government’s requirement that the Government must collect opinions when preparing matters for decisions.

The limits of the Government Offices communication remit are not always self-evident. There is a dividing line between the Government Offices and other central government agencies. A basic rule is that responsibility for communication stems from operational responsibility. When operational responsibility for a given issue is transferred to a government agency, communication responsibility for that issue follows. To function, this requires good dialogue to be maintained between the Government Offices and the agencies concerned, within the framework of normal agency governance. Another dividing line runs between Government policy and party politics. The Government Offices communicates Government policy. Communication by the Government Offices is based on its mandate to assist the Government and its ministers in their role as Government representatives and therefore not as party representatives.

External communication primarily concerns Government policy and the work of the ministers. Occasionally, the Government Offices also needs to communicate externally about its activities, for example in its capacity as an employer.

To enable Government Offices employees to carry out their work in an efficient manner, good internal communication is required. Good internal communication is an important part of the management and governance of the organisation and of the Government Offices’ internal preparatory processes. It helps to increase skills and creates motivated and committed employees, which leads to better operational results.

**Goals**

Communication objectives are linked to operational objectives

The Government’s political priorities are broken down into operational objectives at ministry level\(^1\) together with objectives for the ministry’s

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\(^1\) In this policy, the Prime Minister’s Office and the Office for Administrative Affairs are treated as ministries.
other activities. Internal and/or external communication objectives are linked to these operational objectives.

Overall objectives

The overall objectives for communication at the Government Offices are based on the agency’s overall task of supporting the Government in its mandate to govern the realm and implement its policies. The goals are that

*external* communication should
- give a clear, cohesive and explanatory picture of the Government’s work and policies;
- contribute to the impact of Government decisions;
- create confidence in the Government and the Government Offices as institutions;
- promote open dialogue; and
- support the Government and the Government Offices in the event of serious incidents and in emergencies.

*internal* communication should:
- contribute to Government Offices employees feeling included and motivated and to them being able to carry out their tasks in an efficient and competent manner; and
- contribute to the Government Offices as an organisation functioning efficiently and appropriately, in normal day-to-day activities and in the event of serious incidents and emergencies.

The Government Offices’ target groups for communication

The Government and the Government Offices handle issues that cover all sectors of society, and they therefore need to communicate with different actors such as private individuals, the Riksdag, agencies, the media, companies, stakeholder organisations and international decision-making bodies. The possibility to promote Swedish interests and influence the image of Sweden abroad means that the Government and the Government Offices need to communicate with the whole world around them. The form and language of this communication depends on who the Government Offices is communicating with in each individual case. The message and methods need to be tailored to the different needs and knowledge of the target groups. Internal communication is directed towards employees at the Government Offices, in Sweden and at missions abroad.
How the Government Offices communicates

All communication at the Government Offices is based on the overall objectives for communication and the core values of transparency, factualness, comprehensibility, relevance and timeliness. The import of these core values is specified below.

Transparency

Activities are to be characterised by transparency and public access to information. Transparency is a prerequisite for a well-functioning democracy. Transparency includes being accessible, listening and inviting discourse and dialogue.

*Among other things, this means that:*
- important information, when it is deemed possible and appropriate, is made public before it is formally requested;
- information is made available quickly, albeit always considering the applicable regulations and the accuracy of the content;
- dialogue is used as a complement to information; and
- information is made accessible to everyone, with consideration given to those who need extra support to avail themselves of the information.

Factualness and comprehensibility

A prerequisite for credible communication is that it is factual, comprehensible and put in context. Communication must be related to the mandate of the Government and the Government Offices. It must be adapted to the target groups concerned. The message and the choice of channels are based on an analysis of the different needs and knowledge of the target groups.

*Among other things, this means that:*
- the language employed is straightforward, comprehensible and considered, and that it is presented in an informative way;
- the focus lies on explaining policy, its context and practical significance for those it affects;
- communication is based on the Government Offices mandate to assist the Government and its ministers in their role as government representatives and therefore not as party representatives; and
- communication is adapted to the needs and knowledge of the target groups concerned.
Relevance and timeliness

Communication must be timely, be based on Government and Government Offices priorities and be relevant to the groups concerned. Communication must contribute to achieving the operational objectives in a resource-efficient manner.

Among other things, this means that:

- prioritisation is based on the operational objectives and the needs and knowledge of the target groups concerned,
- strategic monitoring is conducted continuously; and
- existing information is continuously updated.

Division of responsibility

All employees at the Government Offices communicate in one way or another internally and externally and are personally responsibility for this. A prerequisite for good communication is that it is coordinated and well-considered. This is achieved through a clear division of responsibilities. A description of responsibilities and tasks of the functions most concerned with communication follows below.

Prime Minister’s Office

The Prime Minister’s Office has ultimate responsibility for the coordination of both internal and external communication. This includes responsibility for the overall communication priorities and being a signing-off point for cross-ministry and cross-agency communication. Communication is coordinated with the support of the head of communication at the Government Offices.

Office for Administrative Affairs

Head of communication at the Government Offices

There is a head of communication at the Government Offices. Their task is to:

- coordinate internal and external communication efforts at the Government Offices;
- develop and embed annual overall priorities in the communication area;
- when necessary, prepare matters together with the political leadership at the Prime Minister’s Office;
- identify, coordinate and pursue inter-agency communication development;
– ensure that Government Offices inter-agency communication is followed up and evaluated,
– fulfil the function of press contact for the Government Offices as a government agency;
– when necessary, initiate inter-agency skills development initiatives in the communications area,
– assume editorial responsibility for Government Offices wide news on the home pages on Klaranätet as well as the home pages on regeringen.se and government.se; and
– work for good internal communication to support the management and governance of the entire Government Offices.

The Government Offices coordinated communication function

The task of the Government Offices coordinated communication function is to provide support and service to the entire Government Offices. This task includes:
– providing strategic and operative support to the head of communication at the Government Offices;
– in cooperation with the head of communication at the Government Offices, acting as the communication function of the Prime Minister’s Office and the Office for Administrative Affairs;
– taking responsibility for technical and practical support during the broadcast of press conferences, webcast interviews and events;
– taking responsibility for the development of Government Offices websites;
– providing internal consultative and practical support to the entire Government Offices; and
– procuring and managing framework agreements in the communication area which may be used whenever the in-house resources do not meet needs.

Ministries

The ministries are responsible for communicating on their respective issues in accordance with overall guidelines and priorities. They are also responsible for informing the head of communication at the Government Offices of issues that need to be coordinated, informing them of joint development needs and issues of importance and contributing to the appropriate development of communication activities in the entire Government Offices. Several functions at the ministries have responsibility in this regard. A description of the tasks and
responsibilities for the functions at the ministries most affected by communications issues follows below.

Minister/state secretary

As a member of the Government, the minister, assisted by the state secretary, has special responsibility for communication within their area of responsibility. The head of ministry, and their state secretary, also have special responsibility for internal communication. The minister/state secretary is responsible for:

– setting communication priorities within the minister’s areas of responsibility;
– ensuring that well-functioning working procedures are in place between those involved in communication work;
– drawing boundaries between the minister’s role as a representative of the Government and as a party representative in communication matters; and
– ensuring that there is good internal communication to support the management and governance of the ministry.

Heads of press services/press secretaries

The role of a press secretary is tied to a minister. The press secretary’s task is to:

– support the minister in their role as a media spokesperson;
– initiate, coordinate and arrange the minister’s media contacts;
– develop communication strategies and communication plans for their minister; and
– plan this communication in close cooperation with the communication function and policy departments.

Communication function

There is a communication function at every ministry. The task of the communications function is to:

– strategically plan communication activities at the ministry;
– provide support to the ministry by being actively involved in the planning, implementation and follow-up of all stages of the communication process with the aim of achieving the goals of communication activities, both internally and externally;
– when necessary, initiate in-house ministry skills development in the area of communication;
– offer consultative support to departments and management in the ministry;
– be responsible for developing ministry-specific steering documents in the communication area based on this policy;
- work proactively on the ministry pages of the Government’s external websites and Klaranätet, and take editorial responsibility for these;
- be responsible for the follow-up and evaluation of the ministry’s communication activities;
- keep the head of communication at the Government Offices informed of issues of common interest; and
- contribute to the appropriate development of communication activities throughout the Government Offices in consultation with the head of communication at the Government Offices.

Principals/managers

Responsibility for policy issues also covers their communication aspects. Communication responsibility therefore corresponds to line responsibility. The task for the principal with line responsibility is to:
- identify communication needs at an early stage – on an ongoing basis and in activity planning – in consultation with the communication function, and plan activities based on these;
- ensure that published information regarding the department’s policy issues is correct and up-to-date;
- produce background material for communication on policy issues, both internal and external;
- be able to provide facts and background information to the media and other stakeholders on request;
- ensure that employees are given the opportunity to participate in relevant skills development in the communication area;
- pay particular attention to efforts for good internal dialogue between relevant functions at the ministry and within the Government Offices; and
- contribute to good communication with employees to support good management and governance of the ministry.