Australian Government

Australian Government Guidelines on Advertising and Information Campaigns by non-corporate Commonwealth entities

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Introduction

1. Government advertising and information campaigns are typically designed to support the effective delivery and implementation of Government policies, programs, assistance, initiatives and services.
2. Accordingly, campaigns may seek to inform, educate or motivate a particular target audience; change levels of awareness, attitudes and behaviours in order to achieve a specific public policy outcome (e.g. campaigns to address immunisation rates or community attitudes towards domestic violence); or to encourage engagement and dialogue on matters directly relevant to the Government's responsibilities.
3. All entities subject to these Guidelines are expected to develop and implement effective, well-designed campaigns that are strategically sound, and which employ contemporary, best-practice approaches to communications. This recognises that community expectations, media consumption patterns, communications techniques, and available advertising and information channels continue to rapidly evolve.
4. The Guidelines operate on the underpinning premise that:
    a. members of the public have equal rights to access comprehensive information about government policies, programs and services which affect their entitlements, rights and obligations; and
    b. governments may legitimately use public funds to explain government policies, programs or services, to inform members of the public of their obligations, rights and entitlements, to encourage informed consideration of issues or to change behaviour.

Scope

5. In general terms, a campaign is a planned series of communication activities that share common objectives, target the same audience and have specific timelines and a dedicated budget. An advertising campaign includes paid media placement and an information campaign does not. Information campaigns typically involve a mix of public relations or below the line activities, but do not include a paid advertising component.
6. Non-corporate Commonwealth entities (entities) under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act) must comply with these Guidelines.
7. The Guidelines apply to all advertising and information campaigns undertaken in Australia by entities. Activity appearing exclusively overseas is not in scope, as the Guidelines have been designed to support the conduct of domestic communications.
8. Entities conducting advertising and information campaigns must comply with all relevant policies and processes issued and amended from time to time by the responsible Minister or the entity responsible for the government advertising framework.
9. The responsible Minister for campaign advertising can exempt a campaign from compliance with these Guidelines on the basis of a national emergency, extreme urgency or other compelling reason. Where an exemption is approved, the Independent Communications Committee will be informed of the exemption, and the decision will be formally recorded and reported to the Parliament as soon as is practicable.
10. The Independent Communications Committee considers and provides advice to the Accountable Authority (Secretary/Chief Executive) on all advertising campaigns valued at more than $250,000 exclusive of GST or where requested to do so by an Accountable Authority.

Interpretation

11. These Guidelines are a government policy. Entities subject to the Guidelines must be able to demonstrate compliance with the five overarching principles when planning, developing and implementing publicly-funded advertising and information campaigns. The principles require that campaigns are:
    - relevant to government responsibilities
    - presented in an objective, fair and accessible manner
    - objective and not directed at promoting party political interests
    - justified and undertaken in an efficient, effective and relevant manner, and
    - compliant with legal requirements and procurement policies and procedures
12. The information presented under each of the Principles (see later section, titled 'Campaign Principles') illustrates how entities can demonstrate compliance. Where the word 'must' is used, it signals that there is a mandatory requirement. Where the phrase 'must not' is used, it signals that certain actions, practices or approaches are not to be undertaken by entities or entity officials when implementing campaigns. Actions or practices that relate to sound administration or which represent good communications practices are denoted by the word 'should'.

Definition of Advertising Campaigns

13. For the purposes of these Guidelines, an advertising campaign involves paid media placement and is designed to inform, educate, motivate or change behaviour. Information campaigns do not have a paid media component. Large-scale recruitment advertising not related to specific job vacancies and with a degree of creative content (e.g. Defence Force Recruiting) may be considered an advertising campaign. Entities are to seek advice from Finance if they are unsure whether an activity is an advertising campaign.
14. Routine, regular information activities (for example, large scale mailouts or emails to recipients of a service, program or entitlement, which are required by law or to address an operational requirement) are not considered an advertising or information campaign.
15. Simple, informative advertising that generally appears only once or twice, contains factual statements and typically has simple creative content is not an advertising campaign. This category of advertising is non-campaign advertising and includes, but is not limited to:
    - recruitment for specific job vacancies;
    - auction and tender notices;
    - invitations to make submissions or apply for grants;
    - notification of date and/or location specific information (for example, notification of a public meeting at a particular time and place); and
    - other public notices.

Campaign Review and Certification

16. The requirements for review and certification of campaigns are determined by the value of the campaign and whether advertising will be undertaken. The value of a campaign is the budget for all campaign elements across all financial years and includes:
    - market or social research, public relations, advertising and/or other specialist suppliers commissioned in the development of advertising material;
    - production and placement of advertising in any paid media channel (including but not limited to print, radio, digital, social media, cinema, television, out-of-home media); and
    - production and dissemination of other campaign materials.
17. The value of a campaign excludes entity officials and associated costs.
18. For advertising campaigns below $250,000 exclusive of GST, the Accountable Authority has the discretion to seek consideration of campaigns by the Independent Communications Committee.
19. For advertising campaigns of $250,000 exclusive of GST or more:
    - The Independent Communications Committee will consider the proposed campaign and provide a report to the Accountable Authority on compliance with Principles 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the Guidelines. Entities will be responsible for providing a report to their Accountable Authority on campaign compliance with Principle 5 of the Guidelines.
    - Following consideration of the reports on campaign advertising compliance, the Accountable Authority will certify that the campaign complies with the Guidelines and relevant Government policies.
    - The Accountable Authority will provide the certification to the relevant Minister.
    - The Accountable Authority certification will be published on the relevant entity's website when the campaign is launched.
    - The compliance advice of the Independent Communications Committee will be published on Finance's website after the campaign is launched.
20. Information campaigns are not subject to review by the Independent Communications Committee or certification by the Accountable Authority but must comply with these Guidelines and other relevant policies and processes as outlined in clause 8.
21. The Government will provide reports to the Parliament that detail expenditure on all advertising campaigns with expenditure in excess of $250,000 exclusive of GST commissioned by PGPA Act entities.
22. Accountable Authorities will ensure that:
    - research reports for advertising campaigns with expenditure of $250,000 exclusive of GST or more are published on their entity web site following the launch of a campaign where it is appropriate to do so; and
    - details of advertising campaigns undertaken will be published in entity annual reports.

Campaign Principles

There are five overarching campaign principles which set out the context in which Commonwealth Government campaigns are to be conducted. They relate to when campaigns can be conducted, how they are presented, and the legal and procurement requirements.

Principle 1: Relevant to government responsibilities

23. In demonstrating compliance with this principle considerations include:
    - The subject matter of the campaign directly relates to the Government's responsibilities
    - The policy or program is underpinned by:
        - legislative authority; or
        - appropriation of the Parliament; or
        - a Cabinet Decision which is intended to be implemented during the current Parliament

24. Examples of suitable uses for government campaigns include to:

    - inform the public of new, existing or proposed government policies, or policy revisions;
    - provide information on government programs or services or revisions to programs or services to which the public are entitled;
    - inform consideration of issues;
    - disseminate scientific, medical or health and safety information; or
    - provide information on the performance of government to facilitate accountability to the public.

Principle 2: Presented in an objective, fair and accessible manner

25. In demonstrating compliance with this Principle considerations include:

    - The recipients of the information can distinguish between facts, comment, opinion and analysis;
    - Information presented as a fact, is accurate and verifiable;
    - The basis of factual comparisons is clear and does not mislead the recipient about the situation;
    - Pre-existing policies, products, services and activities are not presented as new;
    - Special attention is paid to communicating with disadvantaged individuals or groups identified within the target audience. Particular attention is paid to meeting the information needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, the rural community, people with disability and those for whom English is not a convenient language in which to receive information;
    - Imagery used in campaigns appropriately reflects the diverse range of Australians. Where it is consistent with the campaign objectives, this includes the realistic portrayal of the full participation of women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and people with disability; and
    - Campaigns are tested with target audiences to indicate they are engaging and perform well against their objectives.

Principle 3: Objective and not directed at promoting party political interests

26. In demonstrating compliance with this Principle considerations include:

    - Language used in the campaign is objective language and is free of political argument; and
    - Campaigns must not try to foster a positive impression of a particular political party or promote party political interests.

27. Campaigns must not:

    a. mention the party in Government by name;

    b. directly attack or scorn the views, policies or actions of others such as the policies and opinions of opposition parties or groups;

    c. include party political slogans or images;

    d. be designed to influence public support for a political party, a candidate for election, a Minister or a Member of Parliament; or

    e. refer or link to the web sites of politicians or political parties.

Principle 4: Justified and undertaken in an efficient, effective and relevant manner

28. In demonstrating compliance with this Principle considerations include:

    - Campaigns are only instigated where a need is demonstrated, target recipients are clearly identified and the campaign is informed by appropriate research or evidence;
    - Campaign information clearly and directly affect the interests of recipients;
    - The medium and volume of the advertising activities is cost effective and justifiable within the budget allocated to the campaign;
    - Distribution of unsolicited material should be carefully controlled; and
    - Campaigns are evaluated to determine effectiveness.

Principle 5: Compliant with legal requirements and procurement policies and procedures

29. The manner of presentation and the delivery of campaigns must comply with all relevant laws including:

    a. laws with respect to broadcasting and media;

    b. privacy laws;

    c. intellectual property laws;

    d. electoral laws;

    e. trade practices and consumer protection laws; and

    f. workplace relations laws.

30. Procurement policies and procedures for the tendering and commissioning of services and the employment of suppliers are to be followed, and there must be a clear audit trail regarding decision making.

Contacts for Further Information

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