







# Together, boldly and openly

Central Government  
Communications Guidelines

Together, boldly and openly – Central Government Communications Guidelines  
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## Foreword

Freedom of speech, openness and impartiality are among the core values in Finland's central government. The media environment in Finland is rated one of the most free in the world.

The fifth edition of the Central Government Communications Guidelines explains the values governing communications, outlines the duties and describes the changes in the field of communications and how these changes impact public authorities. It serves as a basis for different government organisations to draw up their own more detailed communications guidelines.

Openness is instrumental in the daily activities of the government. Open and interactive communications are an integral part of good governance. Reliability is the bedrock of all government activities and an essential asset. Openness and trust go hand in hand. Without openness there is no trust.

Public authorities are expected to use clear, intelligible and appropriate language. To succeed in communications, the message must be comprehensible. Citizens are entitled to obtain public information relating to them in an understandable format.

Public authorities should be aware of the expectations of the public and other stakeholders. Our job is to provide services to all stakeholders with impartiality, and different viewpoints must be duly considered in all communications. Service-mindedness applies to all public authorities.

Communications is a vital part of organisation's daily strategic activities. It is managed, planned, developed

and assessed on a daily basis. Communications is an essential part of everyone's job. The management in each organisation is responsible for making sure openness works properly, while communications professionals support the management and employees in their communications. These Guidelines are therefore intended for both communications professionals and all central government employees.

Finland is undergoing major reforms in society. To follow through with these reforms, public authorities need to deepen cooperation in communications. Cooperation is also needed to be prepared for unforeseeable situations. This means that one must be able to react swiftly and flexibly through different communications channels, and often outside office hours. By working together we can pool resources and find new ways of communicating.

The need to measure and assess the impact of communications as well as to learn more about the operating environment is greater than ever before. With this in mind, the next step could be to devise uniform tools in central government for measuring, assessing and monitoring communications. This would provide valuable information on how to further develop communications.

These Guidelines are the product of a working group appointed by the Prime Minister's Office in March 2016. The publication replaces the Central Government Communications Guidelines issued on 15 September 2010.

Let us communicate together, boldly and openly.

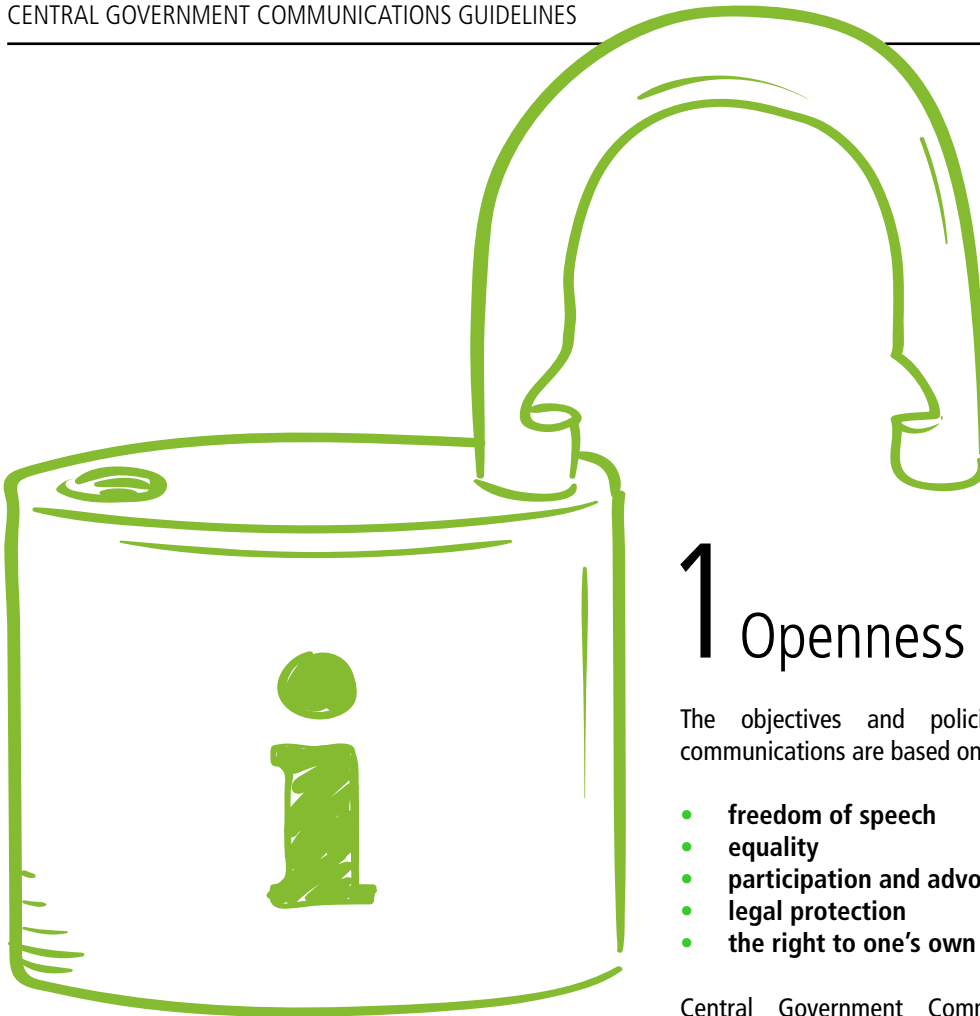
Helsinki, 25 November 2016



**Juha Sipilä**  
Prime Minister of Finland



**Markku Mantila**  
Director General of Government Communications



# 1 Openness

The objectives and policies in central government communications are based on fundamental rights, such as:

- **freedom of speech**
- **equality**
- **participation and advocacy**
- **legal protection**
- **the right to one's own language and culture**

Central Government Communications draws on the fundamental right of citizens to receive information on public decisions and their preparation. Therefore, public authorities are responsible for promoting openness in their activities and for producing and disseminating information. This way, citizens and other stakeholders can assess the work of public authorities and participate in initiatives under preparation. They are able to supervise their own interests and rights.

Successful communications help support democracy, safeguard citizens' rights and ensure a favourable operating environment for organisations and business.

**Which audiences should be informed about the matter?**

**How are different audiences reached?**

**How to engage them?**

## COMMUNICATIONS ANSWERS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

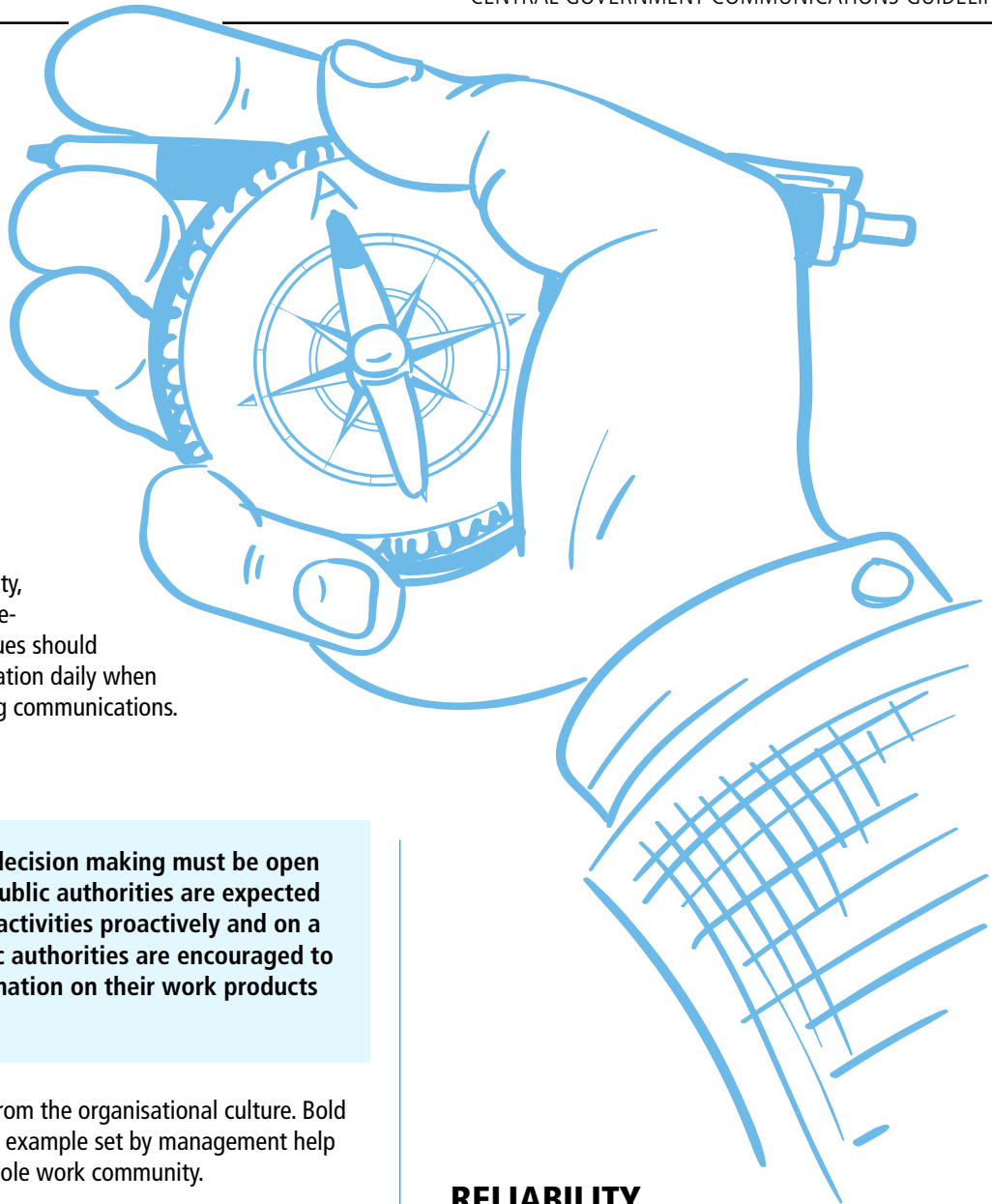
Public authorities should formulate communications in a way that reaches different target groups, provides advice on services and responds to the specific information needs of the media.

Public information should be accessible and easy to use. Good governance of information helps specify how information needs are handled. Organisations must have in place a clear procedure for defining information that is public.

Organisations must ensure that all employees are familiar with the Act on the Openness of Government Activities and know how to apply it in their work. Familiarity with Finland's language laws and an understanding of communications are also a crucial part of expertise.

## 2 Values

The core values in central government communications are openness, reliability, impartiality, intelligibility, interactivity and service-mindedness. These values should be taken into consideration daily when planning and executing communications.



### OPENNESS

**Preparations and decision making must be open and transparent. Public authorities are expected to report on their activities proactively and on a timely basis. Public authorities are encouraged to disseminate information on their work products widely.**

- Openness stems from the organisational culture. Bold initiatives and the example set by management help encourage the whole work community.
- By engaging experts in public debate, government organisations become better-known to the public.
- Openness makes public administration more transparent and intelligible.
- Key public documents produced by public authorities must be available online and be actively utilised for communications purposes. Before any documents are released, attention must be given to the protection of privacy and confidentiality.
- Public authorities supply open data for public use. This in turn opens possibilities for new services. Open data also makes it easier to evaluate the activities of public authorities.
- When information is published authorities must comply with copyright regulations and the recommendations on the use of open-source licensed software.

### RELIABILITY

**Reliability is at the very basis of all authorities' activities. All information that is disseminated must be accurate, clear and adequate. Neutrality and impartiality are the cornerstones of communications.**

- Trust in authorities' communications is earned every day. Information on each matter is given by the competent authority.
- Reliability should not be compromised at the cost of speed.
- Any significant misinterpretations by the public must be promptly corrected.
- Availability of accurate authoritative information needs to be guaranteed online.

## IMPARTIALITY

**Different viewpoints are taken into consideration equally in communications. Communications serves all stakeholders equitably.**

- Citizens, organisations and companies must have a fair chance to form a general view of each issue at hand. Different viewpoints, the background to issues and the impact of decisions need to be communicated. Public authorities must also tolerate critical discussion.
- Different media channels are used in various ways in order to ensure equitable communications. For example, using the social media as the only means of communications is generally not sufficient.
- By making sure online services are e-accessible and readily available, we provide citizens with equal opportunities to act and be involved.
- Communications must be equal in terms of language. All relevant information produced by public authorities must be available in both Finnish and Swedish. Consideration must also be given to the language-related rights of the Sámi and those using sign language.
- Authorities must be prepared to communicate in a wider range of languages to ensure access to information by foreign nationals residing in Finland.
- The need to communicate in plain language or simplified Finnish is also more common than before.

## INTELLIGIBILITY

**Public authorities must ensure the language used is clear, appropriate and understandable. The prerequisite of successful communications is intelligibility.**

- A clear and appropriate language is a basic skill required of all public officials. Organisations must remember to make sure these skills are maintained.
- Citizens have the right to access public information related to them in a form that they can easily understand. This is a fundamental point of legal protection.

- The target group and the objective are taken into account in decisions on the ways of communicating.
- Visual elements help make communications easier to understand and raise interest. High-quality graphics, images, video clips and animations are powerful tools that help clarify messages.

## INTERACTIVITY

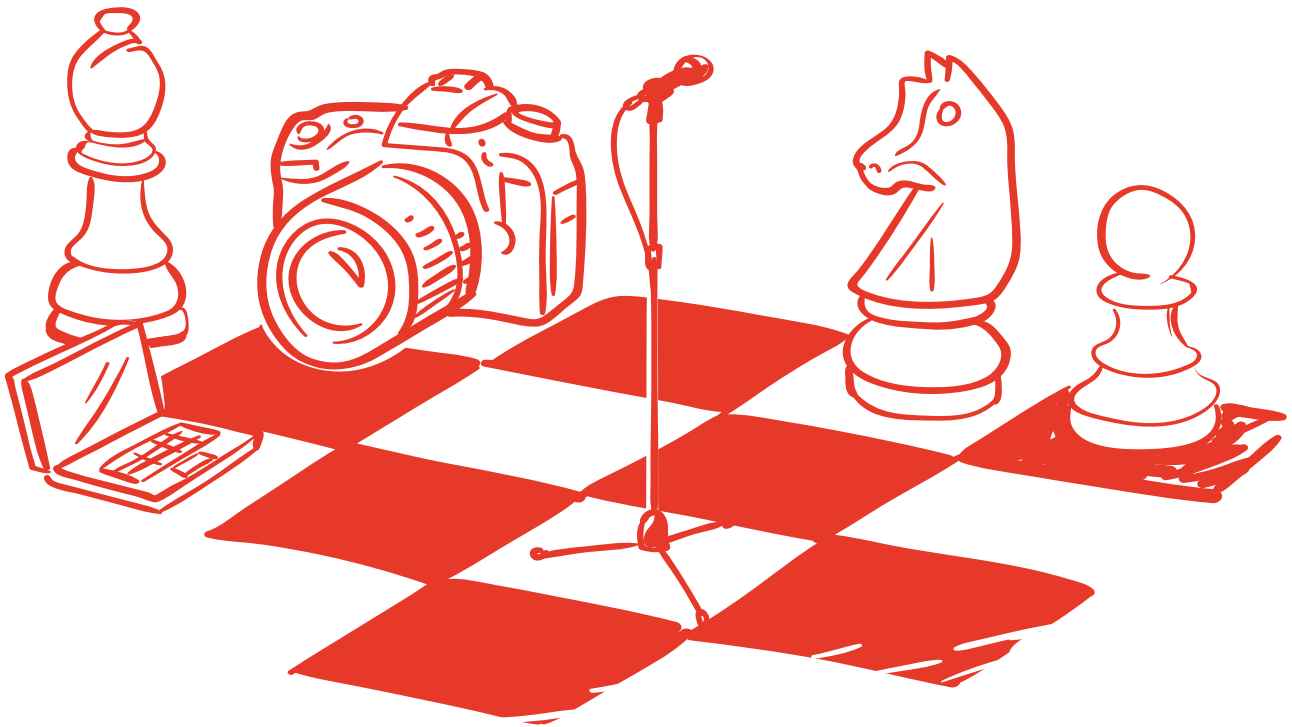
**Communications are inherently interactive. This means being receptive to new things: the wider the discussion and cooperation before and during preparation, the better the outcome.**

- New technology and the shared democracy e-services ([demokratia.fi](https://demokratia.fi)) open possibilities to engage with citizens and other stakeholders. These are an important asset for organisations.
- Interaction before and during preparations makes it easier to execute things swiftly. Inviting feedback on execution and communications helps assess the impact of the communications.
- Public authorities use social media in their work. They should be visible on the forums where people are present and active.

## SERVICE-MINDEDNESS

**Communications are service-minded. Open public communications are an essential part of the services that public authorities provide.**

- Public authorities must be able to recognise target groups and their expectations. Communications should raise interest and be timely.
- Service-mindedness is highlighted in all interaction.
- Experts must be reachable on all issues for which they are responsible.
- Experts give interviews and supply background information to the media.



## 3 Management, planning and assessment

### MANAGEMENT

Communications and media relations are an integral part of management. Senior management gives a face to the organisation and is responsible for the organisation's communications culture, competencies and information management procedures.

Communications professionals must be part of the organisation's management team. Communications are successful and timely when cooperation between management and the organisation's communication professionals is based on mutual trust.

Communications professionals must have access to core matters related to preparations and decision making. By doing so, government organisations can take into account communications comprehensively already in the planning stage. This is the way to carry out changes successfully.

Communication professionals are responsible for the planning, implementation, coordination and assessment of communications. Communications services cannot be properly managed or developed without adequate resources.

As a field, the communications industry is evolving fast. To keep up with the pace, public authorities must develop their own communications services. At the same time, the role of communications professionals as consultants and coaches is growing.

Organisations must ensure an adequate standard of communications skills. Communications professionals need training on a regular basis and need to work in close

cooperation with other actors. Cooperation in communications is particularly important when extensive inter-administrative reforms are being carried out. Cooperation also makes it possible to pool resources and know-how as well as find bold new ways of communicating. Third-party communications resources are used when special expertise is required or when the organisation's own resources are insufficient.

In a global age and today's social media, communications needs are not limited to office hours. Where organisations have a regular need to communicate outside ordinary working hours, they are advised to put in place appropriate work time or on-call arrangements.

Each expert communicates about the issues for which he or she is responsible and cooperates closely with communications professionals when planning messages. Experts must be in a position to wield influence in networks. Organisations need to make sure that each expert knows his or her duties and responsibilities relating to communications. They are also entitled to the support and training they need for it.

Public authorities must be familiar with the principles in the Act on the Openness of Government Activities and understand what this entails. In particular, public servants must recognise how to assess what is public or confidential in terms of the Act.

Experts must keep communications professionals informed on a timely basis of matters that are being prepared or ready for decision making. Those responsible for communications must inform other experts of issues that have a bearing on their duties.



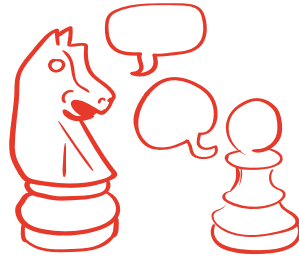
## STAFF COMMITMENT

Open and interactive communications in the workplace promote staff wellbeing and commitment. Active communications, transparent activities and up-to-date communications equipment support workplace management and performance. To be able to respond to the expectations of external stakeholders, workplace communications must be efficient.

The organisational culture evolves through formal and informal communications. Information must flow smoothly within the organisation so that work can proceed as planned. Close cooperation and smooth flow of information brings down internal boundaries and helps develop activities and create new ways of working.

Internal communications enable the staff to form a comprehensive picture of the organisation's activities and to gain access to information that has a bearing on their duties. This makes it possible for staff members to impact their own work and the activities of the whole workplace.

Managers play a key role in shaping the ways in which



information is passed on within the organisation. Directors and managers are entitled to receive support and training on managerial information dissemination. Employees are responsible for acquiring the information they need at work and to pass essential information on to those who need it.

Workplace communications should be planned and implemented in close consultation with the management, human resources, the communications unit and staff representatives. Proper planning safeguards that staff members can participate in preparations, for example. Staff members should always be the first to be informed of new developments in the organisation.

Efficient and interactive workplace communications are particularly important when there are changes in the organisation.

Staff members will want know the reasons for the changes and how the different measures affect their position and what options are available. For projects that involve changes, a specific workplace communications plan should be drawn up and reviewed in connection with co-determination procedures.

## PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT

Communications are part of any organisation's daily strategic activities and are directed, planned and budgeted just like any other activity. All public authorities must have in place up-to-date communications guidelines.

Planning communications brings predictability. This way those who need information can rely on impartial and consistent communications being delivered on a regular basis. Public authorities must plan their activities and communications in such a way that citizens and other stakeholders have adequate time and opportunity to comment on matters under preparation. Communications should make use of a wide range of tools and channels to reach the relevant stakeholders.

Communications planning should be part of all major projects and their execution. Adequate human resources and funding should be allocated for large projects so that communications are successful. If necessary, marketing communications can be used to reach the relevant target groups.

Stakeholder engagement needs to be planned and have clear objectives. It is necessary to keep in regular contact and follow stakeholder information needs and expectations so that they can be met. Stakeholder engagement is part of the duties of all public servants.

Customer communications take into account the needs and special characteristics of different groups. Customer

communications are honed together with the customers. Public authorities must make sure that their services are accessible and stakeholders are aware of them.

The benchmark for success and impact lies in the objectives set for communications. The goal is to develop communications so as to be able to respond to the expectations and information needs of citizens, media and key stakeholders in a wide range of situations.

Communication professionals must have access to tools that permit on-going assessment and monitoring of communications performance. These include customer feedback, monitoring and analysis of the digital services offered to the media and organisations as well as opinion polls and attitude surveys.

Reputation is a reflection of the stakeholders' expectations and experiences of the organisation. It stems from the way in which the organisation and the people in the organisation work. Well-managed, open communications are part of this reputation. To succeed in their operations and to be effective, public authorities generally need to have a good reputation and a high level of recognition. The reputation of government organisations hinges on reliability.

Public authorities pursue their goals through partnerships and cooperation. Administrative organisations cooperate in communications and co-funded activities in order to achieve their own objectives. No form of cooperation may undermine the independence of the public authorities in their exercise of executive powers, however.



### POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS

Some central government organisations are led by elected appointees, for example by a minister. Political communications and communications by public authorities constitute a system in which each actor has its own, justified role.

Political communications strengthens public debate, which is essential for the democratic formation of opinions. Communications by public authorities, in turn, ensure that citizens and other stakeholders have access to information on decisions and matters under preparation.

For example, communications by the Finnish Government and the ministries involves both the discharge of official

duties and political management of Government and the ministries.

In principle, ministries separate communications by the public authorities from political communications. A minister's media relations and other communications are handled jointly by ministerial advisers and the ministry's communications unit. Party-political communications and election campaigns, instead, are made public by the parties' communications services.

It is important to recognise the role of political communications in changes taking place in central government. When reforms are carried out, the division of duties and organisation between communications by experts and political communications must be kept very clear.



## 4 Changes and expectations

### CITIZENS' EXPECTATIONS

The voice of citizens must be heard. Public authorities must understand citizens' expectations when changes are made in public administration and its services. Communications make government agencies and their administrative activities and services more familiar to citizens and organisations alike and provide a framework for interaction between citizens and government.

Different phenomena in society also need to be identified, so that it is possible to respond proactively to citizens' information needs and desire to interact. Information on matters under preparation is communicated through various

channels in media networks, web services, social media, briefings and customer services.

With the advances in digitalisation, citizens themselves are becoming increasingly more important as communicators and individual actors.

They produce and share information and engage in debates on online platforms where it is possible to reach other like-minded people.

Communications by public authorities ensure that accurate information is available and shareable and that authorities are present in the media used by citizens. The needs of different language groups and plain language communications must also be taken into account.

## CHANGES IN THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

The rapid changes in the media environment demands new thinking on the part of public authorities. Public authorities must be able to provide communications services that are both top quality and versatile.

Reliable quality journalism has an important role in today's fast-changing world. Freedom of the press and a media committed to good journalistic practice are the pillars of democracy and freedom of speech.

Media plays a key role in forwarding and interpreting information published by public authorities. The media also serves as a watchdog of decision making in society. Communications by public authorities to the media must be active, open, equitable and service-minded. Experts supply the media background information on issues and developments and must be prepared to appear in public. Unforeseen developments often make it necessary for public authorities to respond to media inquiries outside office hours.

Communications content and services should be provided in a format that is readily usable by the media. Streamed online press conferences communicate information simultaneously

to the media and citizens equitably. Professionally edited and informative online services and proactive interactive communications in social media serve both the media and the public. High-quality images, informative graphics, video clips and animation also contribute to this goal.

Background briefings are an established way of providing the media with more extensive in-depth information about issues under preparation. Invitations must specify whether the event is a briefing or press conference so that the participants know in advance which type of meeting they will be attending. It is also important to clearly indicate what is off the record. Briefings can also be held for more limited groups, such as journalists and other parties with a special interest in the issue at hand.

All media representatives must be treated equally when press conferences and briefings are held. If attendance is restricted, the grounds for exclusion must be clear-cut and fair. Public authorities need to ensure that sufficient information on the theme is also available for those who are not invited.

Meetings between public authorities and individual media companies and journalists are part of the normal management of stakeholder relations.



## DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

Rapidly advancing digitisation affects the content and sharing of communications. Digital communications are characterised by topicality, interaction and ease of use. Citizens and other stakeholders must be given the opportunity to check information on the internet issued by public authorities whenever they need it. Access to the information must also be device-independent, so this needs to be taken into account when online services are developed.

Public authorities can use the social media to increase general awareness of their work and services. They can also use it to direct users to sources of accurate information, such as official documents and data. It is also important to ensure that the information is readily available to citizens in other media channels and sources.

Most people can be reached through digital channels. Public authorities select the channels they use based on

the needs of the citizens and other stakeholders and inform them of the channels being used. The selected information channels must be used consistently. Public authorities should keep abreast of technological developments and take them into account when developing communications.

Public authorities should make active use of social media in new and versatile ways. The social media is especially well-suited for interactive communications and customer services. Social media presence is becoming part of the daily duties of growing numbers of public officials.

Public authorities can use it to supply background information on decisions and clear up any misunderstandings. The speed of social media makes it an important vehicle for crisis communications.

Adequate resources should be ensured when communications channels are chosen and new services created. Operating a site requires active monitoring and sometimes quick responses to feedback and questions.

## INTENSIFIED COMMUNICATIONS

In a networked global environment, new issues and developments are often swiftly debated by the general public. Public authorities must be prepared for unforeseen and exceptional situations. They must be ready to use various communications channels quickly and flexibly.

Communications must be intensified when faced with unforeseen new developments but it is also important to follow the procedures and practices that apply in normal conditions. In the event of a crisis, communications are part

of the efforts to manage the situation. Cooperation and flow of information between those in command, experts and communications professionals is highlighted under such circumstances. Reliable, well-timed and empathetic communications assure people that their concerns are being addressed.

Successful performance in managing emergencies and communications is based on daily cooperation, clear-cut procedures and exercises. More detailed instructions for crisis communications are available in the 'Central Government Communications in Incidents and Emergencies' publication.

## INFORMATION BY INFLUENCE

A lot of information available to the public is difficult to evaluate in terms of reliability and accuracy. Information management and strategic utilisation of information have become an increasingly important way of shaping attitudes and opinions.

Information by influence refers to systematic actions designed to influence public opinion, decision-makers' and people's behaviour and thereby the functions of society. The methods used include dissemination of false and misleading information, exertion of pressure as well as manipulative use of information that is, in itself, correct. It is a strategic activity designed to mislead the targets to

make self-detrimental decisions or to act against their own best interests.

The best buffers against information by influence are efficient cooperation between authorities, a high level of general education, good media literacy and a media committed to good journalistic practice. It is important to respond to manipulative dissemination of misleading information quickly by communicating truthful information. Special care needs to be taken to ensure that correct and reliable information published by public authorities is easy to find. Capabilities must be in place to produce and disseminate such information in different languages, because information by influence is an international phenomenon.

## COUNTRY BRAND

The central government works in an international environment. All ministries, agencies and institutions have responsibilities in providing and developing international communications and improving mutual coordination related to it. Aside from the Finnish public, it is important to also consider the global media and audiences abroad.

Finland's objectives are promoted abroad through traditional diplomacy, official visits and communications as well as by means of country image work. The goal of country image work is to highlight Finland's strengths truthfully so that the country and its people are perceived as reliable and stable partners on the international arena. One of the objectives is to promote the internationalisation of Finnish companies and workforce as well as to attract foreign investments to Finland.

Country image work consists of long-term efforts related to influencing, communications and marketing. This work is coordinated and overseen by the Finland Promotion Board, appointed by the Prime Minister, and its secretariat in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Finland's reputation is affected by the daily actions of all the ministries and public authorities.



# 5 Regulations, instructions and recommendations related to communications

**Central government communications are guided by various regulations, instructions and recommendations.**

## **THESE INCLUDE:**

[The Constitution of Finland \(731/1999\)](#)  
[Administrative Procedure Act \(434/2003\)](#)  
[Act on the Openness of Government Activities \(621/1999\)](#)  
[Government Decree on the Openness of Government Activities and on Good Practice in Information Management \(1030/1999\)](#)  
[Government Decree on Information Security in Central Government \(681/2010\)](#)  
[Non-Discrimination Act \(1325/2014\)](#)  
[Information Society Code \(917/2014\)](#)  
[Act on Cooperation within Central Government Agencies and Institutions \(1233/2013\)](#)  
[Act on the Protection of Privacy in Working Life](#)  
[Act on Electronic Services and Communication in the Public Sector \(13/2003\)](#)  
[Personal Data Act \(523/1999\)](#)

## **LANGUAGE LAWS**

[Language Act \(423/2003\)](#)  
[Sámi Language Act \(1086/2003\)](#)  
[Sign Language Act \(359/2015\)](#)

## **COPYRIGHTS AND FREEDOM OF SPEECH**

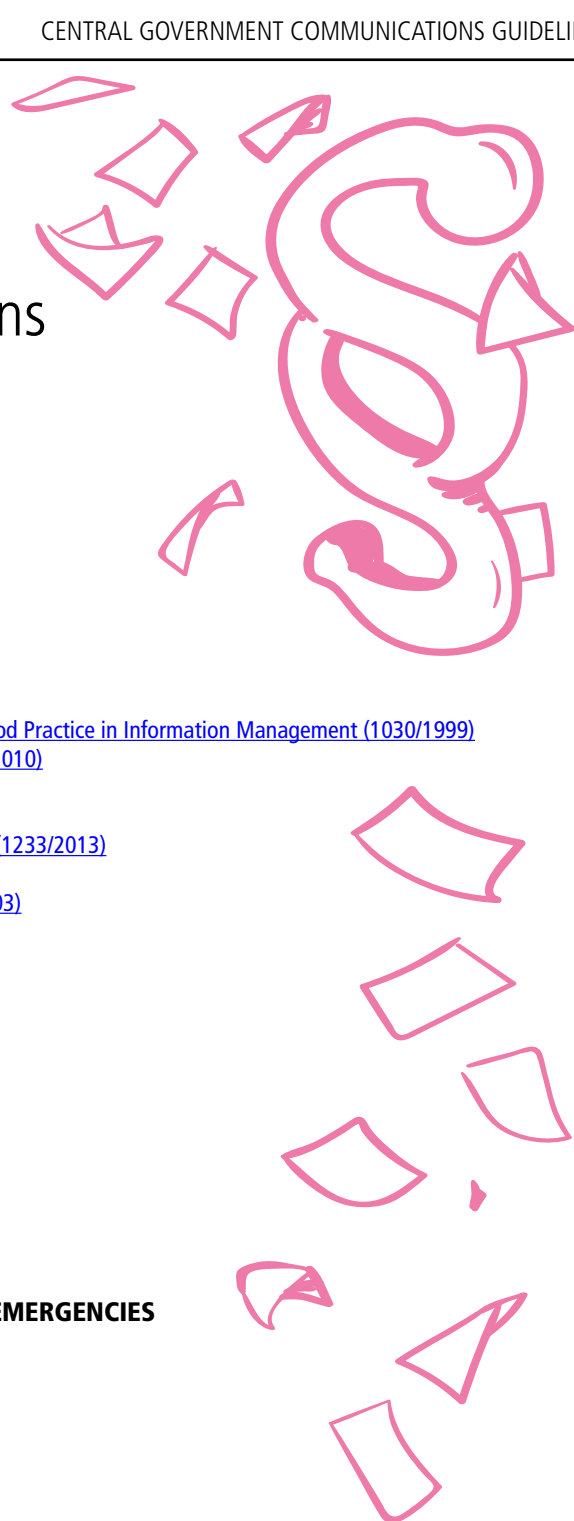
[Copyright Act \(404/1961\)](#)  
[Act on the Exercise of Freedom of Expression in Mass Media \(460/2003\)](#)

## **LAWS REGULATING EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND EMERGENCIES**

[Emergency Powers Act \(1552/2011\)](#)  
[State of Defence Act \(1083/1991\)](#)  
[Act on Emergency Warnings \(466/2012\)](#)  
[Act on Yleisradio Oy \(Finnish Broadcasting Company\) \(1380/1993\)](#)  
[Communicable Diseases Act \(581/1986\)](#)  
[Safety Investigation Act \(525/2011\)](#)

## **INSTRUCTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

[Central Government Communications in Incidents and Emergencies, Prime Minister's Office \(2013\)](#)  
[Emergency Warnings Guide, Ministry of the Interior \(2013\)](#)  
[Government Guidelines for Strategic Communications, Prime Minister's Office \(2013\)](#)  
[Guide to Consultation Regarding Draft Legislative Proposals, Ministry of Justice \(2016\)](#)  
[Minister's Handbook \(2015\)](#)  
[Minister, State Secretary and Special Adviser and Election Campaigns, Communication from the Prime Minister's Office \(2015\)](#)  
[Public Official in Social Media, Recommendations issued by the Council of Public Service Ethics \(2016\)](#)  
[Practical Guide for the Application of Language Legislation in Online Services, Recommendation issued by the Ministry of Justice \(2015\)](#)  
[Report of the Working Group for Clear Administrative Language, Ministry of Education and Culture \(2014\)](#)  
[License to Public Open Data, Recommendation 189 of the Advisory Committee for Data Administration in Public Administration \(2014\)](#)  
[\(Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0 \(2008\)](#)  
[Communication Code of Ethics, Council of Ethics for Communication \(2015\)](#)



## Description sheet

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<p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>The new government communications guidelines outline the values in government communications and describe the position and duties related to communications in today's fast-changing environment. The guidelines serve as groundwork and bedrock for each government organisation's own key communications guidelines. They are designed to benefit the whole of government. The guidelines stress the importance of being open in public duties and aware of the expectations of citizens and other stakeholders. Communications involves strategic activities on a daily basis that are directed, planned, assessed and developed. Communications is a key part of the management of organisations. It is also part of every public officeholder's job.</p> <p>The role of communications professionals as consultants and coaches in organisations is highlighted. The guidelines underline the importance of proper planning in communications. Legislative provisions stipulate that public authorities must plan their communications. The recommendations point out that with proper planning, communication brings predictability and ensures that those who need information can rely on communications that are regular, impartial and consistent. Communication is an integral part of good governance. Broad-based cooperation is an essential part of everyday communications.</p> <p>In a rapidly changing environment, public authorities must be equipped to cope with unexpected situations in their communications. This means being able to react swiftly and flexibly in different media channels. Robust competence and being able to identify new phenomena, such as influencing through information, are essential.</p>			
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