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**ARMENIA LOCAL GOVERNMENT
PROGRAM—PHASE 3**

A Public and Media Relations Handbook for Local Government Officials

December 2007

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Armenia Local Government Program— Phase 3

A Public and Media Relations Handbook for Local Government
Officials

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Foreword

A Public and Media Relations Handbook for Local Governments is developed in the framework of Armenia Local Government Program, Phase–3 (LGP 3) implemented by the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) and funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). While preparing this handbook, LGP 3 staff received significant guidance and technical assistance from local government representatives (mayors’ staffs), professional associations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The following people contributed to the development of this material:

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About This Handbook

The results of the baseline study and training needs assessment conducted in the framework of the USAID Armenia LGP 3 in its 38 program cities revealed that municipalities have underdeveloped public relations capacity.

Not all municipalities have public and media relations departments or even individuals tasked with working on public and media relations. The public relations functions are often assigned to chiefs of staff, who are mainly preoccupied with other priority tasks and cannot devote sufficient attention or time to their public relations responsibilities. No local government has developed a public and media relations plan. Without a public relations plan, a local government's public relations activities tend to be chaotic and under budgeted.

The baseline study also showed that local government officials lack knowledge and skills on implementing effective media relations. Media relations constitute a significant part of public relations. In cases where media relations are not implemented properly, the whole public relations component may fail.

Local governments must improve their public and media relations by

- Establishing and assigning public and media relations responsibilities to a person or department, depending on the size of the local government.
- Budgeting for public and media relations based on a public and media relations plan.
- Focusing on increasing two-way communication with citizens.

Local governments need to understand that public and media relations are not simply a fashionable trend coming from Western countries, but are an important tool for communicating effectively with citizens, improving the transparency of local government decisions, and including citizens in the decision making process. The use of public and media relations tools and techniques also aids in fostering an environment of trust and support among citizens for local government activities.

This handbook has been prepared after an extensive literature and Internet resource review. It includes the results of the Armenia Local Government Phase 3 Baseline Review of local government officials in its 38 program cities, and reflects LGP 3 staff expertise and experience.

Chapters of this handbook range from instructional to practical, with suggestions on how to manage aspects on public and media relations. For easy reference, a chapter concentrates on the relevant laws of Armenia that affect a local government's public and media relations activities. The annexes provide more detail and practical examples for implementing public and media relations functions.

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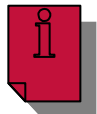
Abbreviations

AED	Academy for Educational Development
CAG	civic action group
CIC	Citizen Information Center
CIP	Capital Investment Plan
CSC	Citizen Service Center
FOI	Freedom of Information
FOIC	Freedom of Information Center of Armenia
GTZ	German Technical Cooperation
ICMA	International City/County Management Association
IFES	International Foundation for Election Systems
ISDTC	Information Systems Development and Training Center
LGP 3	Armenia Local Government Program–Phase 3
LLSG	Law on Local Self Government
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OSI	Open Society Institute
PR	public relations
PSA	public service announcement
PUA	participatory urban assessment
RA	Republic of Armenia
TCPA	Turpanjian Center for Policy Analysis
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In our fast-changing environment, companies and organizations compete to sell their products and services, requiring a positive image and the trust of customers. For local governments, citizens' trust and positive perceptions are crucial for the successful implementation of government strategies, programs, and projects.



Effective and efficient local government management directly depends on how well the local administration manages its communication with citizens. A properly implemented public relations function may lead to

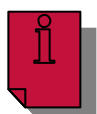
- **Better citizen engagement and understanding of local government governance processes.**
- **Wide public support.**
- **Shared responsibility for community development.**
- **Additional resource of ideas and expert capacity.**
- **Multi-opinion environment in decision making.**
- **Increased trust and support for local government.**

From February to October 2006, the staff of the USAID-funded Armenia LGP 3 conducted the Armenia LGP 3 Baseline Review in its 38 program cities. One part of the baseline review addressed public relations (PR). Eighty interviewees completed questionnaires related to PR.

The baseline survey revealed that the majority of local governments in LGP 3 have underdeveloped PR functions. Public relations include the following tools and techniques:

- Mass media
- Brochures
- Information boards
- Local government directories
- Meetings with the public
- Citizen opinion surveys

To enjoy public approval and support of their activities, local government officials need to use PR tools and techniques extensively and include citizens in decision making processes.



Effective implementation of public relations tools and techniques leads to increased communication with local citizens, and in turn encourages citizens to continue the process of communication, resulting in effective public relations.

Exhibit 1 shows the relationship between PR and communication with citizens.

Exhibit 1. Effective PR and Communication

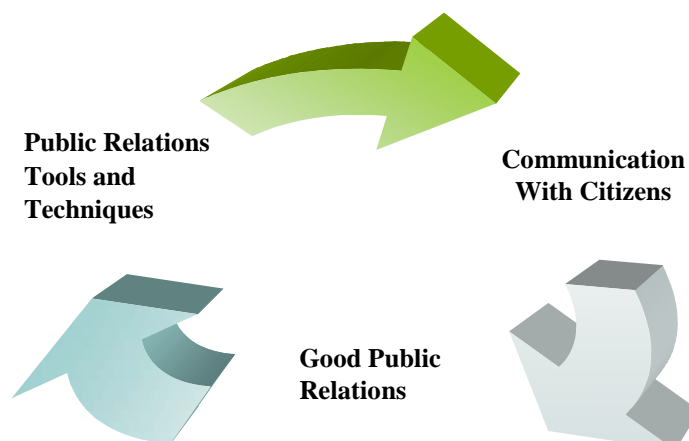


Table 1 indicates the types of communication used in the 38 LGP 3 program cities (some cities used multiple methods).

Table 1. LGP 3 Program Cities' Communication Methods

Communication Type	No. of Cities	Percentage (%)
Local newspaper	22	58
Television	21	55
Radio	3	11.5
Participation in television programs	20	53
Information boards	28	74
Municipal directories	16	42
Meetings with the public	30	79
Periodic newsletters/brochures/announcements	16	42
Municipality phone numbers	21	55

These data provide a snapshot of the PR tools and techniques that local governments employ. Only 11.5 percent of the program cities had access to radio coverage for programming and public service announcements to local residents. Fifty-eight percent of the program cities had local newspaper coverage, and local television coverage was available to 55 percent of the program cities.

Other forms of PR communication tools are information boards, municipality directories, and city hall reference books that include periodic newsletters, brochures, and announcements from local councils; and direct meetings with citizens. All of these tools give a local government's elected and appointed officials an opportunity to

communicate and build a positive relationship with citizens. While the percentages reported in Table 1 suggest a positive trend, particularly in meetings with the public and establishment of information boards, significant progress can still be accomplished. The data also suggest that PR activities that require more effort tend not to be used as much as those that are easier to implement. It logically follows that PR activities should be properly planned and organized. Methods for building PR, including media relations, are discussed in this handbook.



A public and media relations plan is the foundation of consistent and effective public and media relations.

Local governments need to be willing to share information and to use an open and transparent work style. Provision of information forms the basis for an effective local governance system by building positive relationships among elected officials, local government staff, and citizens. Local residents who are poorly informed about local government activities cannot participate in local government decision making processes.

For example, the Turpanjian Center for Policy Analysis (TCPA) at the American University of Armenia reported that, in its 2004 survey of community residents of 12 program cities,¹ 54.3 percent of the citizens interviewed stated they could have played a more active role in community life if they had more information on local government activities.

In general, local authorities are reluctant to share community-related information with citizens and to involve them in decision making processes. This reluctance is based on factors that include

a) General reasons:

- Size of the local government.
- Practices employed by the local government.
- Qualifications of the local government staff.
- Personality of a mayor.

b) Historical practices:

Soviet practices influenced the dissemination of information.

c) Cultural limitations on PR:

Local officials may view public and media relations tools and techniques as something Western and fashionable rather than as powerful management and communication approaches. Cultural limitation is also connected with Armenia's Soviet past, when information was extremely centralized.

¹ Danielyan, Lucig H., and Narine Hakobyan (2005, April). *USAID Citizen Participation Program in Twelve Cities: Report on 2005 Fifth Annual Household Survey Findings*. Yerevan.

d) Resource and capacity limitations:

Many local governments face serious financial constraints; thus they are reluctant to allocate money for PR activities. However, even if funds are available, recruitment and employment of qualified professionals to handle PR may be difficult.

e) Misunderstanding of PR goals:

- Fear that citizens will know too much and will get too involved with local government affairs.
- Fear that if citizens know more they will require more from local governments.
- Opinion that citizens have a limited understanding of local government management, and thus everything should be decided for them.

In summary, local government staff have opportunities to use public and media relations tools and techniques to build a more positive image and greater citizen support and trust in local government as it carries out its functions and services.

Chapter 2

THE CONCEPT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

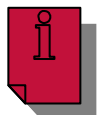
2.1 Definition of Public Relations

PR is important for all organizations, whether they are profit-oriented or nonprofit. PR directly affects the image and reputation of an organization. In the corporate world, the main focus is on profits. For local government, the focus is on the support and trust of citizens. Organizations have to adjust for the needs of their target audiences, and PR is an essential tool in this process. This is as true for local governments as for profit making organizations.

Public relations may be defined in many ways, but in this handbook we will use the definition developed by LGP 3 staff, which describes PR as *a continuous, planned activity aimed at creating good relations and an atmosphere of mutual trust between an organization and its target audiences.*

PR is an inseparable part of local government management. Local democracy is based on citizen participation in local government affairs. To achieve meaningful citizen participation, local governments need to actively involve PR tools in their everyday activities. This handbook also discusses how local governments can encourage citizen participation in local government activities.

In the corporate world, PR personnel address specific groups of consumers, but local governments address all citizens. The work of local government is based on the assumption of collective responsibility and partnership between local officials and citizens.



Local officials need to

- **Set up PR departments, or assign the responsibility to a specific person in smaller local governments, to establish good relations with citizens.**
- **Develop an atmosphere of partnership between the local government and its constituents.**
- **Work in a transparent manner.**
- **Be accountable to citizens for their actions.**

2.2 Activities of Public Relations Departments

PR departments play a significant role in the functioning of a local government and in achieving its goals. A PR department that functions properly implements a plan to coordinate public outreach efforts. A smaller local government can assign a staff person the responsibility for PR activities, as long as he or she clearly understands PR goals and objectives. This individual ideally would have been trained or would have

experience in PR. Table 2 shows the breakdown of PR responsibilities among LGP 3 program cities.

Table 2. PR Responsibilities in the 38 LGP 3 Program Cities

PR Responsibility	No. of Cities	Percentage (%)
PR department	11	29
PR representative	19	50
No PR function	8	21

The LGP 3 baseline survey showed that PR responsibilities were implemented in the majority of local governments in LGP 3 program cities. However, interviews with the local staff revealed that many PR personnel did not have a clear understanding of PR goals and lacked a specific plan of action. They need to define their PR goals and develop a PR plan, which will allow them to reach their target audiences more effectively and create a positive local government image.

When staff members, instead of departments, handle local government PR, the responsibility usually lies with chiefs of the staff, who are mainly preoccupied with other priority tasks. As a result, the use of PR tools and techniques takes on an *ad hoc* nature because the chiefs of staff are not trained in PR and have little time to devote to proper planning and execution of this function.

Local governments often believe that they don't need to invest special effort in the PR function because word of mouth works so well in communities—especially smaller communities. However, word of mouth is not a substitute for planning.

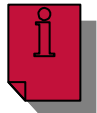
PR is much more complicated than the provision of a limited amount of information. It is a powerful management tool that can build the reputation of a local government; form and influence public opinion; and, most importantly, encourage citizens to participate in community management. Word of mouth does not always reach the expected results because the information may

- Be inaccurate.
- Be incomplete.
- Promote rumors in a community.
- Distort the facts.

Given the limitations of the word of mouth approach, even smaller communities need to assign a staff person with clearly defined PR responsibilities, instead of relying on word of mouth.

Armenian local governments often confuse PR with media relations. Media relations constitute an important part of PR; media and public relations can complement but not substitute for one other. Relations with media are extremely important, but without using other PR methods and tools, local governments cannot achieve the maximum desired impact from their efforts.

Typically, a PR department can perform both public and media relations functions. In some local governments, media-related activities are assigned to a press secretary; in others, they are assigned to chiefs of staffs, as a part of their PR activities. Whether there is a department or only an individual tasked with the public and media functions, the effort must be well coordinated within a local government. Good coordination and effective communication require that a PR plan and communication policies be in place and that there be sufficient funding for planned activities. It may also be wise to budget a small contingency in the PR budget for unplanned PR opportunities.



An effective PR department or function assigned to one or more persons should be able to

- Provide citizens with information about local government activities, programs, and events.
- Prepare brochures and other informational material.
- Establish and maintain contacts with central, regional, and local media.
- Organize press conferences and other media related events.
- Provide for effective internal communications in city hall.
- Organize meetings of the mayor and other local government staff with the public.
- Organize television appearances of the mayor and the local government staff.
- Prepare and conduct PR campaigns for television, press, and radio.
- Conduct citizen satisfaction surveys and report the results to the local council and mayor.
- Review citizens' comments, complaints, and suggestions and report on the trends they reveal.
- Establish contacts that will benefit the community with different groups in and outside of the city.

Performed properly, these tasks will ensure that a local government increases its communication with citizens by informing them of local government events, policies, and major decisions, such as the budget and community development plan. Practice has shown that increased, effective communication improves local government's image and increases its citizen support.

2.3 Public Relations Functions

PR's major functions are

- Communicating.
- Informing (e.g., advertisement of meeting, procurement, new ordinances).
- Analyzing feedback.

- Organizing.
- Managing.²

These interconnected, complementary functions, which are described below, form a strong PR system in local government. Used together, they strengthen the communication, organizational, and management capabilities of government, resulting in mutually beneficial relations with citizens.

Communicating

The communicating function is most widely used in local governments, where communications with citizens happen every day. Note that each communication with a citizen, group, NGO, or foreign donor—whether oral or written—is a PR event. Thus, except for everyday conversations with citizens and groups, these communications should be planned and targeted, so they yield maximum positive results.

Informing

The informing function is part of the communication function. However, because local governments are required to post specific notices, such as advertising in the print media about procurements or disposition of assets, the informing function has a legal perspective and is treated separately.

The informing function requires PR staff to ensure that the local government receives feedback from community residents, organizations, and others outside the government. Feedback from citizens is the only way to confirm that information was received and interpreted correctly. Feedback can take many forms, such as letters requesting information, asking questions, or stating complaints, or comments on the street, in meetings and, especially, at local council and mayor meetings. Feedback often helps local government staff or elected officials evaluate their decisions. Citizens' feedback frequently reflects their preferences, and also can reveal aspects of a decision or problem that local government staff or elected officials may not have considered. Therefore, it is essential that PR policies and planning establish two-way communication with citizens.

Analyzing Feedback

Analysis of feedback enables PR staff and officials to determine trends in a community, foresee developments in the public mood, and identify situations that could arise. This level of effort expands local government's awareness of citizen concerns and desires, and assists in establishing the government's ongoing PR effort. Sources for feedback include public opinion surveys, focus forums with citizens, question-and-answer television and radio shows, letters from citizens, open public meetings of the local council, and a mayor's open door meetings with the public.

² Samokhina, A. The public relations departments in local government bodies: Formation and functioning. Retrieved December 11, 2007, from <http://journal.sakhgu.ru/archive/2005-02-6.doc>.

Organizing

The organizing function is closely related to internal communications within a local government unit. An effective internal communications system helps the government to be more consistent in its communication with all other entities: citizens, NGOs, ministries, local businesses, and international donors. However, the focus here is on an effective means of communicating consistently with citizens as opposed to providing varying responses to a question, request for information, or complaint.

Managing

The managing function enables local officials to form and influence public opinion. Armenian officials could more fully realize the potential of the management function. If it is used correctly, management can be a powerful leverage for building citizens' support and increasing trust in local government's ability to perform. How, where, and when local government responds to citizen concerns, issues, and desires sends a strong message to the citizens. By carefully establishing communication policies and by honestly and carefully crafting its response to citizens, local government can establish a positive image and increase the trust of its citizens.

Chapter 3

MUNICIPALITY INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

3.1 Internal Communications

Before effective communication with citizens can take place, a local government must have consistent and effective communications within its own organizational structure. The PR representative needs to work closely with department heads and the mayor to ensure that what local government tells citizens, interest groups, and those outside the city organization is accurate, consistent, and timely. Unless the internal communication among local government departments, the local council, and the mayor's office is accurate and consistent, citizens will receive confusing messages. The old adage "some information is worse than none at all" may become a reality.

Representatives of different departments within local government often are not aware of one another's activities. Each department may perform at a high level and work toward its goal, without being aware of the overall picture, and thus perspective of the common goal can easily be lost. Good internal communications can help ensure that general communications are effective. A wise manager understands that by implementing these interconnected functions, his or her organization will be more successful in addressing citizens' complaints, requests for service, and questions.

Developing useful internal communication practices requires good managerial skills. A good manager understands the role of internal communications in the successful functioning of local government. The internal communication system needs to inform employees, motivate and empower them to act, promote cooperation, and manage internal conflicts that inevitably arise in any organization.

Effective internal communications are directly related to the ability of a manager to handle conflicts. A manager in a local government unit, like managers in all organizations, has to deal with people who differ in their backgrounds, interests, perceptions, and attitudes. Internal communication practices can help local government management to resolve interpersonal conflicts as soon as possible, before they interfere with the government's ability to carry out its mandate.

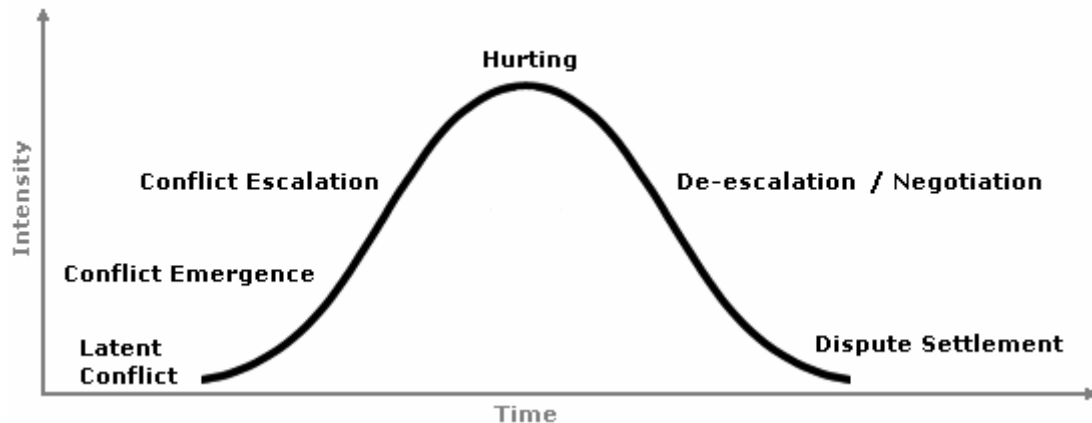
3.2 Conflict Management

Conflicts in municipalities result from a clash of interests between people or groups of people. Conflicts comprise these stages:

- Latent conflict
- Emergence/Escalation
- Hurting
- Negotiations
- Settlement/Resolution

Exhibit 2 shows the general flow of the stages of conflicts.

Exhibit 2. Stages of Conflict³



Latent conflict arises when there is potential for a conflict due to serious differences in needs, perceptions, values, or expectations. A conflict could arise during the latent stage.

A conflict emerges with a triggering event, which is the first sign of marked differences. At this stage, the conflict does not have to show a severe manifestation of these differences.

Conflict escalation leads to hurting. For example, parties involved in the conflict may make statements, and more people may get involved. The situation is not leading to a constructive decision.

The next stage is de-escalation and negotiations, when some dispute settlement possibilities are discussed, and the interests of all conflicting parties are taken into account, with the aim of reaching the final stage, settlement and resolution.

Supervisors have a critical role in conflict management. It goes without saying that the best way to manage a conflict is to prevent it at the latent stage, which requires knowledge of the situation and its reasons. Unfortunately, a supervisor often finds out about a conflict when it is in progress and has passed the latent stage where it could have been prevented.



Not all conflicts have a disruptive nature. Professional management of conflicts can lead to constructive solutions.

³ Brahm, Eric (2003, September). *Conflict stages* (Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess, Eds.). Boulder, CO: The Beyond Intractability Knowledge Base Project. Retrieved December 14, 2007, from <http://www.beyondintractability.org/action/essay.jsp?id=28816&nid=1068>.

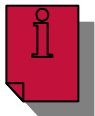
Chapter 4

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN CREATING A POSITIVE GOVERNMENT IMAGE

4.1 Low Citizen Satisfaction

The overall level of citizen satisfaction with Armenian local government performance is low. The reasons for negative perceptions are generally objective and include: Service delivery is poor in solid waste collection; water is not supplied at an adequate level; local roads are in poor condition; and street lighting is not provided in many places. Citizen resentment may also be generated, for instance, by the sale of a local municipal asset without public discussion of whether the asset should be retained and used for public purposes. If citizens aren't informed of such a sale of assets through a local advertisement, they may think their local government is conducting a corrupt act.

However, you can use PR as a method of communicating with and informing citizens of local government actions, and create a much more positive image of and support for the government.



The reputation of the local government indicates how effectively it works and how well it meets the expectations of citizens. A good reputation translates into a high level of citizens' trust in their local government.

4.2 Building a Good Reputation and Trust

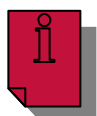
Trust is an important factor in citizen–local government relations, because the local administration came to power as a result of people entrusting the future of the community through their votes for specific individuals. Thus, local government officials need to pay much attention to maintaining this trust throughout their terms. Once trust is destroyed, and public opinion turns against a local administration, enormous efforts and time are required to restore it.

Your local government's reputation is one of its most important assets. A good reputation develops community trust and garners strong community support. When something goes wrong, the public is more forgiving of an administration for which it has a high level of trust.

What is the role of PR in building a good reputation for the local government? When building your government's reputation, don't use PR tools to present reality in distorted ways. Jeopardizing the effort required to build a good reputation to achieve “wrong” goals is unwise. In addition, citizens trust what they see. If they do not see tangible results of local government work or see that local officials keep their

promises, they will most likely lose their trust, and the local government's reputation will be destroyed.

Local governments with bad reputations often take defensive positions toward citizens. When local officials are driven by their weaknesses and not their strengths, citizen–local government relations can become sour. Citizens tend to think that whatever the local government is doing is not in their best interests. When this happens, local government officials may defend themselves. Defensive approaches ignore the potential use of PR tools and techniques to create more positive relations with citizens.



There are many opinions on what reputation is, but for the purposes of this handbook, we will discuss the following main components that build the reputation of local governments:

- **Keeping promises**
- **Working in a transparent manner**
- **Providing good services**

Elected officials do not always keep the promises they make during their campaigns. This gives way to citizens' disappointment and frustration, and undermines the reputation of the entire local government. Reputation can be built by many people but easily destroyed by one person. Therefore, local governments need to adopt comprehensive, unanimous PR strategies in which the roles and responsibilities of PR representatives are defined, so early action can be taken to counter negative reputation trends.

If local government operations are not transparent, sooner or later citizens will think that authorities have something to hide. Even if local government officials are in fact working to the benefit of a community, citizens will have doubts if secrets supersede transparency. To avoid this situation, be as open as possible, providing citizens with community-related information through the extensive use of PR tools and techniques, such as brochures, open meetings, and television and radio programs, so citizens can be informed and involved.

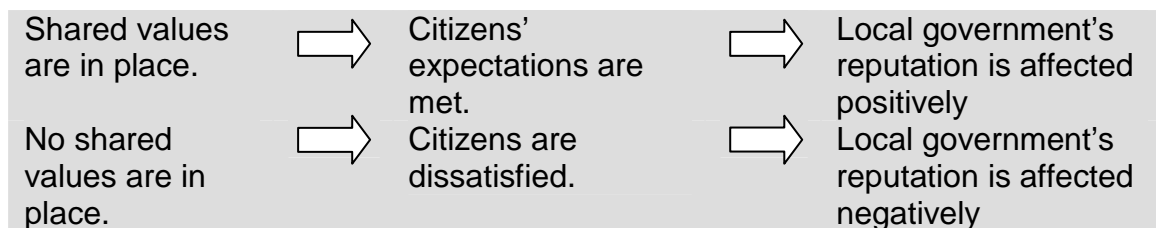
An open and transparent work style has a strong impact on many local government operations, such as tax collection. People may not pay taxes because they are not sure how the money will be spent. Practice shows that citizens are more willing to pay their taxes and service fees if they are well informed about local government activities and trust their local authorities.

Good services are a crucial factor in forming citizens' opinions about local government. Decentralizing powers and responsibilities from the central government to the lower levels is based on the capability of local governments to provide better services as a result of communication and accountability to citizens' needs. Hence, one of the most important criteria upon which local governments are judged, and upon which they build their reputations, is the provision of quality services. (Services are discussed in more detail in Chapter 11.)

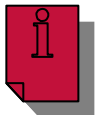
Local governments that keep promises, work in a transparent manner, and provide good services build trust and positive reputations—and gain citizens’ support. Also, the more citizens know about a local government’s operations and the projects it is able to implement within the scope of its budget, the more they will be able to comment and begin to feel “ownership” in local decisions.

A milestone in establishing effective communication with citizens is the shared common values between citizens and local governments. **Exhibit 3** shows that if these values do not exist, discrepancies are created between citizens’ expectations and the work of the local government.

Exhibit 3. Effects of Shared Common Values on Local Government’s Reputation



Shared values can be established by effectively implementing PR methods and tools. In some local governments, PR activities to build a common, shared vision of the future or expectations from services are weak or lacking altogether. To achieve maximum positive results, develop a strategy and use as many PR techniques as possible.



- Good reputation means strong trust and support from citizens.
- Reputation is not easy to build, but is easy to damage.
- Reputation is built by a team, but can be damaged by one person.
- Reputation should not be formed on false facts.
- Good reputation is easier to form than to improve.

Chapter 5

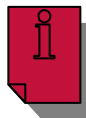
REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA LEGAL FRAMEWORK REGULATING CITIZEN ACCESS TO INFORMATION

5.1 Citizens Have the Right to Access Information

When building a PR function and making a selection between transparent and nontransparent communication, municipal officials need to bear in mind that the legal framework of the Republic of Armenia (RA) provides for the rights of citizens to receive and impart information, and to participate in local government affairs.

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

ARTICLE 19, UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSAL
DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS



Local officials should not view informing and involving citizens in local government as a sign of a good will but rather as compliance with the provisions of RA legislation.

Much of what local governments do in terms of communication with citizens is required by law. This chapter reviews the RA's legal framework and provides specific PR actions that assist local governments in compliance.

5.2 RA Constitution

As the foundation for all the laws of the RA, the Constitution is the starting point for reviewing the communication and informational rights of Armenian citizens. Article 23 gives citizens the right to get information from national and local governments. Article 27 gives citizens, essentially, free speech and expression. Article 27.1, an addition to Article 27, further defines citizens' right to state their case, complaint, or request and to receive a response in a reasonable time frame and manner from central and local government officials.

Article 33.2 states the right of citizens to live in a healthy environment and the responsibility of officials to keep citizens updated on the environmental situation.

5.3 RA Law on Local Self-Government

The Law on Local Self-Government (LLSG) states that the main principles ensuring transparency and availability of the information to be carried out by local governments are

- Reporting to the community.
- Ensuring the publicity and transparency of local government operations.

For example, Article 12, Sub-article 1, of the LLSG sets out the requirements and time for advising citizens of local council meetings. The requirement is that a minimum seven days prior to the council meeting, an announcement must be posted locally, generally at city hall, and that the announcement must state the time of the meeting and list the items to be discussed or decided upon, and that citizens have a right to request copies of materials provided at the meeting, in exchange for a copying fee.

Article 14 of the LLSG requires local councils to hold open public meetings, except in certain circumstances. It takes two-thirds of the local council to vote to close an open meeting.

Article 20 of the law requires local council members to meet with and inform constituents of local government and council operations and to participate in meetings with citizens.

Article 64 requires local governments to publish a four-year community development plan⁴ and an annual budget. To ensure that the four-year year community development plan and annual budget are available to citizens, local governments should publish brochures and bulletins containing main indicators and statistical and graphical data.

LGP 3 Commentary

LGP 3 interviews found that open council meetings were not widely practiced among Armenian local governments. Involving citizens builds democracy, trust, and the image of local governments.

5.4 RA Law on Budgetary System

The Law on Budgetary System states that one of the principles of community formation is publicity, which builds citizen awareness of the local government's budget formation and implementation. Article 36 of the Law on Budgetary System requires local governments to publicize the draft budget in brief. The article also requires quarterly reporting of the budget performance to the public, and requires the mayor to make available the draft budget and periodic performance of the budget to citizens upon request.

LGP 3 Commentary

LGP 3 found that few local governments published their community development plans and budgets, including budgets in brief, which outline the major revenues and

⁴ After the local government elections of 2008, the term of mayor and local council will change to four years instead of three, which will consequently change the term of community development plans from three to four years.

expenditures of a budget. Citizen participation isn't an obstacle to creating a budget; it provides feedback on what taxpayers view as priorities for their local governments.

5.5 RA Law on Legal Acts

In compliance with Article 63 of the Law on Legal Acts, local government official acts are active on the day of their publication in the *Community Legal Acts Bulletin* or when it is posted on a public notice board at city hall. *Community Legal Acts Bulletin* is published according to the population count, with a print run of no less than one copy per one-hundred residents.

The law requires one information board in the community for each 300 residents. The size of the community dictates the number of bulletins printed in each community, with a print run of no less than one copy per one-hundred residents.

LGP 3 Commentary

These provisions are rarely implemented in local governments and, especially, in rural communities. In LGP 3 interviews, local administrations mentioned that ensuring the requirements of the law was expensive, and they could not afford it. Few local governments had more than one information board, which was generally installed in the city hall.

Local governments need to plan for PR-related expenses from the beginning of the budgeting process and conform with the Law on Legal Acts by keeping citizens up to date on new statutes and other official acts.

5.6 RA Law on Local Referendum

This law spells out what a local referendum is and the requirements to implement one. However, the law has some serious flaws. Its procedures make it relatively expensive to implement a referendum. Also, after a successful referendum, action by the Parliament is required before its provisions are binding.

LGP 3 Commentary

This law provides for direct citizen participation in local government decision making. However, to date no community has attempted a local referendum, possibly due to the lengthy procedure and cost of implementation.

5.7 RA Law on Freedom of Information

The Law on Freedom of Information (FOI Law) was adopted by the Armenian Parliament on September 23, 2003, and took effect on November 15, 2003. It has both national and local applications. At the national level, the FOI Law ensures democratic governance by raising the accountability of the governing system, requiring that authorities treat different people equally, and reducing corruption.⁵ *Annex A* provides a copy of the FOI Law.

“A popular Government without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or perhaps both.... A people who mean to be their own Governor, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.”

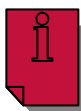
JAMES MADISON, THE FOURTH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

Proper application of the FOI Law is of utmost importance for local governments, because most citizen–government interactions occur at this level. Local governments deliver services and implement programs that immediately and strongly affect citizens. Thus, local implementation of the FOI Law is essential for building citizens’ trust of local administrations, and to motivate citizen involvement in local decision making.

Information does not belong to officials. Information belongs to all citizens. Local governments are obligated to provide information as defined by the FOI Law and summarized below.

The LGP 3 baseline survey of its 38 program cities found that local government officials did have knowledge of the FOI Law but had not implemented it. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents said they were aware of the law but did not have any policies for its implementation. Thirty-two percent stated they did not know about the law.

LGP 3 and the FOIC organized a series of seminars in *marzes* of Armenia on implementation of the FOI Law. Also, FOIC, with financial support from LGP 3, published a guidebook on FOI Law implementation for civil servants, journalists, and citizens.



The FOI Law states four main principles:

- Definition of the unified format of information registering, classification, and filing
- Protection of the right to seek and receive information
- Assurance of information availability
- Publicity

⁵ Pearlman, Mitchell W. The importance of freedom of information at the sub-national level. Retrieved December 11, 2007, from http://www.state.ct.us/FOI/Articles/Sun-National_Artic.htm.

These principles and their implementation ensure citizen participation in community life and in the life of the country in general.

Who Must Provide Information

According to Article 3 of the FOI law, citizens can obtain information from the following bodies, which are considered information holders:

- All state bodies
- All local government bodies
- All state institutions
- All budget-funded organizations
- Publicly significant organizations⁶
- Officials of these organizations

Types of Information Citizens May Request

The FOI Law defines the types of information that are to be made public:

- Activities and services to be provided to the public
- Budget
- Forms for written inquiries and the instructions for completing them
- Lists of personnel, as well as name, last name, education, profession, position, salary rate, business telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses of officers
- Recruitment procedures and vacancies
- Influence on environment
- List of public events
- Procedures, day, time, and place for accepting citizens
- Policy of cost creation and costs in the sphere of work and services
- List of information that a governmental body or organization holds (maintains) and the procedures for providing it
- Statistical and complete data on inquiries received, including grounds for refusal to provide information
- Sources of elaboration or obtainment of information defined in this part
- Information on person entitled to clarify the information defined in this part

LGP 3 Commentary

LGP 3 found that local officials often made decisions as to whether information was secret, and this was not in accordance with the FOI Law. Read the law (*Annex A*), and use the lists above to guide decisions about the rights of citizens to access information.

⁶ Organizations of public significance are private companies, including those that hold a monopoly or superior position in the goods market, as well as those that provide services in health care, sports, education, culture, social security, and transport and communication—e.g., ArmenTel and HayRusGazArd.

Types of Proprietary Information

Proprietary (secret) information is defined by the FOI Law rather than by local officials, who are obligated to act in accordance with the statutes.

According to the RA Constitution, the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information can be limited by other laws based on the considerations of protection of state and public safety, public order, public health and customs, and others' rights and freedoms, dignity, and good name.

Article 8 of the FOI Law states that proprietary information is that which

- Contains state, official, bank, or trade secrets.
- Infringes the privacy of a person and his/her family, including the privacy of correspondence, telephone conversations, post, telegraph, and other transmissions.
- Contains pre-investigation data not subject to publicity.
- Discloses data that require accessibility limitation, conditioned by professional activity (medical, notary, attorney secrets).
- Infringes copyright and associated rights.

How Citizens Apply for Information

The FOI Law specifies that citizens may apply for public information in writing or orally. The preferred method is to establish a written record (see example in *Annex B*).

Article 9, Provision 1, of the FOI Law indicates that in the written application, an applicant should state his or her name, citizenship, address of residence, work or academic institution. Written requests should be signed.

Provision 4 of Article 9 states that applicants do not have to justify their requests for information.

Basis of Denial of Written Requests for Information

According to Provision 3 of Article 9, a written request for information can be denied if

- It does not contain the data stipulated by Provision 1 of Article 9.
- It is discovered that the information about the identity of the author is false.
- The request is the second request for information by the same person during the past six months, except for the cases envisaged by Article 10, Provision 4, which states that the body or organization that provided untruthful or incomplete information shall provide corrected information free of charge, as defined by this law, upon the written inquiry of the receiving party.

A Person Responsible for Handling Information Requests

The FOI Law requires each government organization to appoint a person who is responsible for handling information requests. Provision 4 of Article 9 of the law states that an applicant does not have to justify his/her request for information.

LGP 3 Commentary

The LGP 3 baseline survey found that few of its program cities had a single individual who was responsible for compliance with FOI. In many cases, secretaries, PR departments, and chiefs of staff were able to handle requests for information.

Some local government officials mentioned they would not provide information if they did not know for sure why an applicant needed it. However, local governments are *obligated* under the FOI Law to provide information to citizens as specified by the law. Besides, local government officials should remember that the information is not their property but belongs to the public.

Payment for Information

Information does not belong to local officials, so it cannot be sold by them.

Local governments do need to have policies that require applicants to reimburse the expenses for providing the information they request. As stated in the FOI Law, these expenses include photocopying for more than 10 pages and the cost of digital media on which the information is recorded. Up to 10 pages of photocopied information should be provided for free.

Applicants also do not need to pay for

- Oral responses.
- Information provided by e-mail.
- The provision of information that can prevent damage to the public safety, public order, public health and customs, others' rights and freedoms, and to the environment and property.

Terms of Response to Requests for Information

Local governments handle many requests for information and therefore have to address the time frame during which responses should be issued. For oral requests, responses should be given immediately or in the shortest period possible.

The situation is different for written requests. The law envisages the following terms when responding to a written request:

- Respond within five days. If the information can be provided in less time, that is preferable.
- If additional work is needed to provide the information, the response can be issued within 30 days. Nevertheless, within five days after receiving the request, the respondent should notify the applicant in writing of the reasons for the delay and when the information will be provided. If possible, the respondent should provide the applicant with the address of the body that has the information.

Conditions for Not Providing Information

The FOI Law protects the rights of people seeking information, but it also protects the rights of information holders and specifies conditions under which requests for information can be denied:

- In the cases envisaged by Article 8 (discussed earlier in this chapter), or if the specified fee for provision was not paid.
- The information holder can decline an oral inquiry, if at the given moment it interferes with the main responsibilities of the information holder, with the exception of cases foreseen by the second clause of Article 7.
- If a local official refuses to respond to a written request, the applicant must be informed in writing within five days of his or her application. Local officials need to mention the basis of denial—according to the law—and the order of complaint process (see *Annex A*, FOI Law).

The FOIC developed a sample standard Information Request Form for citizens to use when requesting information from a local government. The form, included in this handbook as *Annex B*, simplifies the request process by providing clear directions for citizens and helps organize handling for local officials.

Chapter 6

PUBLIC RELATIONS PLAN

6.1 Building Citizen Involvement through a PR Plan

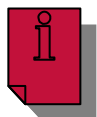
You can improve citizen trust and involvement by planning your local government's public and media relations efforts.⁷ The plan should be as comprehensive as possible, yet flexible enough to take advantage of opportunities that arise throughout the year.

Currently, no communities in Armenia develop public and media relations plans (PR plans). Even if a local government conducts some PR activities, it often does so spontaneously, making decisions without planning. PR activities that do not involve planning and sufficient resources often fail.

A sound and well thought out PR plan that is fully funded will produce strong communications with citizens. Your PR plan and budget must allow for unplanned events, with opportunities to use a variety of PR tools and techniques. The plan also needs to ensure that the PR representative is properly trained.

The PR plan is a document presenting a strategy and planned actions for one year (see the sample plan in *Annex C*). The plan should be prepared by the PR department, or the person assigned the PR function, in close cooperation with other departments to ensure proper communication and presentation of facts, appropriate timing for activities, and that PR messages are presented as one voice from the local government. To accomplish this close coordination, the PR representative must meet with and plan the communications between PR and other department heads, the local council, and the mayor.

Until a local government establishes a PR plan, budget, and assignment of responsibility to a department or individual, the chief of staff should temporarily carry out the PR function.



The PR plan is specific for each community and includes the following important components:

- **Background information**
- **Goals and objectives**
- **Target audiences or segmentation of population**
- **Identification of PR methods and tools involved to reach target audiences**
- **Schedule of activities with time line, responsible individual, and budget**

⁷ Media relations are a specific subtopic of public relations and should be included in overall public administration.

Background Information

Background information is the foundation of a PR plan. Therefore, it needs to create a clear picture of existing PR activities, describing the

- PR department.
- Mass media in the community.
- PR tools and techniques used by the community.
- PR efforts that have been carried out.
- Results of PR efforts.

Goals and Objectives

Set the goals and objectives for your PR program based on the background information. The plan begins with broad goals and gets more specific in the statement of objectives. The objectives should be measurable to the extent that the community can determine program success or failure.

For example, a goal could be: Build strong and positive communications with citizens. The objectives for this goal could be to

1. Conduct citizen surveys.
2. Organize citizen forums and focus groups.
3. Issue a periodic newsletter in conjunction with the citizen survey.
4. Ensure that public notice boards and directories are installed in city hall.

Local governments need to develop a full PR plan with several goals and related objectives to ensure a sound and thorough PR program.

Population Segmentation

In general, local officials tend to view citizens as a homogeneous group. However, PR takes into consideration that distinct groups may need to be reached through specific PR efforts. For example, elderly people need specific attention and communication techniques. Likewise, youth in the community need to be targeted. Identifying the main groups within the community will go a long way toward strengthening communication with them.

Segmentation also aids local governments in understanding the expectations of community groups and allows the government to ensure that it meets those expectations. Public opinion and satisfaction surveys are very useful for better understanding community segments. Local authorities usually conduct them to find out if citizens are satisfied with the quality of services and local government programs, or if there are issues and problems that are of concern to citizens. Local governments can use the survey results to ensure that it meets the desired quality of services. Another benefit of local opinion surveys is that they allow government officials to verify the accuracy of their views about what citizens think is important. Segmentation and surveys can also include additional and more specific information for use in making budget and service decisions.

PR Tools and Techniques

This section of the PR plan describes PR activities, methods, and tools that will be used in the plan's time frame, and is specific in how each population segment will be reached. Examples include organizing meetings with schoolchildren to present local government activities or meeting with the women of the community to listen to their needs and problems.

This section also refers to PR tools and techniques designed to reach the overall population. Examples are installation of information boards in city hall, where many people congregate, and a local government directory in the city hall.

Mass media, among the most powerful PR tools, need special attention. For example, if a community has television service, planned, televised interviews can enable the mayor, council, or local government staff to answer questions or address community or segment issues.

Of course, during the planned period, situations may demand unplanned interviews. It is important that those responsible for PR be trained in preparing for such interviews to maximize their benefits.

PR Plan Schedule and Administration

This section of the PR plan clearly states the schedule of activities, person, or persons responsible for each activity's preparation, and a budget allocation. The PR department or representative prepares the PR calendar for the duration of the plan, which is generally one year. Essentially, all the information discussed earlier in the PR plan is incorporated into a chart in this section. Some changes during the planned year may apply to the information in the chart.

Chapter 7

PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

7.1 Using PR to Inform and Involve Citizens

You can use a variety of PR tools and techniques to inform and involve citizens in local government. Before choosing your approaches, identify the weak points in the local government's communications with citizens by conducting a self-assessment of the government's current activities. The self-assessment assists in identifying communication shortcomings and topics about which local government wants to better inform specific groups of citizens. *Annex D* provides a self-assessment questionnaire that you can customize for your needs.

Good PR requires the right choice of PR tools and techniques, which need to target audiences. Chapter 6 explained segmentation of populations, which can be very detailed, including factors such as age, sex, occupation, and personal preferences. Clearly define the citizen groups you want to reach to ensure that messages will be understood. Segmentation might not be needed; e.g., when a message refers to a situation or event that applies to everyone in the community.

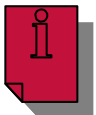
You can use the following tools and techniques to improve PR.

Public Notice Boards

Public notice boards inform citizens about local government activities and other community events. Public notice boards are usually installed on the first floor of a city hall and in areas where large numbers of citizens congregate. For information boards to be effective, each local government needs to assign a person who is responsible for keeping the information up to date and accurate.

These types of information are displayed on public notice boards:

- Land auction information
- Bidding announcements
- City council decisions
- Mayor's decisions
- Proposed and approved budgets
- Local government departments and their structure
- Taxes, duties, and fees (rates)
- Job vacancies in the community
- Donor programs implemented in the local government
- Programs implemented in the community by the local government or the central government
- Local newspapers with specific information that may be of interest to citizens



The role of the information boards in creating information flow from local government to citizens is underestimated in Armenia. Local media may include the same announcements and information that would be posted on information boards. However, there is no doubt that public notice boards tend to play a greater role in smaller local governments with limited media coverage—and information boards are also an important medium in communities that have media. Some citizens cannot buy newspapers; others may miss television or radio announcements, so these media may not reach some target groups. The goal is to ensure that messages reach those for whom they are intended, using all appropriate media.

Brochures and Leaflets

Brochures and leaflets can be effective tools in reaching citizens. PR departments, citizen information centers, and other local government departments can prepare and distribute them. The brochures can address a specific event or be of a general nature, addressing topics such as

- The budget.
- Local government structure.
- Phone numbers of local government and city enterprises.
- Issues that interest citizens.
- Programs and projects implemented in the community.
- Decisions of the council.
- Tax collection.

Brochures can also be distributed through condominium associations, council members, and city enterprises, or they can be placed in easy-to-access locations at city hall and the post office.

Boxes for Questions and Comments

Boxes for questions and comments can be installed at city hall and other locations where large numbers of citizens gather. Citizens can write and deposit their concerns, questions, comments, and complaints in the boxes. Citizens do not have to sign their names. A person from the local government collects the contents on a timely basis, such as once a week. Responses to the questions and concerns can be posted on the information board or made public through local media.

Meetings with Community Residents

Face-to-face meetings with citizens create an environment of mutual trust between local government and citizens. These meetings are a powerful PR method, because they give both citizens and officials an immediate means of determining whether the communication is successful. Face-to-face meetings also indicate the local government's commitment to improve communications with all of the community's residents. These meetings have long-lasting impressions on citizens.

For general meetings, be well prepared. For example, if a meeting is called about the local budget, local government staff need to be able to answer questions that arise

after the budget's presentation. Make arrangements for adequate heating, lighting, and seating in advance. Also, give prior notice of the meeting with sufficient time for citizens to plan to attend.

Telephone Hot Lines

Telephone hot lines can be staffed during the business day and attached to an answering machine during nonworking hours. Local government staff can write the answering machine responses and add them to the hot line response archive.

Periodic Newsletters and Calendar of Events

Local government newsletters are publications that inform, encourage discussion of issues and problems, and may even provide an area for written survey responses. A newsletter can be published once or twice a month. Newsletters are generally free with the goal of wide circulation to ensure communication with citizens. Often, the periodic newsletter provides a calendar of events in the community, such as public events, council meetings, events sponsored by the city and other groups within the local government, and celebrations (see *Annex E* for an example of an event calendar).

Local Government Web Site

A local government Web site plays a significant role in creating an open and transparent image of the local government, and ensures that citizens have access to local government-related information. The Web site needs to contain a wide array of information, such as biographical data of elected and appointed officials; projects and programs implemented by the local government; mayor's and council's decrees; community-related events; local government announcements; and budgets. The Web site can also have interactive features, such as online surveys and forums. Update the local government Web site regularly.

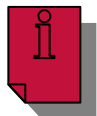
Chapter 8

CITIZEN INFORMATION CENTERS AND CITIZEN SERVICE CENTERS

8.1 Establishing Citizen Information Centers

Citizen Information Centers (CICs) can be a strong PR tool to create two-way communication between local government and citizens. Not only do CICs ensure information flow from local government to citizens, but they also provide for citizen feedback. CICs can be the “face” of the local government. That is, they may be the first point of contact when a citizen is seeking information or lodging a complaint. Thus CICs can have tremendous influence in creating and sustaining an image of mutual trust and cooperation for local government.

CICs are especially important for countries in transition to democracy, because they facilitate the breaking down of citizen passivity and involve citizens in local government decision making processes.



The Eurasia Foundation established 20 information analytical centers (also called citizen information centers) in the following Armenian cities: Gyumri, Alaverdi, Vanadzor, Ijevan, Dilijan, Noyemberyan, Sevan, Martuni, Gavar, Ashtarak, Metsamor, Vedi, Masis, Yeghegnadzor, Jermuk, Sisian, Kapan, Goris, Charentsavan, and Abovian.

Initially, CICs performed two broad functions: (1) serving as an internal information department to local government, and (2) responding to citizens’ requests for information. As an internal information provider, CICs tracked correspondence, progress of local government legislation, and, in the beginning, they developed and maintained the voters’ list.

CICs were provided a computer and software for the population register and voters’ list, the budget, correspondence tracking and legislation archiving, and a geographic information system.

However, the LGP 3’s baseline survey and review showed that few CICs now provide these functions. Many of them have dropped the name Citizen Information Center and turned their focus toward providing internal information, thereby losing their citizen orientation and service function. Another observation made during the baseline review was that CICs tended to play a greater role in small municipalities than in large ones, which may be because smaller communities have few mass communication sources, and there is a tendency to pass information by word of mouth. Tasks that CICs perform—e.g., providing references drawn from the Citizen Registry database—are vital for smaller cities.

8.2 Citizen Information Center Model

CIC Functions

CICs typically respond to requests for information and service, and they lodge complaints on behalf of citizens to local governments. In carrying out these functions, a CIC often acts as the facilitator for questions to which only a *marzped* or central government ministry can respond if the request is for a service or document. In terms of PR efforts on behalf of a local government, CICs provide brochures and newsletters produced by the government's PR department and information about decisions made by the mayor and local council, particularly the budget. A CIC can also act as a collector of information; e.g., by compiling the number of complaints about specific problems, which can assist the government staff, mayor, and local council to address problems, often more quickly than other methods of feedback.

Location and Physical Premises

The main function of a CIC is to provide easy access to information, so they need to be located on the first floor of city hall.

The physical setting of the CICs needs to be visitor friendly and inviting. The design can vary, based on the size of the local government, availability of space on the first floor of the city hall, and available resources. For those local governments that can afford it, a touch-screen computer monitor screen at the entrance of the CIC would allow many citizens to access their own information. If a citizen has problems with the touch screen, CIC staff can assist or take the request themselves.

Staff of the CIC

CIC staff ultimately make the CIC effort successful. In comparison with other local government departments whose staff may rarely interact with citizens, CIC employees meet with citizens most of the working day. Thus, the CIC staff play an essential role in setting the tone and service orientation of the local government.

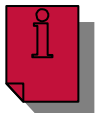
Careful screening is essential to ensure that the best CIC candidates are hired. The interviewer has to make certain that the candidate will be friendly, customer-oriented, and patient with citizens making their information requests or lodging complaints.

In addition, CIC staff need to be highly professional and well informed about local government activities. For this reason, it is preferable to shift existing staff to the CIC, if possible, instead of hiring a person from outside the organization. Local government officials must keep in mind that CIC employees are the face of the local government and the first point of contact for many citizens; thus choosing the wrong person will negatively affect the image of local government. *Annex F* provides a sample scope of work for CIC employees.

8.3 Transformation of Citizen Information Centers into Citizen Service Centers

Recently, CICs have been transformed into citizen service centers (CSCs). The main difference between them is that CSCs not only provide information, but also offer certain services. In fact, a CSC is a one-stop shop for local government information and services. For citizens, CSCs are advantageous because they save time, minimize bureaucratic barriers, and may reduce the potential for corruption in local government.

In addition to the functions of CICs, CSCs can

- 
- Make appointments for citizens to meet with the mayor.
 - Track written requests, complaints, letters, and questions addressed to the mayor and local government staff.
 - Provide citizens with information and official confirmations concerning the status of property, place of residence, marital status, and fees and charges owed to the local government.
 - Provide citizens with all forms and requirements necessary for obtaining licenses (e.g., permits to build, to sell alcohol), and assist citizens in filling them out. Citizens can also pick up approved forms at a CSC.
 - Provide information on taxes and fees due and information on schedules of payment.

CSCs, like CICs, can place touch-screen monitors with simple instructions in the CSC reception area. This way, citizens will be able to find information on their own, provided the CSC's computers are linked to the city hall intranet.

Armenia has few CSCs. One was established in 2005 in Aparan with the financial support of USAID and German Technical Cooperation (GTZ). The CSC is located on the first floor of Aparan's city hall. Five people, including the head of the CSC department, work in the center. An interesting extension of the Aparan CSC operation is that it carries out property tax billing and collection as a part of its functions.

Aparan has a population of approximately 12,000, and the CSC receives 700 to 800 requests for services per month. This level of usage is encouraging and demonstrates that a CSC can be both an effective PR tool and a service provider. Ideally, many other functions could be incorporated into the work of the Aparan CSC. Nevertheless, it is a big step forward in terms of combining some service and information functions, which has a positive effect on the image of the local government.

Another CSC was established in the city of Charentsavan, with financial support from GTZ, in 2006. This CSC is also located on the first floor of city hall. It has a sign with employees' names and the working hours of the CSC, and employees actively provide this information to citizens.

The CSC in Charentsavan comprises two parts:

- Citizen reception area
- Citizen service area

The front entrance to the CSC has a waiting room with tables and chairs. Visitors can locate CSC employees in the reception area. The employees listen to citizens' questions, answer them, and provide direction for additional actions.

Even if a citizen's question is not in the scope of work of the CSC, its employees try to be helpful by calling and arranging for other departments to meet with the citizen.

The reception area includes a touch-screen computer. Citizens can access information themselves by making selections on the screen. Citizens whose questions can be addressed by CSC employees are directed to the service area.

The CSC provides the following services, in addition to information:

- Licenses
- Registration for the mayor's reception
- Receipt and registration of citizen applications
- The provision of information about mayoral and council decisions
- Receipts for taxes and service fees
- Literature

8.4 Municipality Information System

Information technologies can improve the effectiveness and quality of local government work, ensure transparency, raise quality, and make services more available to citizens and organizations. These technologies also help local governments manage community budgets and property more effectively and reduce corruption risks.

The Information Systems Development and Training Center (ISDTC) developed the Municipal Governance Unified Information System (the System), which was installed in 2002 and is in use in the city of Charentsavan. The System is a collection of Web pages and automated systems in the local government's intranet, a network that uses the program tools and technologies of the Internet. The functions of the System are to receive, process, exchange, and unify information. The System can improve CSC and CIC employees' efficiency by making information and documents readily available from their computers. It also provides additional information directly to citizens via touch-screen computers.

The following technical administrators and users have access to all System files and documents:

- System administrators
- Information processors
- Other users, such as citizens and community enterprises

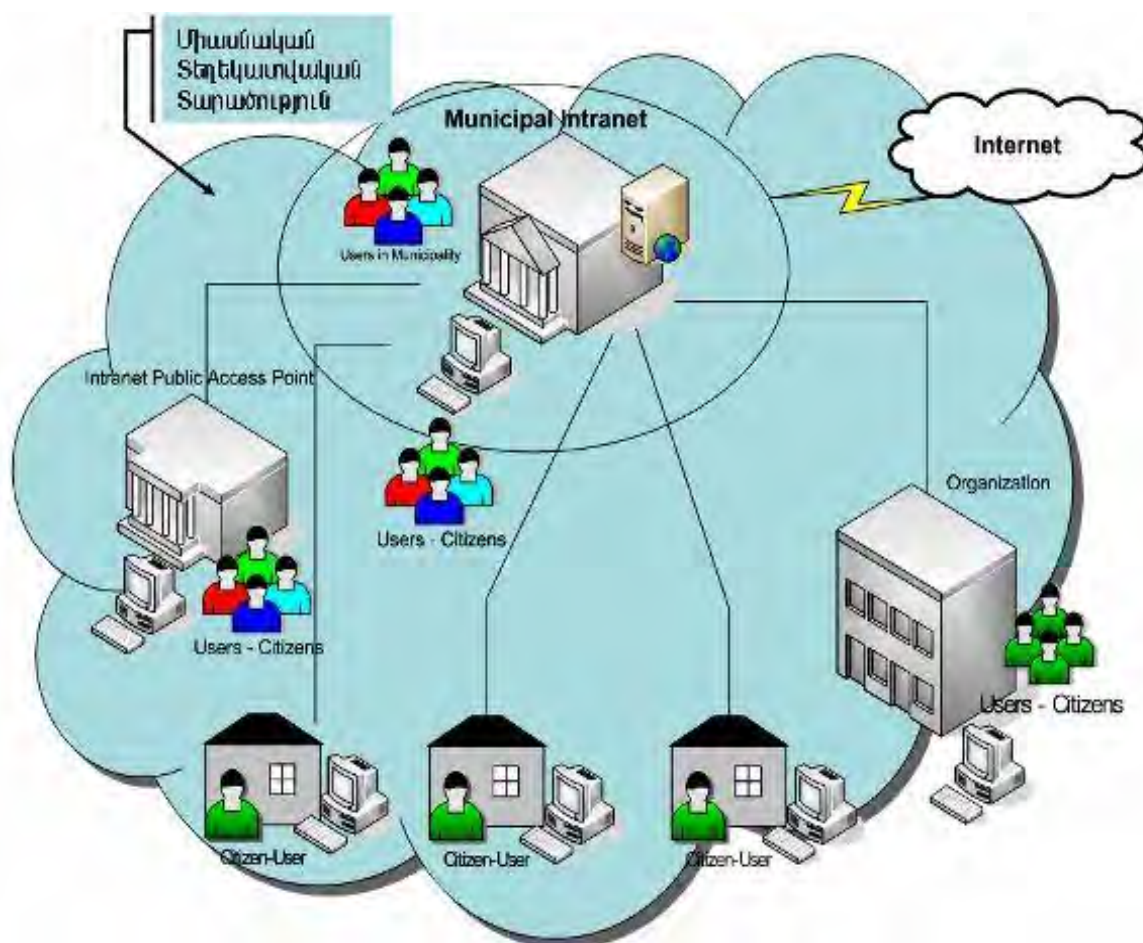
The System can also register user groups—e.g., financiers and heads of departments—who can be given appropriate levels of access to files.

Plans for the unified information space would allow access to the following users:

- Local governments and their staff
- Municipal enterprises and organizations
- Citizens

Exhibit 4 shows how local government employees and citizens could access a municipal intranet.

Exhibit 4. User Groups' Access to the Municipal Intranet



In this scenario, citizens can use the system at

- Different municipal departments.
- CICs and CSCs.
- Public access points, located in the libraries, schools, and other public places.
- Municipal enterprises and organizations.
- Apartments, if they have computers that are connected to the System.

The System runs on a local government network server, located in the administrative building, and users in the building can access it from computers. Other users can access the System through distant privileges.

Local governments have to take action to make the System work smoothly. Most importantly, a local government has to employ an open and transparent work style and adopt a policy that each department must share information by placing it on the intranet. Local government employees need training on how to use the intranet.

The local government needs to ensure that departments have computers and network equipment. It should provide for the server, network, uninterruptible power supplies (UPSs), and hubs. Also, a system administrator needs to be in place to coordinate installation, security, and maintenance. Software such as Population Register System, Office Work Software, and Oracle[®] can be incorporated into the intranet.

Chapter 9

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT DECISION MAKING

9.1 The Importance of Having Active Citizens

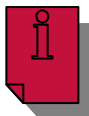
“Citizen participation in the decisions that affect their lives is an imperative of contemporary society. For the first half of the 20th century, citizens relied on public officials and administrators to make decisions about public policy and its implementation. The latter part of the 20th century saw a shift toward greater direct citizen involvement. This trend is expected to grow as democratic societies become more decentralized, interdependent, networked, linked by new information technologies, and challenged by “wicked problems.”⁸

Citizen Participation in Armenian Local Government Decision Making

The dual goals of PR are to inform citizens and raise their awareness of local government activities and to increase citizens’ active participation in those activities. Citizens who are informed and aware develop a positive attitude toward participating in local government decision making and policy formation.

Citizen participation is low in Armenia’s local government decision making processes. Chapter 1 described how local governments may prefer that citizens not be active or “intrude” into local government matters. Other reasons also explain the lack of citizen activity. For example, many citizens consider the local government to be ineffective and do not want to waste their time in getting involved. Some citizens are willing to participate as long as there is an incentive—such as resolving a problem that affects them or their families. Others are not aware of the possibility to participate or think that they cannot devote the time.

The root cause of this problem is that Armenian local governments are not encouraging and involving citizens to take part in local government processes. The local government plays the central role in transforming citizen passivity.



To turn citizen participation into reality, local governments have to be proactive, transparent, and accessible in order to create an environment in which citizens can also have a say.

The LGP 3 survey and review identified some reasons why local authorities do not want to involve citizens in local government affairs. Some local government officials think that

- If citizens know more, they will require more.

⁸ Roberts, Nancy (2004). Public deliberation in an age of direct citizen participation. *American Review of Public Administration*, 34(4), 315–353.

- If citizens know more, local authorities will be criticized for their mistakes.
- If citizens get involved, the decision making process will become too complicated.
- Organizing citizen participation requires more resources from a local government.
- The results from involving more citizens in local government decision making do not warrant the effort.

Despite all these justifications, bear in mind that citizen participation is the foundation of local government and democratic processes.

Improving Citizen Trust in Local Government

Local governments benefit from investing time, effort, and resources in PR processes to build more positive relationships with their citizens. Greater citizen involvement in local government policy and decision making

- Creates a strong environment of mutual trust and support.
- Develops or increases citizens' ownership of the implemented projects.
- Improves decision making processes by providing fresh views on a problem and potential solutions for decisions.
- Increases project or program support and reduces the resistance that many new projects encounter.
- Divides the responsibility for decisions.

Citizens who have ownership and responsibility in project-related decision making and implementation invest their efforts and energy to help local authorities make the projects successful. When citizens are well informed about what projects are implemented in their communities and participate in the implementation phase, they develop a strong feeling of responsibility and ownership for these projects.

Local governments officials may prefer to make decisions within their own organizations, without involving citizens in the process. Local officials may think that citizens do not have much expertise and, therefore, their input is not valuable. However, local governments that include citizens in decision making improve their chances of making effective decisions and are more likely to gain citizen support for their decisions.

Increased citizen involvement in decisions about capital projects often adds a measure of assurance that a project will be carried out as approved. Both city officials and citizens, who know what to expect based on their involvement, watch a contractor's work progress. Also, when citizens have been involved with a project decision and know its history, they are less apt to blame the local government for delays and mistakes when it is not the local government's action that caused the problems.

Turning citizen participation into reality in Armenia will not be an easy task because people, in general, are negative toward change, disappointed in efforts by local governments, and discouraged that they are not informed and involved in the local government decision making process. Local government officials need to be patient and committed to the process of involving citizens in making decisions about a

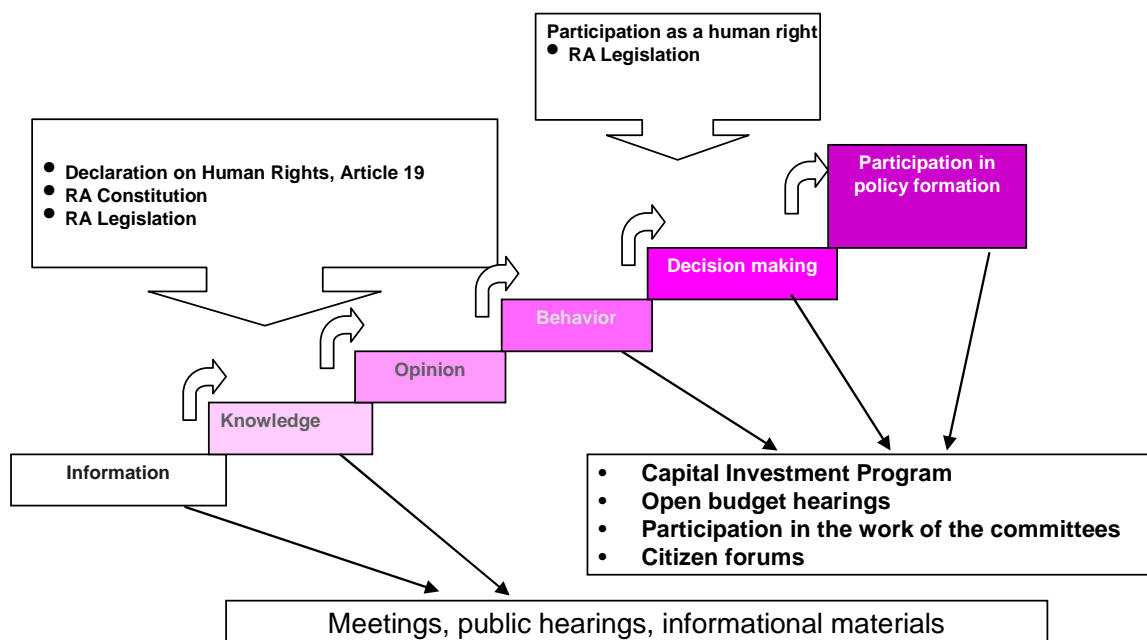
community's service needs and future. *But patience is not enough: Local government officials must be proactive in involving citizens* through PR campaigns, increasing their openness with citizens, and developing an understanding that in the democratic processes being implemented in Armenia, citizen support is essential.

9.2 Citizen Participation Ladder—One Model

LGP 3 reviewed professional literature on organizing citizen participation. The model shown in *Exhibit 5*, a citizen participation ladder, was developed by the Open Society Institute (OSI)⁹ and takes the Armenian context into account.

The citizen participation ladder could be applied, for example in organizing open budget hearings, developing and approving capital investment plans, and organizing citizen forums. The model shows levels of citizen participation and the factors that both influence, and are influenced by, participation.

Exhibit 5. Levels of Citizen Participation



The first three steps of the ladder—information, knowledge, and opinion—represent information that goes in one direction, from local government to citizens, with no feedback from citizens to the local government:

- Information, a necessary prerequisite for citizen participation, is the lowest step in the ladder. At this stage, local government PR tools and techniques can help build citizen participation by ensuring that information is complete and non-biased; otherwise citizen participation will be perfunctory and will not yield the desired results.

⁹Vanoyan, Mais (2005). Chapter I, Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation–Armenia. In Mais Vanoyan, Arthur Drampyan, Armine Grigoryan, and Diana Gaziyan, *Citizen participation and its role in decentralization and strengthening local governments*. Yerevan: Armenian International Policy Research Group/OSI.

- Citizens have knowledge when they are informed. This knowledge can be active or passive, not leading to further participation or action.
- Thorough, comprehensive knowledge can be transformed into opinion.

In the final stages—behavior, decision making, and policy formulation—citizens acquire power to influence decisions and policies. In these stages, information flows in two directions, from local government to citizens and from citizens to local government:

- At the behavior stage, residents start to become active based on the information and knowledge they have and opinions they have formed. They begin to visualize roles they can play in the overall process and take steps to get involved in the next two stages.
- At the decision making and policy formation stages, citizens may participate in budget hearings, council meetings, and citizen–local government working groups dedicated to topics of community significance, such as drafting the community’s four-year social development plan or capital investment plan.¹⁰

Each step in the ladder is important to build citizen participation. However, citizen participation is impossible without the first stage, when local governments provide information to local citizens.

9.3 Open Budget Hearings

Citizen participation in local government budget hearings occupies the highest step in the citizen participation ladder, where local residents can have a say in developing their community budgets. Citizen participation in the local budgeting process sets a strong basis for cooperation between local government and citizens, the exchange of ideas, and for creating an environment of mutual trust and support in community.

Unfortunately, the situation is not that optimistic in Armenia. According to a survey implemented by the TCPA at the American University of Armenia in 2004, 50.8 percent of the Armenian citizens interviewed stated that they would have better performed in the decisions of the local government if they had more information about the city budget. When asked when their city budgets are approved, 86.7 percent of the respondents stated they did not know.¹¹

Armenian legislation ensures publicity of the local government budget. However, some local officials may view citizen participation in the budgeting process as a hindrance to forming and adopting the budget. Local government officials may argue that (a) local residents are not interested in attending public budget hearings; (b) public budget hearings require much time and effort to organize; and (c) local residents do not have a good understanding of the budget. In this point of view, the

¹⁰ Alternative to the community four-year social development plan

¹¹ Danielyan, Lucig H., and Narine Hakobyan (2005, April). *USAID Citizen Participation Program in Twelve Cities: Report on 2005 Fifth Annual Household Survey Findings*, Yerevan.

entire process of citizen involvement is a waste of time and resources, and it cannot be effective.

The budget is one of the most important documents produced by a local government. The level of citizen awareness and degree of their involvement in the budgeting process can positively affect the reputation of local governments and create an environment of mutual trust and support. Community residents should be involved in the local government budgeting process, because

- Key public policy decisions are made that directly affect citizens.
- A significant part of local government budget revenue is formed from the taxes paid by citizens.

Some local governments in Armenia, with the help of international organizations, have attempted public budgeting processes. However, in the majority of these cases, local residents were invited to participate on budget adoption day. Thus they could not influence the process, and their participation was really not meaningful.

An effective public budgeting process consists of a series of meetings that occur long before budget adoption. When citizens and local government officials are involved together from the beginning, they develop a “bottom-up” budget based on a spectrum of inputs that strengthen both the budget and government–citizen relationships.

Local government officials have to take the initiative in providing information that citizens are able to analyze. The following tips will help ensure effective budget communication:

- The head of the finance department presents the budget in plain, understandable language, without overloading the presentation with professional terms.
- During these discussions, local government officials provide citizens with the budget in brief, outlining the main revenue and expenditure items.
- All people participating in budget discussions have a right to express themselves according to the protocol of the meeting. Often it is necessary to establish a time limit, if many citizens want to speak about the budget.
- Local government officials ensure that the budget reflects citizens’ concerns and suggestions, as expressed at the meetings. This is central to building citizens’ confidence, ensuring that local priorities are determined through a democratic process, and building civic culture.



Timing is vital in the public budgeting process. Citizens should be involved in the early to middle stages of the process; otherwise there is no two-way exchange of information; and citizen participation is not meaningful, but perfunctory.

9.4 Capital Investment Plan

Requirement to Plan

According to Article 53 of the LLSG, “The community head (mayor) develops a community four-year development plan and presents it to the approval of the newly elected council.”

There is no citizen involvement in the process, as it is carried out today. The mayor develops the four-year community development plan by involving the heads of finance, programs, and other departments. In some cases, the heads of city enterprises are invited to participate in the process. The plan encompasses the socioeconomic aspects of a city, organized by service or functional areas, such as health care, education, transport, and culture.

In most cases, no serious financial justification is provided for the projects selected. Often, capital projects don’t form an important part of the four-year development plan, but instead reflect a mayor’s capital project preferences. Local citizens may not know what is in the plan or the capital projects for which a mayor seeks funding. This approach does not fulfill a mayor’s obligation to keep citizens informed or build support and trust in the local government’s decisions and actions.

Rationale for Developing Capital Investment Plans¹²

Given their extremely limited financial resources, local governments in Armenia face the challenge of providing adequate service delivery and improving infrastructure. At the same time, local governments have a significant void in their technical abilities to develop and implement their capital investment plans (CIPs). Local governments have no process in place to prioritize and evaluate projects based on objective criteria. And most importantly, citizen participation is lacking in identifying cities’ problems and developing a consensus for CIPs.

One international donor, USAID, through its Local Government Program, has been providing training to program cities that link citizen participation and the capital budgeting process to develop a consensus on projects to include in a CIP. The citizen participation portion of the process involved dividing cities a city into neighborhoods, which identified their priority projects to recommend to the local government. In addition, neighborhoods also appointed one representative to sit on a committee appointed by the mayor to make the final city-wide capital improvement selection. *To emphasize the process and participation of citizens in project selection, an international donor funded the final project selected by the citizen committee.* The process revealed that citizens working closely with elected local government officials and staff can bring into focus a community-oriented need that differs from ones that elected and appointed officials might select on their own.

Advantages of the CIP Process

Advantages to the approach described above are that

¹² Vanoyan, Mais, and Armine Grigoryan, CIP Program Description. Yerevan: LGP 2.

- The CIP process is democratic: Citizens are involved in problem identification and decision making. Also, direct citizen participation in the capital needs identification process—and representative citizen participation in capital needs prioritization and the CIP implementation planning process—build ownership and support for a project.
- The CIP process is a bottom-up one: Community problems are defined and prioritized at the local level by citizens and directed toward formal decision makers at the top, with an expectation that they will incorporate citizens' needs and aspirations in the community's city's multiyear capital plans.
- The CIP offers an objective methodology for prioritizing capital needs and evaluating projects, because priority needs are discussed and adopted in advance and by a representative group of people. In other words, the highest priority projects are not the projects selected by one individual or one group with a narrow interest.
- The CIP is approved by a city council and is coordinated with and integrated into a city's budget. Consequently, priorities in the CIP are automatically integrated into the city's overall spending plans.
- Some capital projects also may include in-kind contributions by citizens. These projects may only be possible when citizens are involved in every step of the decision making process.

The Participation Process

LGP Phase 1 (LGP 1) and LGP Phase 2 (LGP 2) developed the participatory urban assessment (PUA) methodology for engaging citizens in the capital planning and project selection process. Several cities used the PUA process and found it beneficial in building citizen support. Often, the process was continued after the completion of LGP 2.

PUA was designed to achieve the following objectives:

- Enable citizens to participate in the identification and assessment of neighborhood needs.
- Increase citizen participation in the local government decision making process.
- Ensure citizen participation in the development of a CIP.

The logical model of PUA–CIP implementation and steps can be represented as:

Direct participation → Representation → Deliberation → Democratic Decision Making

Using PUA methodology, cities were divided into several neighborhood districts based on natural, cultural, traditional, or human-made boundaries. Semi-structured interviews with individuals and focus groups were conducted, followed by general meetings, in each neighborhood, at which residents identified, ranked, and prioritized

their problems. At general meetings, each neighborhood district formed a civic action group (CAG) that comprised representatives who were elected by the district through direct voting. Citizens also elected neighborhood CAG coordinators from their CAG members. At the later stage of developing the city's CIP, the CAG coordinators represented the interests of their districts as members of the CIP coordination committee. CAG coordinators also played a critical representation role by submitting CIP proposals to the CIP coordination committee. These proposals reflected a neighborhood's top priority problems as identified by its residents through the interviews and general meetings.

The CIP Coordination Committee

When a PUA was completed, and following the mayor's decree, a CIP coordination committee was convened, comprising the CAG coordinators and the appropriate city hall officials. The committee worked through formal sessions, meetings, and consultations to design the municipality's four-year CIP, following an agenda that had been worked out in advance. Table 3 shows a sample of projects funded.

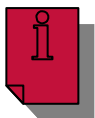
Table 3. Examples of Projects Funded from CIP Lists (LGP 1 and LGP 2)

City	Project	Funding Organization
Artik	Improvement of three roads	Allowance for Work, RA government
Ijevan	Roof repair of six buildings	World Vision
Ijevan	Partial repair of roofs of 40 buildings	RA government (state budget)
Jermuk	Improvement of water gallery	RA government
Kapan	Acquisition of equipment for culture house	Private entrepreneur
Sevan	Lighting of Sevan and Gagarin village streets (partial)	Allowance for Work, RA government
Sevan	Garbage collection, garbage bin preparation, acquisition, and fencing (partial)	Allowance for Work, RA government
Sisian	Kindergarten N3	Marzpetaran
Sisian	City library	Marzpetaran
Sisian	Partial renovation of school N5	Zangezur Fund

The committee discussed and approved the CIP projects submitted by the CAG coordinators, city staff, and organizations in the community. The CAG coordinators presented proposals reflecting the top problems of their respective neighborhoods.

The committee analyzed the proposals to verify their accuracy and data, such as the description and substantiation of the problem, total cost of project, number of beneficiaries, availability of funding, and levels of investment from the community capital budget and citizens.

The final step was approval of the CIP and budget by council members.



The CIP can be a very strong planning tool, because it creates an environment of trust and support—if citizens are brought into the process.

9.5 Citizen Forums

Citizen forums allow citizens to participate in selecting the NGO and community group projects to be funded from a local government's budget. LGP 3 program city council members developed the concept of citizen forums based on their study tour to Bulgaria, organized in June 2007 through the cooperation of LGP 3 and the Academy for Educational Development (AED).

Before you conduct a forum, inform local NGOs and community groups through local media and announcements of the amount of funding that has been allocated from the local budget to implement a community project. Potential project implementers should be able to invest 20 percent of the total project cost.

Presenters should be informed that their projects will be rated according to the following criteria:

- Cost share availability
- Degree of urgency
- Number of beneficiaries and the community impact
- Level of community support
- Project cost

At the forum, a moderator asks citizen volunteers from the audience to form a jury, and then each NGO presents its project. After each presentation, jury members and representatives of the public can ask questions. Then, the jury ranks each criterion on a scale of one to five, and the rankings are averaged for each presentation. This process takes place in public with the participation of those in attendance, and the winner is selected based on the highest score.

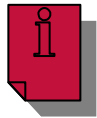
The first citizen forum was organized in 2007 in Gavar with the strong support of the local administration. Six projects were presented for funding. The winning project was called Park Rebirth and will improve landscaping and plant trees in an old community park. The Gavar citizen forum will be duplicated in other communities in Armenia.

Chapter 10

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE FUNCTIONING OF LOCAL COUNCILS

10.1 Local Council Use of Public Relations

Local councils are entrusted with the democratic representation of community residents in addressing the community's needs and problems and in decision making.



According to the results of a 2004 survey implemented by the Turpanjian Center for Policy Analysis, American University of Armenia, only 2.4 percent of the respondents knew when council meetings were held and only 38 percent of the respondents were able to name at least one council member. Note that these questions were asked during the elections period when citizen activity increases.

The low percentage of correct answers in the TCPA survey indicates that citizens were poorly informed and were not involved in the decision making processes that affected their community. Armenian council members may not fully realize that they have to voice the concerns of the people who elected them.

Council activities mainly proceed in two directions:

- Cooperation with the mayor and the mayor's staff (internal)
- Representation and cooperation with the public (external)

Internal Communications

Councils need to be informed and strong enough to counterbalance a mayor's policies if those policies ignore citizen interests and involvement. Council members often do not carry their representative role and instead allow mayors to make the decisions. In many cases, council members are the "mayor's people" or have the same party affiliation as the mayor. The result can be that no alternative approaches and solutions are offered during decision making processes.

Council–mayor relations should be created in a way that gives citizens avenues to be heard by both entities. Weak cooperation between the mayor and the council members can result in a situation where the council lacks information on projects implemented by the local government and future prospects for development. In this case, the council cannot function effectively and is barred from local governance processes.

To avoid such situations, local government officials need to ensure that the mechanisms of internal communication between the council members and the mayor and mayoral staff work properly. Local government officials need to take a proactive role in informing and involving council members in their activities. Council members, in turn, need to *require* information from the mayor and the staff. After all, council

members, the mayor, and the staff should work to benefit the citizens, and their collective work will multiply the results of their efforts.

External Communications

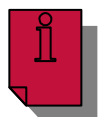
“Representing its constituents is the main function and leadership role of the local council.”¹³ In Armenia, some local councils do not have strong images among the citizens they represent. This can be explained by council members’ lack of or weak attempts to inform and involve citizens in decision making and the low level of citizen awareness of local government functioning in general. According to the results of the LGP 3 survey and review, few council members meet with citizens and, even if they do, the meeting is more apt to be a chance meeting outside of city hall. Consequently, a local council member may not be prepared to address a constituent’s question or complaint, resulting in the constituent’s negative opinion of the council member.

Chance meetings by the mayor, staff, or local council members provide opportunities to inform and to serve the interests of citizens. This factor can be strengthened by recognizing that such events present PR opportunities that can build citizens’ trust and positive opinion of the local government.

The LLSG provides the framework for citizen involvement and participation in municipal decision making processes (Articles 12[1], 14, 20). Elected and appointed officials need to take advantage of the means that the RA legislation gives them to better inform citizens.

Consider the location of council meetings. Often they are held in the mayor’s office, where council members, let alone citizens, do not feel comfortable. This location places council members at a disadvantage, and may not allow space to accommodate citizens.

Council members need to heavily employ as many PR tools and techniques as is reasonable.



- **Insist that the mayor and staff properly announce council meetings in advance.**
- **Have regular reception hours to meet with citizens to avoid spontaneous and chaotic interaction.**
- **Make local government contact information available to the public.**
- **Insist on holding open council meetings with the participation of citizens.**
- **Invite press representatives to these meetings.**
- **Prepare booklets and brochures describing officials’ roles and responsibilities.**

¹³ Chatinyan, Zara (2008). *A handbook for newly elected councilors and council candidates*. Yerevan: LGP 3.

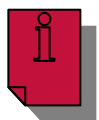
10.2 Council Rooms and Chambers

A Place to Meet Constituents

Council members need separate *council rooms* where they can meet, discuss projects, and most importantly, meet with their constituents. The LGP 3 baseline study of its 38 program cities revealed that four cities—Alaverdi, Armavir, Ararat, and Charentsavan—have allocated and equipped council rooms.

Council members are required by law to meet with citizens, so space needs to be set aside for this purpose. Article 20 of the LLSG states that local council members are obligated to “meet with the community residents on regular basis and keep them informed on council works, as well as participate in citizen receptions conducted by the council.”

LGP 3, through its Component 5, Training and Technical Assistance to Local Council, conducted negotiations with the mayors of 21 cities on providing the space for councils in city hall.

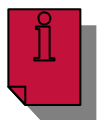


Council rooms will be used to

- **Assign office hours for each council member.**
- **Meet with citizens on the council premises instead of meeting with them elsewhere.**
- **Receive and act on complaints, comments, inquiries from citizens.**
- **Conduct council subcommittee work.**

Council meetings are conducted in *council chambers*. The chambers need to be large enough for a substantial number of citizens to participate. The council chambers should be equipped with sound equipment and seating for all. In many cases, even when citizens are invited to a council meeting, they do not have a place to sit.

In most of Armenia’s municipalities, council meetings are conducted in a mayor’s office, which poses obstacles both for council autonomy and citizen participation. When the meetings are conducted in the mayor’s office, citizens are reluctant to participate because of the “executive” environment.



Establish council rooms and council chambers. They promote citizen participation in local government.

10.3 Citizen Participation in the Council Meetings

Citizen participation in decision making should be viewed not only as a process that benefits and empowers citizens, but also as a management tool that makes the work of local government bodies easier. The right of citizens to participate in the council meetings is stipulated by the LLSG, which states that *the council meeting should be*

open, unless the decision on holding a closed meeting is made in special cases (Article 14).

To ensure citizen participation in council meetings, citizens should be notified of the time and venue of the meeting. The LLSG says that *the community head should publish the information regarding the council meeting time and venue, as well as the agenda of the meeting.*

The LLSG clearly states requirements that ensure citizen access to council meetings, but the reality in Armenia is very much different. Citizens often are not encouraged to participate in the council meetings and meeting notices often are not posted. The result is that citizens develop a negative image of the council.

The LLSG also requires that citizens have access to documents related to a council meeting. Citizens may request copies of these documents by covering photocopying costs (Article 12, Subpart [1]).

During LGP 3 interviews, local council members mentioned that when citizens participate in council meetings and are allowed to voice their concerns, the meetings acquire a chaotic character. These respondents believed that citizens put forward their personal concerns and do not listen to each other. Some of these objections reflect Armenia's status as a young democracy, and also that local council members have yet to become accustomed to diverse viewpoints at their meetings.

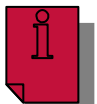
Conducting a Council Meeting

Council members need to clearly define their rules of procedure, particularly when the rules pertain to the process of conducting a meeting with public participation.¹⁴ There is no doubt that citizens have the right to speak and voice their concerns. Rules of procedure preserve order at the meetings.

Two or three days before a council meeting, citizens who wish to participate should submit their questions to the council. The council either approves these questions and puts them on the agenda, or declines them. At the end of the council meeting, devote half an hour to citizens' questions and comments. A time limit of three to five minutes should allow everyone to be heard. When possible, respond to questions at the time they are asked.

Once the citizens are aware of rules of procedure, they will get used to them, and council meetings can be conducted more effectively and in a multi-opinion environment. In addition, citizens will be satisfied because they are able to voice their concerns in front of the people they elected.

¹⁴ The *Newly Elected Council Rules and Procedures* were developed by LGP 3 staff within the framework of Component 5. They will be distributed to the councils of the LGP 3's 38 program cities after they are approved by the Ministry of Territorial Administration.



Citizen participation in council meetings will increase the level of citizen awareness and involvement in decision making processes. In the long run, this will positively affect the image of local government and create an environment of mutual trust and support in the community.

Chapter 11

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN SERVICE DELIVERY

The provision of services is a fundamental responsibility of local governments. Decentralization is based on the concept that local governments can better provide services to their citizens than a central government.

In terms of service provision, citizens are *customers* of public services, and maintaining good relations with them builds their sense of government accountability. Service provision requires a high level of customer awareness and in many cases participation.

Based on the LLSG, local governments of Armenia provide the following mandatory services:¹⁵

- Garbage collection and disposal
- Maintenance of multi-apartment buildings
- Provision of central heating
- Preschool education (kindergartens)
- Specialized education (music schools, sport facilities, community clubs, craft centers and exhibitions, extracurricular education development centers)
- City transportation (buses and minibuses)
- Parks and cemetery maintenance
- Road repairs and city lighting

All service delivery influences citizens' image of the local government. This handbook focuses on garbage collection, because this service is an issue of concern for all communities of Armenia.

11.1 Garbage Removal and Disposal Service

Garbage removal and disposal—waste management—is a well known problem Armenian communities. There is no doubt that in order to improve this service, serious capital investments—e.g., trucks, garbage bins, and improvements to landfills—and a strong managerial approach are needed.

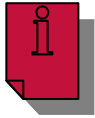
Aside from the technical and financial aspects of waste management, customer service issues also have to be addressed. Specifically, the collection of user fees and charges require PR involvement.

Quality of Service

The quality of a service is the basis of citizen satisfaction. The local government and waste management company need to inform and involve their customers in waste management processes, using the tools and techniques discussed below. Customers

¹⁵ This is not a full listing of the mandatory services that local governments carry out but does list the services that have the greatest potential for citizen or customer participation and satisfaction.

should think that their needs are addressed based on the feedback they provide to the local government and waste management company. Also, a link between fees and service availability and quality needs to be established in customers' minds.



The results of the survey conducted by the LGP 3 staff in its program cities revealed that willingness to pay for local services is not generally connected with the ability of customers to pay, but is related to the quality of the service provided.

Local authorities and waste management companies can use the following PR tools and techniques to develop a strong communication system with customers:

- Produce brochures and leaflets
- Make public service announcements (PSAs)
- Organize interviews through mass media
- Conduct polls and surveys
- Capture youth potential
- Organize city cleaning days

Brochures and Leaflets

Brochures and leaflets can be distributed both by local government and waste management companies. Brochures include the following information:

- Collection rates for service
- Changes in service schedules
- Garbage separation and recycling information
- Ecological issues
- The most frequently asked questions, and answers, about garbage collection and removal

Public Service Announcements

Write PSAs in a plain, persuasive language that all of the public can understand. *Annex G* provides an example of a PSA.

Interviews

Waste management is a major issue in most communities, so interviews on this topic help inform customers of problems and changes in the service. Live television or radio interviews can be organized so that customers can call and ask questions.

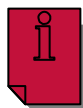
Polls and Surveys

Polls and surveys provide local officials and waste management companies the opportunity to find out how customers rate the services that local governments provide. Telephone surveys are an effective and inexpensive method of conducting polls. Telephone surveys can be set up so that the telecommunications system randomly picks the numbers of customers to be called.

The LGP 3 staff successfully used this method in some of its program cities. Poll results indicate that local governments can get objective information and make changes in their work and management styles to improve service delivery.

Involving Youth

Local governments can extensively involve youth in waste management activities and, in the process, help develop young people's knowledge of the responsibilities of citizenship.



According to an International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) survey in 2004, 67 percent of the respondents (young people) mentioned that they have little information on the activities of their local government.

Developing a culture that cares about keeping a city clean starts with school age and even younger children. In 2003, the LGP 2 sponsored a writing contest in 12 pilot cities for high school students on their perceptions of community problems. According to the results of the contest, high school students believed that garbage collection was a major community issue.

Local government staff members can provide lectures at schools on the importance of a clean city and students' roles in making and keeping their communities clean. Contests can motivate and mobilize school and university students to act on the idea of a clean city.

Clean City Days

Some cities in Armenia organize Clean City Days events, which are an excellent method for involving citizens in waste management activities. When these events occur regularly, as a tradition, they provide an avenue for citizens both to stay informed and provide feedback, and they offer another opportunity for youth involvement.

Chapter 12

MEDIA RELATIONS

12.1 Media Relations as a Part of Public Relations

Media relations are a significant part of PR. The media play an essential role in conveying information to people and forming opinions. The mass media include television, radio, newspapers, and the Internet.

Developing effective relations with the media is challenging for local governments and those who handle PR. In fact, the entire PR component can be negatively affected if relations with media are not carried out effectively. The PR representative should prepare a media relations plan that outlines the steps to take for successful media relations. The media relations plan should be a part of the more comprehensive PR plan and budget.

The local media in Armenia are underdeveloped. Table 1 in Chapter 1 of this handbook shows that only 58 percent of the country's cities have local newspapers, 55 percent have local television, and 11.5 percent have radio. In regard to Internet connections, citizens either don't have a local service provider or Internet connections are poor due to telephone service.

When encountering the media, local government officials must do more than simply respond to questions and interviews. Local government must *take the initiative* in providing the media with information about events, programs, the budget, and major decisions that affect citizens. Taking this initiative enables the government to build open and transparent communication with citizens, which in turn builds their trust and support.

Media relations tools and techniques help local governments develop a good working relationship with the media. Keep in mind that good media relations don't mean that the media always write or say good things about local government decisions, events, and actions. However, it does mean that the media trust the information that a local government provides and that the information is accurate, timely, and verifiable.

12.2 Media Relations Tools

Key Messages

A key message is the core of your writing. It represents the very essence of what you want to communicate to your target audience(s).

When considering contact with the media or providing them with information, the PR representative makes sure that the reason for providing the message is clear, and that the message itself is clear, accurate, and brief.

To be effective in its communication with the media, local governments must

- Define the target audience.

- Send clear messages.
- Make sure that the media will find the information useful.
- Use the KISS principle.¹⁶

PR representatives and local government officials must identify and define their target audience(s), and be certain that their messages are tailored for that audience, are timely, and are relevant to the audience. Also, the message must be the same whether it is provided, for example, by the PR representative or the mayor, or confusion will occur.

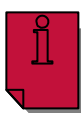
All press releases, speeches, media interviews, and public events need to speak with one voice for the local government. Often there is more than one media outlet, making it necessary to repeat the same message frequently. Keep the message short and simple. Too many details will distract an audience from your basic focus. If journalists cannot understand and communicate your message to their audiences, the point of the media event is lost. Even worse, differing reports of a message will cause confusion that has to be corrected.

PR representatives must assess what information is most relevant to their audiences. The five basic journalistic questions of what, who, where, when, and why apply when disseminating a media message.

Sometimes local governments need to issue information of interest to a particular segment of the public, such as elderly people. In this case, the message needs to be tailored to that group. You may use different media depending on the audience and/or the message. For example, radio may be the best vehicle to reach the youth in a community. Also, the PR representative needs to consider the timing of a message. For example, the best time for an announcement or program targeting housewives or elderly people may be weekday mornings.

Press Release

A press release is a news message prepared for journalists and other media that contains information for the wider audience. It is written in third person and includes contact information such as name and telephone and fax numbers. Be sure to verify all information in a press release.



Press releases answer the main questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

Determine the message you want to convey, and use the inverted pyramid style to write the press release. The inverted pyramid provides the most important information first, followed by details:

1. The main point or conclusion
2. Supporting information
3. Background and technical details

¹⁶ KISS is the acronym for “keep it simple stupid.”

Try to make the headline as compelling as possible. Then, in the first paragraph, provide a more detailed—but brief—explanation of the headline.

You want a press release to attract readers' attention. Remember to keep the material simple and understandable, with short sentences and paragraphs, and don't overload the article with statistical facts and tables. Try to fit the press release onto one page, and print it on local government letterhead.

Some tips for writing a successful press release¹⁷ are noted below. (See *Annex H* for a sample press release.)

- Place the words PRESS RELEASE on the first line at the top of the page. If you want the release to be published immediately, put the words FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE at the top. Also in this area, include the date you want the release to be published.
- In the second line, include the date that the release was prepared.
- The third line contains contact details of the person who prepared the press release. This should include all possible contact information, such as a name, address, telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address.
- Make the headline short and compelling.
- Journalists and many of your target audience(s) may read only the first paragraph of the release, so make it count, which will encourage them to read more. Include *brief* information that answers readers' who, what, when, where, why, and how questions.
- Avoid terms such as “the best” or “unique.” Use concrete language to show the value of local government events or processes. For example, why would audiences want to attend an event sponsored by the local government? When and where will it be held? Is it for the general public, or for young people ages 12–18? How will changes in service delivery schedules affect readers; why is the change needed; and when will the changes begin?
- It is useful to include some quotations.
- Spell-check your press release for errors.
- Maximize your chances of securing good media coverage by following up by telephone with the target journalists.

Press Conferences

The general rule of organizing a press conference is to do so “when you need to give the same information at the same time to everyone in the media, and when it is information that they want and need quickly.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Laszlo-Howard, Anne. Ten tips to writing a successful press release. Retrieved December 18, 2007, from <http://searchwarp.com/swa20548.htm>.

¹⁸ International City/County Management Association (ICMA) (1994). *Effective Communication: A Local Government Guide*.



Remember that if you do not find the event you want to talk about noteworthy or if you are in doubt, it's better not to call a press conference.

One of the most important concerns when planning a press conference is who will present the news. If the person who will present at the conference is not a professional on the topic under discussion, ensure that other people on the team can step in.

When organizing a press conference, you should clearly understand what message you want to convey to the journalists or electronic media and prepare responses to anticipated questions. If there is time, you can prepare visual aids to make your point.

Before the press conference begins, prepare an information folder for each member of the press. The information material should include

- The press release for the topic of the conference.
- Background information on the topic.
- More detailed information containing statistical data and figures.
- Booklets or brochures (if available).
- Contact information of key personnel.

The information packet gives journalists more detailed information on the topic, which will help them later in writing the article.

Pay attention to the location and time of day of the press conference. The room should be an appropriate size for the group you've invited. Before making a decision on the final day and time, ensure that there are no other events in the community that could attract the attention of the press.

After the main presentation of the news, ensure enough time for all follow-up questions and answers.

Public Service Announcements

In general, all announcements that are helpful to the public are considered to be PSAs. The mass media usually provide PSAs free of charge.

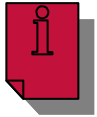
PSAs educate the public about an event, problem, or action in the community. To ensure a timely response, schedule most PSAs to be aired on local television or radio stations. A PSA may be very short and involve an announcer who reads it, or it may be an elaborate video presentation that emphasizes the point of the PSA.

The best air period is 30 seconds. The PSA can be shown a couple of times during the day. At the beginning and end of the PSA, provide the telephone number and name of a contact. Ideally, specialists from television or radio can work with local government staff to prepare the PSA.

Media Interviews

The most important thing you can do to prepare for a media interview is to review the topic or topics that will be covered. Be sure that you have background material, data,

and other information germane to your topic. Also, give some material to the audience you want to reach or provide specific points you want to make before the interview begins.



Be prepared by knowing what you want to say and what you may be asked. You also need to know whether the interview

- **Will be live or recorded.**
- **Is one-to-one or if others will take part.**
- **Will involve main topics that are provided in advance.**
- **Will be published or broadcasted.**

During an Interview

The following tips will help you provide a successful interview:

- Be clear, confident, and in control, even if the questions are hostile.
- Concentrate and maintain constant eye contact.
- Don't take notes. There isn't time, and doing so will break your concentration.
- Smile, but don't joke. This will help you and reporters to relax.
- Avoid professional jargon and technical language.
- Listen very carefully to an introduction as it will set the tone of the interview and may contain errors that you have to correct.
- Listen carefully to the questions of the reporter. He or she may repeat a question differently to confuse you.
- Answer questions using key messages.
- Don't worry about cameras; speak to reporters, not to the camera.
- Never assume you're off camera or microphone.

Rules for Dealing with Media

Media relations generally refer to journalists. That is why trust should lie at the heart of such relations. When building relations with journalists, local government officials should do the following:

Do

- Take the initiative.
- Get your messages delivered early.
- Be available for journalists; always answer their calls immediately.
- Repeat your key messages in different ways.
- Have stories or examples that illustrate key messages.
- Correct misinformation immediately.
- Find out what the media deadlines are and respect them.
- Disseminate only information that has been carefully checked; anything that's not verified should not be distributed.
- Keep records of all inquiries from the media.
- Treat all media fairly, providing equal opportunities and material for print and broadcast.

- Carefully monitor media and keep accurate records of stories, broadcast transcripts, and key issues.
- Keep an up-to-date media list, contact information, field of coverage, and interests.

Don't

- Argue with members of the media.
- Lie.
- Talk off the record; there's no such thing.
- Lose your temper.
- Talk more than 20 minutes.
- Ease up with journalists after an interview; you're always "on."
- Deviate from key messages or elaborate new messages.
- Speculate.
- Cover up or mislead the media.
- Try to block the media in their work.
- Let unauthorized personnel talk to the media.
- Leave the media with unanswered questions.

ANNEXES

Annex A. Law of the Republic of Armenia on Freedom of Information

Adopted by the National Parliament of the Republic of Armenia on September 23, 2003

Article 1. The Subject Regulated by the Following Law and the Sphere of its Operation

1. The law regulates the relations connected with freedom of information, defines the powers of persons holding (possessing) information, as well as the procedures, ways and conditions to get information.
2. This law applies to the activity of the state and local self-government bodies, state offices, organizations financed from the state budget, as well as private organizations of public importance and their state officials.

Article 2. Legislation on Freedom of Information

1. Legislation of Freedom of information is comprised of the Republic of Armenia Constitution, the following law, and other laws and legal acts.
2. If the norms defined by the Republic of Armenia's international treaties differ from those in the following law, than the international treaty norms supersede.

Article 3. Main Concepts Used in the Following Law

Main concepts used in the following law include:

Freedom of Information—exercise of the right to seek and get information from its holder, as defined by legislation.

Information—records/data of facts, people, subjects, events, phenomena, processes that are received and formed as defined by legislation, despite of the way those are possessed or their material carrier (electronic or hard copy documents, records, videos, films, photos, drawings, schemes, notes, maps, etc.).

Information holder—state bodies, local self-government bodies, state offices, state budget sponsored organizations as well as organizations of public importance and their officials.

Organization of public importance—private organizations that have monopoly or a leading role in the goods market, as well as those providing services to public in the sphere of health, sport, education, culture, social security, transport, communication and communal services.

Inquiry—a written or oral application to the information holder with a view of seeking or getting information as defined by the following law.

Publication—making the information available for population via printed media and other means of mass media, via World Wide Web, as well as by other ways as defined by legislation.

Article 4. Main Principles of Securing Information Freedom

Main principles of securing information freedom are:

- a) definition of unified procedures to record, classify and maintain information

- b) insurance of freedom to seek and get information
- c) insurance of information access
- d) publicity

Article 5. Recording, Classifying and Maintaining Information

The recording, classification and maintenance of elaborated or delivered data on the part of the information holder is implemented as defined by the Government of the Republic of Armenia.

Article 6. Exercising the Right to Freedom of Information

1. Each person has the right to address an inquiry to information holder to get acquainted with and/or get the information sought by him as defined by the law.
2. Foreign citizens can enjoy the rights and freedoms foreseen by the following law as defined by the Republic of Armenia Law and/or in cases defined by international treaties.
3. Freedom of information can be limited in cases foreseen by the Republic of Armenia Constitution and the Law.

Article 7. Ensuring Information Access and Publicity

1. Information holder works out and publicizes the procedures according to which information is provided on its part, as defined by legislation, which he places in his office space, conspicuous for everyone.
2. Information holder urgently publicizes or via other accessible means informs the public about the information that he has, the publication of which can prevent dangers facing state and public security, public order, public health and morals, others' rights and freedoms, environment, person's property.
3. If it is not otherwise foreseen by the Constitution and/or the Law, information holder at least once a year publicize the following information related to his activity and or changes to it,
 - a) activities and services provided (to be provided) to public;
 - b) budget;
 - c) forms for written enquiries and the instructions for filling those in;
 - d) lists of personnel, as well as name, last name, education, profession, position, salary rate, business phone numbers and e-mails of officers;
 - e) recruitment procedures and vacancies;
 - f) influence on environment;
 - g) public events' program;
 - h) procedures, day, time and place for accepting citizens;
 - i) policy of cost creation and costs in the sphere of work and services;
 - j) list of held (maintained) information and the procedures of providing it;
 - j 1. statistical and complete data on inquiries received, including grounds for refusal to provide information;
 - j 2. sources of elaboration or obtainment of information mentioned in this clause;
 - j 3. information on person entitled to clarify the information defined in this clause.

4. Changes made to information mentioned in the 2nd clause of the proceeding Article are publicized within 10 days.
5. Information mentioned in the 2nd and 3rd clauses of the proceeding Article is publicized via means accessible for public, and in cases when the information holder has an internet page, also via that page.
6. Organization of public importance can decline to publicize the information mentioned in 3b, 3c, and 3e sub clauses of the proceeding Article or changes to that information.

Article 8. Limitations on Freedom of Information

1. Information holder, with the exception of cases defined in the 3rd clause of the proceeding Article, refuses to provide information if:
 - a) contains state, official, bank or trade secret;
 - b) infringes the privacy of a person and his family, including the privacy of correspondence, telephone conversations, post, telegraph and other transmissions;
 - c) contains pre-investigation data not subject to publicity;
 - d) discloses data that require accessibility limitation, conditioned by professional activity (medical, notary, attorney secrets);
 - e) infringes copyright and associated rights.
2. If a part of the information required contains data, the disclosure of which is subject to denial, than information is provided concerning the other part.
3. Information request cannot be declined, if:
 - a) it concerns urgent cases threatening public security and health, as well as natural disasters (including officially forecasted ones) and their aftermaths;
 - b) it presents the overall economic situation of the Republic of Armenia, as well as the real situation in the spheres of nature and environment protection, health, education, agriculture, trade and culture;
 - c) if the decline of the information request will have a negative influence on the implementation of state programs of the Republic of Armenia directed to socio-economic, scientific, spiritual and cultural development.

Article 9. Procedures of Information Inquiry Application and Discussion

1. A written inquiry must be signed to include applicant's name, last name, citizenship, place of residence, work or study (in case of legal persons: name, physical address).
2. A written inquiry is registered and processed as defined by the relevant legislation of processing civilian's applications and appeals, separately from other types of administration.
3. A written inquiry remains unanswered if:
 - a) it does not contain all the information mentioned in the 1st clause of the following Article;
 - b) it is discovered that the information about the identity of the author are false;
 - c) it is the second request on the part of the same person within the last 6 months for the same information, with the exception of the case foreseen by the 4th clause of the Article 10 of the following law.
4. The applicant does not have to justify the inquiry.

5. In case of oral inquiry, the applicant must in advance tell his name and last name. Oral inquiry is given an answer when:
 - a) The disposal of the inquired information can prevent to state and public security, public order, public health and morals, other's rights and freedoms, environment and person's property.
 - b) It is important to make sure that the given information holder has the relevant information.
 - c) It is important to clarify the procedure according which the information holder processes the written inquiries.
6. The answer to the oral inquiry is given immediately after listening to the inquiry or within the shortest possible time frame. If the person making the oral inquiry is not telling his name, last name and/or the oral inquiry does not correspond to the conditions defined in the sub clauses a, b and c of the 5th clause of the following Article, then the information holder can decline the oral inquiry.
7. The answer to written inquiry is given in the following deadlines:
 - a) If the information required by the written inquiry is not publicized, than the copy of that information is given to the applicant within 5 days after the application is filed.
 - b) If the information required by the written inquiry is publicized, than information on the means, place and time framework of that publication is given within 5 days after the application is filed.
 - c) If additional work is needed to provide the information required, than the information is given to the applicant within 30 days after the application is filed, about which a written notice is being provided within 5 days after the application submission, highlighting the reasons for delay and the final deadline when the information will be provided.
8. The answer to written inquiry is given on the material carrier mentioned in that application. If the material carrier is not mentioned and it is impossible to clarify that within the time limits foreseen by the following law, than the answer to the written inquiry is given by the material carrier that is the most suitable for the information holder.
9. In the cases foreseen by the 7 a sub-clause of the following Article, the person submitting inquiry can by his wish, as defined by legislation, get acquainted with the information within the premises of the information holder, getting back his written inquiry.
10. If the information holder does not possess the information sought or if the disclosure of that information is beyond its powers, than within 5 days after the written inquiry is filed, it must inform the applicant about that in a written form, and if it possible, also point out the information on the place and body, including archive, that holds that information.
11. If the information holder does not possess all the data on the inquired information, than it gives the applicant the part of the data, that it possesses and in case of possibility also points out in the written answer the information on the place and body, including archive that holds that information.

Article 10. Conditions of Providing Information

1. Providing information or its copy from state and local self-government bodies is realized according to the Government Regulation of the Republic of Armenia.

2. The payment defined in the 1st clause of the current Article is not paid in the following cases:
 - a) response to oral inquiries;
 - b) for up to 10 pages of printed or copied information;
 - c) for information via e-mail (internet);
 - d) responding the written information inquiries mentioned in the 2nd clause of the Article 7;
 - e) providing information about the changes of the deadline in the cases foreseen by the 7c sub clause and 10th clause of the Article 9;
 - f) declining the information request.
3. The organizations of public importance decide themselves the cost to be paid for information, which cannot exceed the costs of providing that information.
4. Body or organization that has provided untruthful or incomplete information shall provide corrected information free of charge, as defined by this law, upon the written inquiry of the receiving party.

Article 11. Grounds and Procedure to Decline Information Request

1. Information request is declined according to the grounds mentioned in the Article 8 of the following law or in case the relevant payment is not made.
2. The information holder can decline the oral inquiry, if at the given moment this interferes with the main responsibilities of the information holder, with the exception of cases foreseen by the 2nd clause of the Article 7.
3. In case of declining a written information request, information holder inform the applicant about it within 5 days in a written form, by mentioning the ground for the refusal (relevant norm of the law), time frame within which the decision of refusal was made, as well as the relevant appealing procedure.
4. The decision not to provide information can be appealed either in the state government body defined by Legislation or in the court.

Article 12. Responsibilities of Information Holders in the Sphere of Insuring Free Access to Information

As defined by the law, information holders are responsible to:

- a) ensure information access and publicity;
- b) record, categorize and maintain information possessed;
- c) provide truthful and complete information (possessed by them) to the person seeking information;
- d) define their procedures of providing oral and/or written information; appoint an official responsible for information freedom.

Article 13. Person Responsible for Information Freedom

1. Official person responsible for information freedom can be the head of the information holder or an official appointed by it.
2. Person responsible for the Freedom of information according to the law:
 - a) ensures that the responsibilities of the information holder in the field of FOI are exercised;
 - b) explains thoroughly the procedures, conditions and forms of providing information to the person seeking information;

- c) elaborates the statistical and complete data of inquiries received.

Article 14. Responsibility for the Infringement of Information Freedom

1. For illegal refusal to provide information, or for the incomplete information disposal, as well as for other infringements of the information freedom defined by this Law, the official persons responsible for information freedom are held responsible according to the Law.
2. In the cases foreseen by the 3rd clause of the Article 8 of the following law, the disclosure of information cannot cause administrative or criminal responsibility.

Article 15. Entrance of the Following Law into Force

1. This Law enters into force on the 10th day after its official publication.
2. The 3rd and 4th clauses of the Article 7 of the Law enter into force from the 1st of January 2004.

Annex B. Sample Request for Information Form

Dear Sir/Madam,

According to Articles 27 and 27.1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia and Article 6 of the Law of the Republic of Armenia on Freedom of Information, I ask you to provide me with the information on

[Give a detailed description of the information that is needed.]

According to Article 9 of the Law on Freedom of Information, a response to a citizen's written request should be provided within 5 days of receiving the request, with the exception of information requiring additional work to provide (30 days). Thus, I ask you to respond to my request for information in accordance with the terms stipulated in the Law.

In case my request for information is denied, please inform me in writing about the basis of your denial (Article 11) and, if possible, provide me with the address of the state institution or the official to whom I can apply for obtaining the information.

I am ready to reimburse you for the photocopying expenses.

Thank you in advance,

[your full name]

[address of your residence, work, or academic institution]

[sign and date]

Annex C. Sample 2008 Public Relations Plan

Use this sample plan, developed by LGP 3 and its program cities, for guidelines in creating your community's annual PR plan. Each section is designed to build upon the previous one, and the data in these sections will guide your decisions in budgeting for scheduled activities and allowing for the inevitable unscheduled events that can occur. In this sample, we refer to "City X," a fictitious community; and the plan includes elements that may be applicable to most communities. Your PR plan may require similar or additional elements.

The purpose of this plan is to support City X's efforts in achieving effective and well planned communication with the public and the media.

Effective communication is power and a sign that problems are understood and controlled. Therefore, City X needs to have **a complete strategy for its communications and an annual plan for working with the public and media**. If City X has a good public relations (PR) plan, it will be more effective in reaching its overall communication goals.

The PR plan includes activities related to working with residents and the media for a period of one year. Most importantly, the PR plan is not a document that gathers dust on the shelves; it is a working plan that guides the local government's communications with the public. Each year, City X will have the opportunity to assess its communication strategy to see what results were achieved and, if necessary, make adjustments to accommodate a fast-changing environment.

All employees of City X should be aware of the PR plan and act in accordance with it. They should understand the importance of having strong PR components for achieving the goals of good municipal governance.

Background Information

City X has a population of 13,000 people with 2,500 households. A large portion of the population is youth, which results in a high unemployment level and high migration rate.

There are no print media in the city. Previously, a local newsletter with a print run of 300 copies was developed by the city hall with the assistance of the Eurasia Foundation, but it is no longer published. There is a private local television channel in the city, with which the municipality entered into an agreement to air its announcements and other important information.

The Social Forecasts and Programs Department of City X is responsible for the PR functions. The department was created from the Information-Analytical Center established in City X by the Eurasia Foundation. The primary responsibility of the department is to write project proposals and present them to donors for funding. The public relations functions include providing information to citizens, performing phone surveys (e.g., citizens' satisfaction with services), and organizing open budget hearings.

Goals and Objectives

The main goal of City X's PR plan is to create a transparent image of the city's activities and establish active, open, and responsive communication with its residents.

These are the objectives of City X's PR plan:

- Communication with the residents is well planned and coordinated.
- The indicators that allow a realistic assessment of the PR activities' effects are set in advance.
- Community residents are better informed about municipal events.
- Community residents are more involved in the activities of the community.
- Community residents are more supportive of local government activities.
- The local government's reputation is improved.

Population Segmentation

The residents of City X are not a homogeneous mass of people. They consist of various segments that can be defined by certain criteria, such as age, sex, income level, and interests. To reach as many people as possible, City X's PR plan has to take into account all of the segments and employ general PR methods and tools and direct specific PR activities to each segment. In City X the following segments were defined:

- Youth
- Elderly people
- Unemployed
- Businesses
- NGOs

At present, City X uses various communication techniques to address each of its segments. For example:

Youth constitute a significant part of City X's population. They have formed a Youth Council which cooperates with the local government on activities, such as organizing city cleanliness days and submitting proposals to the city. However, in general, young people are not very interested in community life.

Elderly people constitute around 11 percent of the City X's population. The municipality has traditionally organized meetings and led discussions with elderly people on issues that concern them and has also provided shelter for elderly people in the winter.

Registered **unemployed** people constitute around five percent of City X's population. In reality this number is higher, because any landowner is considered "employed" in the Republic of Armenia. To assist the unemployed, City X organized computer training to make them more competitive in the job market.

City X also serves as a mediator between the unemployed and local employers. The municipality registers unemployed community residents and provides this information to local businesses.

There is one big **business** in City X. The business owner of this business assists the municipality in providing financial aid to families in need and stationery for school children. Other small and medium-size businesses do not cooperate with the municipality on regular basis.

The number of **NGOs** is small in City X. Nevertheless, they are active and always participate in the council sessions. They also participate on ad hoc committees (e.g., waste management).

Public Relations Methods and Tools

In City X, the Social Forecasts and Programs Department is active in performing PR functions and is in charge of creating and implementing a clear and comprehensive PR plan. The department employs many PR methods and tools to inform citizens and involve them in local government decision making processes.

However, the Social Forecasts and Programs Department is responsible for other municipal tasks, too. Therefore, department employees need to develop rules that determine the limits of their PR duties.

The PR methods City X will use this year can be divided into two categories: general (PR directed to the entire public) and specific (PR directed to particular segments of the public).

General PR Activities

General PR activities are directed to the entire public. They include the following:

- Installing public notice boards in busy areas of the city
- Installing a city hall directory
- Announcing council meetings in advance
- Organizing open budget hearings
- Organizing a report by the mayor during the budget discussions
- Preparing a budget-in-brief to be distributed to the public
- Producing a local government newsletter
- Publishing brochures that detail the responsibilities of the departments and city programs
- Preparing a local government telephone book
- Organizing meetings with community residents to discuss community issues
- Organizing interviews with the mayor and city staff on live radio or television
- Producing “Happy New Year” cards to be sent to all diligent taxpayers
- Organizing and celebrating “City Day”¹⁹
- Organizing and celebrating a “City X Day of Open Doors.”²⁰

¹⁹ The choice of a day can be made by conducting a survey among citizens.

²⁰ On this day, citizens will be invited to visit the city hall and get acquainted with the work of the departments. This activity can be of particular interest to young people.

Waste Management

Waste management is the number one problem in Armenian communities, and in this respect, City X is not an exception. City X is one of 11 cities that obtained garbage trucks through the LGP 3 framework; 80 percent of the cost was paid by LGP 3, and 20 percent was paid by the local government.

Nevertheless, City X's waste management-related problems do not end with the procurement and operation of garbage trucks. There are still unsolved issues of educating the public and changing its mentality in terms of waste management. The cleanliness of the city greatly depends on the attitude of the residents toward their city. To create this positive attitude, serious PR activities should be implemented. These activities include:

- Providing lectures in high school on the importance of having a clean city
- Organizing a “Cleanliness Month”²¹
- Organizing special Cleaning Days
- Organizing a Clean Yard Contest, with a financial award to motivate citizens
- Conducting television interviews with the mayor, the head of municipal waste management, or other relevant staff
- Producing brochures on waste management (e.g., ecological hazards, health hazards, and disposal information) and distributing them to community residents

Specific PR activities

Specific PR activities are directed to segments of City X's population. These activities include:

Youth

- Providing lectures to school and university students on local governance and the functions of the municipality
- Distributing informational brochures among youth on the role of young people in community development
- Cooperating actively with the youth community council on implementing various projects, such as City Cleaning Days
- Organizing a drawing competition (e.g., “City X in 2020” or “How I See My City”) with a monetary award²²

Elderly people

- Providing the space/room where elderly people can meet during the winter
- Meeting with elderly people to discuss their problems and the role of municipality in solving them

Unemployed

- Organizing career fairs, where local businesses will present themselves and put forward their requirements for employment
- Organizing training courses aimed at raising the skills of the unemployed

²¹ City X has the practice of organizing “Cleanliness Month” from March 25 to April 25.

²² City hall corridors could be used to exhibit the drawings.

Businesses

- Meeting with representatives of local businesses to discuss community problems and their possible involvement
- Sending thank you notes to businesses that have been helpful in solving community problems or extending financial aid to families in need
- Publishing the names of businesses and their owners who were helpful in solving community issues

NGOs

- Accepting NGOs as partners
- Meeting with the NGO community to discuss the possibility of implementing joint community projects
- Cooperating with NGOs to spread various types of informational material
- Cooperating with NGOs on special occasions, such as organizing lectures for school children and organizing city cleanliness days

Internal communication

For City X to achieve its goals and objectives, it has to be strong internally. A good working atmosphere of fellowship and partnership should be created in the administration. The following PR activities can help achieve these goals:

- Communicating the decisions of the mayor to other employees
- Communicating information about city programs to city employees
- Creating good working relationships with the local council
- Handling crisis situations when they occur
- Organizing training for staff based on their needs
- Conducting a weekly or biweekly “five-minute time” (brief meeting) for the mayor to gather his or her staff to discuss past and future work
- Celebrating occasions and holidays together, such as New Year’s Day

The following table can serve as a checklist for administering the PR plan in City X. The table presents PR activities, the time frame in which they should be implemented, the people responsible for implementation, and the cost of the activities.

PR Plan Administration

N	Activity	Time Frame	Responsible Person/Department	Cost
General PR Activities				
1	Install a public notice board in the city	January 2008		
2	Install a city hall directory	January 2008		
3	Announce council meetings in advance	Before each council meeting		
4	Organize an open budget hearing	December 2007–January 2008		
5	Organize a report by the mayor during the budget discussions			
6	Produce brochures on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget • Municipal departments, their functions, and staff • Municipal department telephone numbers • Functions of the local government (e.g., mandatory, voluntary, delegated) 	Throughout 2008		
8	Produce a municipal newspaper	Throughout 2008, once a month with a print run of 100 copies		
9	Prepare a city phone book	January 2008		
10	Prepare a city album	January 2008		
10	Organize meetings with community residents to discuss issues of community significance	6 times a year		
11	Organize interviews with the mayor and city staff on live radio or television	6 times a year		

N	Activity	Time Frame	Responsible Person/Department	Cost
12	Produce Happy New Year cards to be sent to timely taxpayers	December 2007–January 2008		
13	Celebrate City Day	October 2008		
14	Organize a “Day of Open Doors”	March 15		
Waste Management				
16	Organize lectures in high schools on the importance of having a clean city	October–November		
17	Organize Cleanliness Month	March 25–April 25		
18	Conduct a Clean Yard Contest with a special emphasis on youth	During the year		
19	Organize television interviews with the mayor, the head of municipal waste management and other relevant staff on garbage-related issues	3 times during the year		
20	Produce brochures on garbage-related topics (e.g., ecological and health hazards and disposal information)	Throughout the year		
Specific PR Activities				
Youth				
21	Provide lectures to students on topics related to local governments	October–November		
22	Distribute informational brochures on the role of youth in local governance	Throughout the year		
23	Cooperate actively with the Youth Council on various matters (e.g., involve them in implementing “Cleanliness Month”)	On as needed basis		
24	Organize competitions (e.g., best photo of the city, best composition about the city, best drawing)	Throughout 2008		

N	Activity	Time Frame	Responsible Person/Department	Cost
Elderly people				
25	Provide elderly people with the space where they can meet in the winter			
26	Meet with elderly people to discuss their problems			
Unemployed				
27	Organize a career fair and invite local businesses			
28	Provide training (e.g., computer skills)			
Businesses				
29	Meet with the representatives of local businesses to discuss their possible involvement in community issues			
30	Send "thank you" notes to the businesses that helped in solving community issues			
31	Publish or announce on TV the names of the businesses that helped in solving community issues			
NGOs				
32	Cooperate and involve NGOs in implementing community projects (e.g., street cleaning and organizing lectures)			
33	Cooperate with NGOs for spreading informational materials			
Internal Communications				
34	Produce internal newsletter			
35	Create good working relations with the city council			
36	Handle crisis situations at the stage of occurrence			
37	Organize training for staff based on their needs			

N	Activity	Time Frame	Responsible Person/Department	Cost
38	Conduct the a "5-minute time" to discuss municipality issues			
39	Celebrate occasions and holidays together (e.g., New Year's Day)			
	Total Budget			

Annex D. Questionnaire for Self Assessment for Activities of the Municipality Communication

1. According to you what type of communication does the municipality carry out: “open” (has established and working channels for communicating with the citizens, media, business community, non-governmental organizations, etc.) or “closed” (communicates with the citizens, media, business community, NGOs, etc., only when necessary)?

Please tick the statement, which is closest to the situation in your municipality.

Open	Rather open	Rather closed	Closed	Cannot say

2. Is there a specially appointed public relations officer/s?

Yes

No

3. If the answer is “yes,” since when?

4. If the answer is “no,” do you intend to appoint such an officer?

5. What functions does the public relations officer fulfill in your municipality?

Communicates with the media;

Prepares materials (publications, reportages, etc.) for the municipality media;

Organizes and participates in the training of the municipality team on effective relations with the media and the citizens;

Organizes the whole communication strategy of the municipality;

Responsible for the protocol activities of the municipality;

Participates in the development of the projects with which the municipality applies for funding for the different activities;

Other (please specify)

6. Are the responsibilities of the public relations officer specified with a particular job description?

Yes

No

7. Is he/she present at all important municipality events, including when management decisions are taken?

Yes

- No
- Only at some

8. What is his/her role in these events?

- Just being present
- Expresses opinion

9. Under what subordination is the public relations officer?

.....

10. Are there possibilities for him/her to improve his/her professional knowledge and skills by attending training courses and seminars for additional qualification?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

11. Is the public relations officer a member of professional bodies?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

12. According to you, what are the main problems that should be resolved by the public relations officer?

.....

.....

.....

13. Has the municipality developed a long-term communication strategy?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

14. If yes, for what period?

- 6 months
- 1 year
- 3 years

- 4 years
- Other (please specify)

15. Has the municipality developed a media plan for the current year?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

16. Are there established channels for internal communication in your municipality?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

17. Does a preliminary communication plan for crises exist?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

18. Please describe how information is exchanged?

- At horizontal level (between the different departments/directorates/teams)
.....
.....
.....

- At vertical level (from the management toward the team and vice versa)
.....
.....
.....

19. How often are meetings of the teams in the municipality organized?

.....

20. How often are joint meetings for all teams of the municipality organized?

.....

21. Are any traditions established for informal meetings of the teams of the municipality?

.....

22. If yes, please specify on what occasions and in what form?

.....

23. Does the municipality have an established internal technological system for the exchange of information?

Yes

No

I do not know

24. If yes, please specify what type.

.....
.....

25. If no, do you plan to introduce a similar system?

Yes

No

I do not know

26. According to you, what are the main problems in the sphere of internal communications that should be overcome soon?

.....
.....

27. What types of media are working on the territory of your municipality? (Please specify the media as well.)

Municipality

Local and regional

Correspondents of national media

There are no media representatives in our municipality

28. How often do you formally communicate with the media representatives working in your municipalities?

.....

29. What communication forms do you use most often?

- Press releases
- Press conferences when necessary
- Regular press conferences
- Open meetings of the teams of the municipality for journalists
- Interviews
- Events for the journalists
- Media campaigns
- Joint trainings (journalists and municipality administration)
- Other (please specify)
-

30. Who is authorized to communicate with the media?

.....

31. Do the key figures in the teams of the municipality have the possibility of attending training courses on effective communication with the media?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

32. How soon does the municipality answer questions put forward by the media?

.....

33. How do you measure the effectiveness of your media policy?

- Monitoring the materials
- Inquiries with journalists
- Number of press releases
- Number of publications
- Other (please specify)
-

34. According to you, what are the main problems that the municipality comes across when communicating with the media?

.....
35. Please describe good practices for communication with the media that your municipality applies? (Not more than 3)

.....
.....
.....

36. What communication forms do you use most often, when communicating with the citizens?

.....

37. According to you, which of them are most effective?

.....

38. How often are direct meetings with the citizens organized?

.....

39. On what occasion?

.....
.....
.....

40. In what direction do you envisage to widen the contacts with the citizens?

.....
.....
.....

41. Does the municipality have an Internet site? If so, is it periodically updated?

.....
.....
.....

42. How many NGOs are working actively in your municipality?

.....
.....
.....

43. With how many NGOs do you actively work in partnership?

.....
.....
.....

44. In which activities of the municipality is this collaboration?

.....
.....
.....

45. What is the form of this collaboration?

.....
.....
.....

46. Do NGOs participate during the discussions and the development of key strategic documents (strategies for development, plans, municipal budgets, etc.)?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

47. Please describe the good practices for communication with citizens and NGOs that you apply in your municipality? (Not more than three)

.....
.....
.....

48. Is there a practice in your municipality for establishing partnerships with the media, NGOs, and the business community for particular occasions?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

49. If yes, please describe such practices?

.....
.....
.....

50. In which spheres do you think you need expert help?

.....
.....
.....

Thank you for your time!

Annex E. Municipal Calendar

Following are the main events of the city scheduled in the next year. Some event dates or times may change on short notice. Most events agendas will be posted at the city hall building 1–2 days in advance.

	Date	Event	Location	Organizer: Contacts
JANUARY				
1.		New Year's Day		
2.		Christmas		
		Council meeting		
FEBRUARY				
		Trade exhibition		
MARCH				
		Council meeting		
		Ascension Day (Hambartsum)		
APRIL				
		Easter		
		Genocide Victims Memorial Day		
MAY				
		Labor Day		
		Council meeting		
		Day of the First Republic		
JUNE				
		Celebration of ...		
		Special public meeting regarding waste management problems of the municipality		
JULY				
		Constitution Day		
		Council meeting		
AUGUST				
SEPTEMBER				
		Independence Day		
		Council meeting		
OCTOBER				
		Forum on municipal infrastructure		
NOVEMBER				
		Budget preparation meetings		
		Public budget hearing		
DECEMBER				
		New Year's Eve		

Annex F. Sample Scope of Work for a Citizen Information Center Employee

Responsibilities

- Sign up citizens for mayor's receptions.
- Provide written and oral information to citizens upon request.
- Receive citizens' requests, applications, and written complaints.
- Help citizens compile their applications, requests, and complaints addressed to local government.
- Direct citizens to relevant people/departments in the municipality.
- Regularly update the information placed on public notice boards, such as
 - Agenda of the council meetings
 - Decisions of the council meetings
 - Voting results of the council meetings
 - Mayor's decisions
 - Various municipal announcements
 - Information on bids and auctions
- Classify citizens' applications/requests according to their nature (e.g., personal aid, service requests, complaints).
- Conduct surveys to determine what interests citizens the most (e.g., using Office Work Software).
- Cooperate with other municipal departments to receive information from them on a timely basis.
- Prepare brochures and distribute them to citizens (e.g., brochures on municipal information and information on services provided by the city).

Requirements

- Higher education
- Computer skills
- Fluency in Armenian
- The ability to work with people (patience, politeness, willingness to help, and communication skills)
- Local government work experience is an asset
- English is an asset
- Experience in working with citizens is an asset

Annex G. Sample Public Service Announcement

From: [name of municipality]
Issued on: June 15, 2007
Expires on: June 25, 2007
Contact: [Name and telephone number]

Dear Resident,

In [name of municipality] the garbage removal and disposal is performed by [name of waste management company]. The prevailing part of the garbage is plastic, glass bottles, and paper, which increases the overall volume by 5–6 percent.

If the bottles and papers are not mixed with the garbage, the garbage truck will make fewer routes to the landfill. Consequently the volume of the garbage taken to the landfill will be reduced, and garbage removal and disposal expenses will be reduced. And our city will still get rid of the piles of plastic bottles and paper, which spoil the looks of our city and contaminate the environment.

The municipality and [name of waste management company] create conditions for separate acceptance points of plastic and glass bottles and paper. The amount of X drams will be paid per each bottle and Y drams per kilogram of paper. [Describe the collection and acceptance order.]

We urge you to perform your civic responsibility and separate plastic and glass bottles, as well as paper. By doing so, you will help the municipality and [name of waste management company] keep our city clean!

[signed]
[name of municipality]
[name of waste management company]

Annex H. Sample Press Release

Press Release

Date: October 19, 2007

Contact:

Mr. G. Boshyan

Deputy Mayor

Municipality of Gavar

Phone:

Fax:

Gavar Council and Citizen Forum Recognizes Community Projects

On October 19, 2007, Gavar Municipality, with the assistance of the staff of the Armenia Local Government Program—Phase 3, implemented by RTI International, conducted a council and citizen forum in the municipality meeting hall. The purpose of the forum was for citizens to recognize one project of community importance from a number of projects presented by local individuals, organizations, and NGOs.

About 200 Gavar residents attended the forum, where six projects were presented. Six citizens volunteered to serve as members of an independent jury. The projects were rated against five criteria: cost share availability, level of project urgency, number of beneficiaries or community impact, level of community support, and cost of the project.

The winner was the City Park Rebirth project, presented by a Gavar local council member. The project, which received 20 percent of its funding from an implementing organization, helped to improve an old community park by restoring its looks to its original, more natural state.

Mr. Boshyan, Deputy Mayor of Gavar Municipality, said, “We are happy to be the first city in Armenia to conduct a council and citizen forum. The decisions of the forum are taken with the active participation of citizens and the whole process is extremely democratic. Next year we will allocate more money from the community budget to make this forum a tradition in Gavar.”

The Gavar Council and Citizen Forum were patterned after a similar event in the Bulgarian city of Teteven, which hosted 13 local council members from Armenia in June 2007. The Gavar forum experience will be spread to other cities around Armenia.

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