

**WRS COMMUNICATIONS AND CONSULTATION
PLAN**

Report No. WRSF2005/

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the attached draft plan for WRS consultation and communications be received.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the attached communications and consultation plan is to ensure that appropriate approaches and methods are employed to generate understanding of, and feedback on the Growth Framework discussion document in 2005, and final WRS Strategy in 2006.
- 1.2 Feedback is sought from the WRS Forum as a basis for agreeing a final version of the Communications and Consultation Plan.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF DECISION

- 2.1 No significant decisions are sought in this report. When decisions arise that may trigger local government 'significance tests', care will be taken to ensure each council's decision-making criteria are reflected.

3. BACKGROUND

- 5.1 Specialist advice has been obtained in developing the attached plan, along with input and advice from communications and consultation advisors from the participating WRS member organisations.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 A key aspect of the WRS process is developing understanding of the issues facing the Wellington region, discussion and debate within the regional communities of the options for tackling these, and shared understanding and ownership of the adopted Strategy. The attached plan seeks to contribute to achievement of these outcomes.

5. POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 The approaches proposed are considered to be consistent with the Policy positions of all of the WRS member organisations.

6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 There are no changes required from the previously specified budget.

7. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 There are no known legal considerations.

8. PUBLICITY CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 These are specifically addressed in the Communications and Consultation Plan attached.

Report prepared by:

Chief Executive Group approval:

Name: Graham Spargo

Date: 13 May 2005

Designation: Project Director

Date: 10 May 2005

18 May 2005

DRAFT

Wellington Regional Strategy Communications and Consultation Plan

1. Background

The Wellington Regional Strategy is a project of the nine local authorities which make up the greater Wellington region...

- Kapiti Coast
- Porirua
- Upper Hutt
- Hutt
- Masterton
- Carterton
- South Wairarapa
- Wellington
- Greater Wellington

Regional economic development agency Positively Wellington Business (PWB) is a key partner in the project

WRS aims to build “an internationally competitive Wellington by developing and implementing a vision and an integrated framework to achieve sustainable growth for the Wellington region”

While the Wellington planning aims to be valid for 50 years, its main focus will be on the next 10-20 years. The regional strategy itself is to be completed in July 2006.

This paper deals with the communication and consultation requirements around the growth framework and the resulting regional strategy. The paper will evolve and consultation tools used will be reviewed as the formation of the strategy is finalised. For example spatial decisions will require more targeted consultation than is required at the growth framework stage.

2. How does the WRS consultation tie in with local authorities' ongoing consultation?

All local authorities have consultation obligations, especially around their Long Term Council Community Plans (LTCCP). Wherever possible the consultation required for this planning, and WRS consultation, should be merged and seamless to stakeholders. For example a WRS publication seeking feedback on the growth framework might also devote space to the relevant local authority, covering its consultation requirements.

3. Principles

- The consultation processes should comply with the relevant requirements of the Local Government Act
- Consultation should tie in with other consultative processes being undertaken by other local authorities.
- Communication mechanisms should be accessible, easy to understand and easy to provide feedback from.
- Communication and consultation needs to be relevant to all target audiences including main ethnic groups

4. Objectives

Consultation is a mandatory component of all major local authority decision processes. The development of a Wellington Regional Strategy is no exception. However, although consultation is mandatory, it is often difficult to engage ratepayers. This is especially relevant in developing the WRS because the subject is intangible and most of the effect of the planning will not occur for several years. It is during the “effect” stage, when things start happening, that people are more easily engaged.

Although stakeholders are difficult to engage, many will still have a view, they’re just not motivated to express it unless persuaded to do so. Consultation processes therefore, need to incorporate an element of persuasion. The WRS needs to ensure it cannot be reasonably challenged down the track when the strategies are put into action.

Consultation needs to be particularly strong among interested parties such as business – these groups are potential advocates for the strategy

The WRS team also has a role in ensuring the nine participating authorities and Positively Wellington Business are thoroughly involved in implementing the communications plan. In doing so it will capitalise on the relationships the council communications managers have with their media.

More specifically the objectives of this communication plan are to:

- identify relevant external stakeholder groups.
- increase awareness and understanding of the Wellington Regional Strategy among the target audiences
- implement a robust consultation process at a level commensurate with the needs of each stakeholder group.
- communicate the regional strategy, especially the growth framework, via a range of communications vehicles thereby maximizing the uptake of information
- identify a number of opportunities and package those milestones in a manner which optimises media coverage.
- develop a list of key themes (messages) for use in all external communication.
- implement procedures which ensure the smooth flow of information from the WRS executive team to external stakeholders via the nine local authorities.

5. Timing

A number of the initiatives detailed in section 7 of this paper have a significant lead time. For this reason, determining the launch date for the growth framework is a priority. Other dates of significance include:

- 26 May 2005. Communications Plan signed off by communications group, PEG, CEO's forum and WRS forum
- July 2005. Draft regional growth framework complete. Public consultation begins
- Mid August 2005. Consultation for growth framework concludes
- September 2005. Consultation feedback merged into final growth framework
- April 2006. Communication and consultation of draft strategy commences
- June 2006. Strategy adopted

6. Target audiences

Internal audiences

The internal audiences are:

- Wellington Regional Strategy Forum.
- Chief Executives' Group.
- Project Executive Group.

- Positively Wellington Business (PWB).
- Regional iwi. The Ara Tahī group.
- The Strategic Partners Forum

- The WRS Executive team
- The Communications working group

More detail on the internal audiences is contained in the appendix

External audiences

- Council Managers and staff
- All Councillors who are not members of the forum

- Residents in general

- Media (Television, Dominion Post, Wairarapa Times Age, Community newspapers, NBR, Independent, Maori and Pacific Island media and local radio)

Key stakeholder representatives including:

- Politicians and their staff
- Ratepayer Associations
- Iwi
- Central Government agencies
- Business Groups (details from PWB)
- Property Developers
- Social service providers
- Professional Associations (Lawyers, Accountants, valuers, real estate, architects)
- Academics
- Community Boards
- Environmental groups
- Educational sector (schools and universities)
- Interest groups as identified by local authorities
- Construction industry
- Decision makers outside the region – for example those with a presence in the region but head office elsewhere

7. What will we do to achieve the objectives?

The following is a series of actions that will be undertaken to facilitate the communication and consultation process. The actions are designed with the objectives in mind and will apply to varying degrees, to each stakeholder group. The commentary below provides an overview of what will occur. More detail is required before implementation.

7.1 Develop key messages and consistent branding. The key messages represent the main themes that stakeholders should take out of communication from the WRS. At a functional level, the messages need to bring about an understanding of the WRS generally, what is being planned, and the need for feedback...

- The Wellington Regional Strategy is a grouping of Wellington and Wairarapa local authorities and Positively Wellington Business
- The WRS is developing a plan to ensure the regions long term growth and wellbeing
- We want feedback... have your say by [list feedback mechanisms]

In addition to the above, messages/themes need to be formed around the strategic packages. These will be important. They represent a distillation of the entire strategy and need to be crafted in a way that is meaningful to stakeholders.

For example:

“the region’s got a lot going for it and the people are smart, but our incomes aren’t increasing as much as they should”

is a more meaningful way of communicating the first strategic package which is “unleash economic potential” .

Development of these themes will increase understanding. Consistent branding in all communications will increase awareness.

7.2 The Launch. The purpose is to launch the growth framework and to generate media coverage. The actual format of the launch is being decided. Initiatives being considered include a launch presentation to key stakeholders and/or a regional roadshow.

7.3 Research. Research is the tool by which the WRS will extract feedback from ratepayers. It is recommended because:

- Ratepayers are the most important audience
- It is difficult to engage ratepayers passively on a strategy – they’re interested in actions, not strategies
- It is necessary to get a “valid” understanding of ratepayers’ views. The growth framework will precipitate feedback from sectors of the population who are acutely interested in local body affairs and suspicious of local authorities. This group will want their say. However their views are probably not indicative of what the general population thinks. Quantitative research will add balance to responses
- Research will increase understanding among respondents and will yield more informed results.

The research should commence after the initial publicity. This will ensure there is greater awareness of the strategy among respondents. As a first step focus group discussions should take place drawing respondents from throughout the region. The purpose of the focus groups is to flesh out the issues – what are the things in the growth framework that push the buttons of the region’s ratepayers. The outputs from the focus group discussions will form the basis of a subsequent region wide quantitative survey of 600 respondents. This will provide statistically reliable results for the region. If greater accuracy is required at a local authority level, a larger sample will be necessary.

There are two key advantages in the research. First it provides a statistically reliable measure of what ratepayers actually think, and second it demonstrates that the WRS is genuinely and proactively obtaining feedback.

A standalone analysis of this nature is expensive and, if possible, the WRS should tap into existing research vehicles that the local authorities have in place.

The WRS needs to be prepared to receive and understand a range of views. It is possible some aspects of the final strategy will be at odds with the research findings. Where this occurs the WRS needs to be clear in explaining the rationale behind its recommendations and also to understand what lies behind the views that may be expressed.

The research is potentially a media opportunity and to some extent sets the agenda for the Strategy.

7.4 Use the media. Media coverage is good because it is:

- Cost effective (in most cases)
- Unbiased (again in most cases) and therefore credible
- Reaches a wide audience

However media also poses challenges:

- The growth framework is not overtly interesting and the WRS needs to package outputs to make them newsworthy.
- We don't have control, and there is potential for the big picture to be clouded by inter regional disagreements.

To get the best use out of the media WRS needs to:

- Highlight various opportunities that evolve out of the consultation process and package them in a newsworthy way. This will mainly include outcomes from meetings
- Develop a database of media and the means by which they will be provided information
- Develop a relationship with key reporters
- Monitor coverage and implement quick response mechanisms for negative coverage, including letters.

Media planning needs to recognise that community media are an important conduit for many regional authorities. Planning should also ensure that communications managers receive copies of all information sent to media.

7.5 Use the web site www.wrs.govt.nz The current website is functional, and describes the role of the WRS. However it does not "fit" with a region which prides itself on its innovation, creativity and design skills. The Wellington site would benefit from:

- an overall design that is creative and innovative
- less formal language that is targeted at ratepayers
- use of graphics, photographs and illustrations to reinforce understanding and enhance interest
- content that demands interest. For example "every week that goes by in the western Bay of Plenty... 32 new homes are built, 54 more vehicles go on the road..." In the Bay of Plenty's case these facts demand interest because they are conveyed in a way that is meaningful to ratepayers. They also convey the need for planning or *SmartGrowth* in Bay of Plenty's case.
- a feedback mechanism and discussion forums
- E-newsletters that the public can subscribe to

The web site needs to be a reference point which provides as much, or as little detail as stakeholders require. For example if a ratepayer is looking for superficial information it should be easily obtained from the home page. Alternatively an academic wanting to find an economist's report should also be able to access it from the site.

In addition to the web site a CD should be developed based on the web content. This provides an alternative means of information and is relevant to a region which incorporates the "innovation capital". The CD will be part of the information pack that is provided to stakeholder groups and to individuals who request information.

The web address needs to be a mandatory component of all communications and will be one of the main mechanisms through which feedback is provided.

7.6 A publication for all stakeholders. At the end of the consultation process the WRS needs to be satisfied that it has:

- taken reasonable steps to maximise awareness of the project among all stakeholders
- provided the means for stakeholders to give feedback if they want to

It is proposed that a publication giving an overview of the growth framework, be sent to all households. Local authority consultation requirements should be dovetailed into this same publication, but allowing for variation by authority. While a publication does not guarantee readership, it does ensure that every household has the opportunity to learn about the strategy. The publication should contain a simple means of providing feedback. It should be an easy read both in terms of the language used, and the liberal use of charts and illustrations. It should not attempt to convey detailed information, but should refer readers to the website if more detail is required.

It is proposed the publication be sent as a wrap around (ie the front and back "cover") of relevant community newspapers - for example the Wellingtonian for Wellington, Upper Hutt Leader for the Upper Hutt etc.

The publication, the CD and a covering letter from Forum members should also go to all key stakeholder representatives. They should receive this package just prior to the newsletter arriving in their mailbox. The objective being to show they are being treated as a privileged audience and to optimise feedback.

7.7 Public exhibitions. Public exhibitions (as opposed to meetings) are proposed as the means to engage local communities. They are intended to be information opportunities (both ways). The public exhibitions should mainly be a local authority responsibility. It is proposed that each exhibition incorporate a visual display (ideally interactive) illustrating the key themes of the strategy and also incorporating local content if required. WRS and local people would be in attendance to facilitate discussion and answer questions. Local authorities would arrange the venues, the invitation list and/or advertising.

7.8 Tap into internal staff communication vehicles. Staff within the local authorities and Positively Wellington Business are potential advocates for the strategy as well as conduits of information. They should receive regular updates of progress, especially around the launch of the growth framework. The information should be conveyed via internal staff update vehicles that exist within each authority. In addition to regular staff communications, call centre staff should receive a dedicated briefing just prior to the launch. This will include a question and answer along with referral instructions for detailed queries.

Alongside this, local authorities should use their existing community communications vehicles to convey information.

7.9 Newspaper advertising. It could be argued that newspaper advertising is not necessary because it is additional to two similar initiatives - the dedicated publication and general news coverage (see items 7.6 and 7.4 above). Newspaper advertising is proposed because it has the potential to raise general awareness in a way that none of the other communications can. This is because it provides an easy entry point for readers who are not motivated enough to read a standalone publication or indeed a news item in the general media. The purpose of an advertisement is to ignite awareness/interest.

The newspapers chosen and the advertisement(s) will be a trade off between cost and ensuring reasonable region wide coverage

The objective of this mix of written communication (dedicated publication, news articles and newspaper advertising) is to ensure that stakeholders who want to be engaged are given every opportunity to do so.

7.10 Consultation with iwi. The WRS will consult with Ara Tahi over the suitability of this plan to meet iwi requirements and will be available for iwi briefings as required. The WRS will also determine what is required for other ethnic groupings in conjunction with external partner agencies, eg Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs.

7.11 Implement a clear process for managing feedback. Many of the actions in this section invite feedback in varying forms. Feedback will occur via three avenues:

- verbal feedback in open forums, for example key stakeholder presentations.
- written feedback. This will mainly result from the region wide publication which will contain a feedback mechanism.
- feedback from the web site.

In each of these examples the WRS needs to ensure it has processes to:

- capture and record feedback
- acknowledge receipt (for written communication)
- group responses so the scale of similar responses is captured
- ensure responses are factored into the final document

7.12 Contingency planning. The main exposure in the project appears to be concerns arising among forum partners which delay or potentially derail the project. This would attract negative media coverage. While the WRS can't prevent this from happening, it can be proactive with journalists. For example issuing media statements after forum meetings will provide at least some direction for resulting news articles.

WRS needs to identify other issues (for example an election during the growth framework consultation) that could damage the process, and determine what its response will be.

8. Communications by stakeholder

Stakeholder group	Communications they will receive / have access to
Local Authority Councillors, managers and staff	7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.8, 7.9
Ratepayers in general	7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.7, 7.8 7.9
All other external stakeholder groups	7.2, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.7, 7.9

Legend for above table (full details are contained in the previous section entitled "what will we do to achieve the objectives")

7.2. The Launch.

7.3 Ratepayers research.

7.4 General news media coverage.

7.5 Dedicated web site

7.6 Publication for all stakeholders.

7.7 Public exhibitions

7.8 Existing staff and community communication vehicles within local authorities.

7.9 Newspaper advertising.

9. Responsibility and approvals

The communications plan needs to be signed off by the Forum. It has received comment and approval from the Communications Group and PEG.

Responsibility for the implementation of the plan rests with Jock Mackintosh, WRS Communications Advisor. During implementation he will require input from:

- The WRS team
- The Communications Group
- PEG
- Outside suppliers for:
 - Design and printing - for the growth framework publication for ratepayers
 - Advertising - newspaper
 - Research - of ratepayers
 - Web design - for update of existing site and production of CD

10. Legal

All components of this plan need to be mindful of local authority legal obligations

11. Budget

Item	Cost
The Launch	5,000
Ratepayer research including focus groups**	45,000
Media programme*	
Update and maintenance of web site, CD production	20,000
Dedicated publication for all ratepayers	30,000
Public exhibitions	10,000
Internal staff communications*	
Newspaper advertising	20,000
Managing feedback*	
Contingency planning*	
misc	15,000
total	\$145,000

* these items are either part of existing processes or do not incur expenses other than payment to the Communications advisor.

** this figure assumes we can tap into existing vehicles for at least part of the research

12. Measurements of success

- robust database of external stakeholder groups established
- the timely and effective implementation of the initiatives detailed earlier (see section 7)
- generation of positive or balanced coverage around each of the identified media milestones.

APPENDIX

How will the plan be formulated?

The project will be progressed via a series of meetings and agreed outcomes involving the nine authorities, Positively Wellington Business and relevant outside parties. The groups that will progress the strategy include:

- Wellington Regional Strategy Forum. This group is made up of two representatives from each metropolitan authority, one on behalf of the Wairarapa and representatives from Positively Wellington Business and Ara Tahi. It meets once a month. Half of this meeting is formal, and half uses a workshop format. This group provides overall direction.
- Chief Executives' Group. Chief Executives meet monthly although only a part of these meetings is devoted to the regional strategy. Chief Executives also provide advice to their representatives.
- Project Executive Group. This group is made up of Senior Managers from each of the member authorities and from Positively Wellington Business. It meets fortnightly at the Greater Wellington offices.

In addition to these formal groups input is provided from:

- Positively Wellington Business which is the economic development agency of all the territorial authorities in the Wellington Metropolitan area (not including Wairarapa). Positively Wellington Business is a significant source of information on the economy. It is working with the Councils on the development of the strategy and will play a key role in its delivery.
- Regional iwi. The Ara Tahi group from Greater Wellington provides input on behalf of regional iwi.
- The Strategic Partners' Forum made up of 20-30 local business and community representatives.

Much of the work on the project will come from a small WRS executive team, the Project Executive Group and several working groups, one of which is the Communications Group.

The Communications Group is made up of communications managers from each of the metropolitan authorities represented at the Forum and Positively Wellington Business.