

The 19th July, 2024.

The Meghalaya Public Communication Policy, 2024.

No.IPR.11/2024/18. - The Governor of Meghalaya is pleased to adopt the Meghalaya Public Communication Policy, 2024 with effect from the date of issue of notification in the Meghalaya Gazette.

1. Short title and Commencement

- (i) This policy may be called the Meghalaya Public Communication Policy, 2024.
- (ii) It shall come into force from the date of publication in the Official Gazette.

2. Policy Statement

2.1. At its core, the Meghalaya Public Communication Policy (MPCP) is dedicated to fostering trust and transparency between the Government and its citizens recognizing the imperative need for uniform communication policy across all Government Departments to ensure clarity and consistency in information. Central to the approach is the principle that the Government serves as the primary source of information on its activities, decision and policies, featuring the values of transparency, accessibility and accountability. The policy is also the proactive response to the prevalent challenges of misinformation and disinformation in today's rapidly evolving information landscape. Through concerted efforts to combat misinformation and disinformation, the aim of the policy is to empower citizens with accurate information thereby fostering informed participation in the governance process. Moreover, the policy prioritizes coherence in communication strategies, with a keen focus on enhancing public engagement and facilitating the effective implementation of government policies.

2.2 During times of crisis, the communication strategy pivots towards ensuring timely and responsible dissemination of information to safeguard public safety and well-being. Furthermore, the policy advocates for responsible social media usage by government officials, thereby reinforcing the steadfast commitment of the government to transparent and accountable governance.

2.3. In essence, the Meghalaya Public Communication Policy endeavours to cultivate an environment of trust, transparency, and informed public engagement, thereby contributing to inclusivity of the society and the growth story of Meghalaya.

3. Guiding Principles

3.1. Ensuring Informed Citizenship: Citizens must be adequately and accurately informed about government activities, programs, and policies, thereby upholding their inherent right to communication.

3.2. Government as the Source of Information: Government shall be the unequivocal source of information, fostering transparency and trust by making it explicitly clear that all information regarding government activities and decisions originates from official sources.

3.3. Substantive Communication over Image Building : Government communications should focus on the content of the policies and their impact, not on image building for individual members of government.

3.4. Active and Accessible Communication: Communication shall prioritize accessibility by utilizing language comprehensible to the populace, devoid of specialized terminology, and tailored to accommodate diverse linguistic backgrounds and levels of digital proficiency, disseminating information across various platforms including print, digital, and social media for widespread dissemination.

3.5. Available and Responsive Government: Government shall be readily accessible to the public for soliciting feedback on the government decisions and activities and be responsive to such feedback, promptly addressing the needs and concerns of the public.

4. Objectives of the Policy

4.1. Policy-Driven Governance: At the forefront of the Policy lies the policy-driven governance, embodying a commitment to steering governmental decisions, activities, and programs under meticulously formulated policies derived from public consultations. This principled approach emphasises the importance given to transparent and inclusive governance, wherein the voices and perspectives of diverse stakeholders converge to shape the trajectory of governance.

4.2. Enhancing Transparency and Trust: It is the primary objective of the policy to promote clear and consistent communication practices that inform citizens about government activities, decisions, and policies. By prioritizing effective communication and demonstrating openness, it is sought to enhance public trust in governmental institutions.

4.3. Ensuring Information Dissemination and Accessibility: The policy commits to ensure that timely and accurate information reaches all citizens through diverse communication channels, including mainstream media, social media, and community outreach. The communication strategies will be tailored to cater to diverse populations with varying levels of access to technology and literacy.

4.4. Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation: Strategies will be developed to counter misinformation by promptly providing factual information and addressing the sources of disinformation. Through proactive communication and media literacy initiatives, citizens will be empowered to discern truth from falsehood.

4.5. Promoting Coherence in Communication: A well-articulated public communication policy along with Standard Operating Procedures will foster coherence in communication across different government departments and levels of governance, ensuring consistency and clarity in communication.

4.6. Encouraging Public Engagement and Participation: The policy seeks to encourage two-way communication, enabling citizens to voice concerns, ask questions, and participate in discussions on government policies and initiatives. It will be governments' endeavour to facilitate public feedback mechanisms to continuously improve government services and policies.

4.7. Ensuring Effective Policy Implementation: By clearly communicating government policies, their rationale, and potential impact, it is intended to garner public support and cooperation. Providing ongoing updates on policy implementation progress and addressing public concerns promptly are integral to ensuring effective policy execution.

4.8. Crisis Communication Preparedness: The policy will establish clear protocols for communicating during emergencies, ensuring the dissemination of accurate and timely information to minimize panic and ensure public safety.

4.9. Promoting Responsible Social Media Use by Government Officials: Government officials will be required to utilize social media platforms responsibly as tools for information dissemination and public engagement, discouraging their use solely for personal image building.

5. Action Programme

5.1A State Public Communication Committee (SPCC): The State Public Communication Committee (SPCC) will be notified by Information & Public Relations (IPR) Department with the following composition:

(a)	Chief Secretary	Chairperson
(b)	Development Commissioner	Member
(c)	Principal Secretary/Commissioner & Secretary/Secretary of Departments mentioned in Annexure-1	Member
(d)	Commissioner & Secretary/Secretary of IPR Department	Member Secretary
(e)	Inspector General of Police i/c Law & Order	Member

B. The committee is empowered to co-opt members as needed, including non-official members from Media. Its primary function is to develop strategies and issue guidelines aimed at achieving the objectives outlined in Para 4 of this Policy, with additional considerations as detailed in the subsequent paragraphs. The Committee will meet at least once a month or as frequently as necessary.

5.2. District Public Communication Committee (DPCC): Chaired by the Deputy Commissioner of the District, this committee will be constituted with a composition similar to the District Coordination Committee. However, it will include the District Public Relations Officer (DPRO) as the Member Secretary. The committee's mandate is to formulate strategies aimed at achieving the objectives outlined in Clause 4 at the district level, as notified by the SPCC. The Commissioner & Secretary of the IPR Department will periodically review progress with the Deputy Commissioners, offering guidance and direction as necessary.

5.3. Departmental Spokespersons: The departments listed in Annexure-1 are required to appoint spokespersons for their respective departments and notify the IPR Department in writing. Other departments may also appoint spokespersons as required. In the absence of a designated spokesperson or in the event of their transfer, the senior most Secretary in the department assumes the role of spokesperson until a replacement is appointed. A spokesperson must hold a rank not below the rank of Joint Secretary in the department. It is the responsibility of the spokesperson to engage with the media and disseminate necessary information. They are expected to respond promptly to media inquiries and, if necessary, convene press briefings, coordinating with the DIPR for arrangements in the Secretariat Press Chamber. The spokespersons are also responsible for issuing Press Releases (PR), Press Statements and Press Notes as needed. The spokespersons must be well-prepared to address media queries, adhering to the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) issued in this regard. At the district level, the Deputy Commissioner and Superintendent of Police serve as spokespersons for matters concerning district administration and law & order, respectively.

5.4. Secretariat Press Chamber: A Centralized Press Chamber will be established within the Secretariat premises to facilitate regular press briefings by Departmental Spokespersons, Officers from the Departments, Ministers, and the Chief Minister, ensuring consistent and timely communication with the media. The Press Chamber will be equipped with audio-visual presentation facilities and should provide seating for at least 50 media representatives. Additionally, an adjoining room will be designated for media personnel to wait and conduct their work.

5.5. Structured Information Dissemination: SOPs, prepared by the IPR Department and approved by the SPCC, will govern the dissemination of information, inter alia, delineating the roles of responsible officials for various categories of information. These SOPs will outline the types of information to be released at different levels (Chief Minister, Minister, Senior most Secretary of the Department, Departmental Spokesperson). Additionally, they will ensure coordinated communication to maintain consistency and coherence in messaging across government departments. Typically, announcements regarding projects, programs, schemes, or significant decisions will be made by either the Minister in charge of the Department or the Chief Minister, based on the announcement's significance. In instances of public confusion requiring

clarity, misinformation or disinformation, or during crises, the Departmental Spokesperson will promptly provide clarification via Press Release/Statement or by organizing a Press Briefing. A government function, be it an inauguration, the launch of a scheme, a foundation stone-laying ceremony, or a seminar, conference, or workshop, serves as a crucial platform for public communication. SOPs should outline the nature and structure of such government functions.

5.6. Government Advertising and Publicity: Effective dissemination of government policies and programs is crucial to foster public awareness and engagement. While press releases and briefings serve as valuable communication tools, they may not always suffice to reach a broad audience. Hence, departments are mandated to conduct public campaigns for their programs across print and digital media platforms. These advertisements, integral to the public campaign, not only boost awareness but also support the sustainability of mainstream media in the State. Departments must comply with the guidelines outlined in the Meghalaya Advertisement Policy, 2023 when issuing such advertisements.

5.7. Active Department Websites and Social Media Accounts: Each Department must consistently update its website with pertinent information. The department's website should comprehensively detail its activities and programs, meeting the public's informational needs. Additionally, departments are mandated to maintain social media accounts for broader outreach. The Departmental spokesperson will manage the social media accounts of the department. Guidelines on information dissemination through websites and social media will be issued by the IPR Department, as approved by the SPCC.

5.8. Digital Media Cell (DMC): Within the Directorate of Information & Public Relations (DIPR), a dedicated Digital Media Cell will be established to counter misinformation and disinformation. The DMC's primary responsibility will be to monitor digital media, including social media channels, to systematically scan news related to the State. Upon detecting any instances of misinformation or disinformation, the DMC will promptly report them to the senior most Secretary of the department, who may then instruct the spokesperson to address the issue. Additionally, the DMC will conduct regular surveillance of department websites and social media accounts, preparing reports on their compliance with established guidelines. These reports will be submitted to the SPCC for review. Furthermore, the DMC will continuously monitor the social media activities of government officers, identifying any deviations from the SOPs. Such deviations will be reported to the IPR Department, which will present them to the SPCC for necessary action.

5.9. Information Dissemination by DIPR: The Directorate of Information & Public Relations (DIPR) will disseminate information regarding all government activities and programs through newsletters printed in local languages. These newsletters will be distributed to public free of charge or at an affordable price. Additionally, DIPR will utilize digital media platforms, including popular social media channels, to disseminate information. To oversee the management of the DIPR Newsletter and digital media initiatives, the 'Meghalaya Media Society' will be established and registered under 'The Meghalaya Societies Registration Act, 1988'. The governing body of this society will be chaired by the Minister in charge of the IPR Department, with the executive council chaired by the Commissioner & Secretary of the IPR Department. The Articles of Association governing the society are as approved by the Minister in charge of the IPR Department.

5.10A Strengthening Mainstream Media and Welfare of Accredited Journalists: In today's rapidly evolving digital media landscape, misinformation and disinformation proliferate swiftly. In light of this, it is crucial to provide regular training and capacity-building opportunities for accredited journalists. This empowers mainstream media to effectively combat misinformation and disinformation. Additionally, it is imperative for the government to support accredited journalists in terms of their welfare. This includes provisions for post-retirement support, ex gratia assistance in case of unnatural death, aid during times of serious illness, support for permanent disability, and other such welfare measures for strengthening the mainstream media.

B. DIPR shall ensure that all the individuals in the state who are disseminating news on social media, without DIPR accreditation register themselves with it. DIPR shall also ensure that these individuals refrain from posting content that is against the interests of the state, public order, decency, morality, or involves defamation of any institution or individual, or that is likely to incite the commission of any offense.

5.11. Direct Engagement with Citizens: Frequently, the concerns and issues of the public are conveyed through memorandums submitted by Civil Society Organisations advocating on behalf of the community. Upon receiving such submissions, officials should endeavour to directly engage with the affected individuals or communities at the earliest opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the issues and expedite resolution. Ideally, a standard practice should be established wherein officials, upon receiving a memorandum, proactively arrange meetings with the concerned individuals at their location, whenever feasible. In cases where the issue affects a large number of people, officials may opt for public hearings or convene press briefings to facilitate broader engagement and transparency.

5.12. Public Feedback Mechanisms: Establishing channels for public-to-government communication is equally vital as government-to-public communication. Developing a system that enables the public to convey their concerns, needs, and provide feedback on government activities is a fundamental aspect of communication policy. A key component of such a system is ensuring that the government is responsive to the feedback it receives.

5.12.1. CM Connect: CM Connect Program, managed by the Planning Department, shall serve as the cornerstone of the State's public feedback system. One of its notable strengths is its responsiveness to the received complaints. To streamline the process of public feedback in the state, all existing telephone lines established by various departments for different purposes will be integrated into CM Connect. Feedback received through alternative channels, such as physical memorandums, comments on government social media posts, issues identified by the DMC, or concerns raised by the media, will be consolidated and channelled into CM Connect for action. Furthermore, District Public Relations Officers will establish mobile messaging groups with the village heads. Any complaints received through this platform will also be routed through CM Connect for resolution."

5.12.2. Inspections by Officials: All government officials, excluding secretarial staff, are required to conduct regular field visits to engage with end users and beneficiaries and gather feedback on their respective government activities. The IPR Department will develop standardized templates and report forms for these inspections, which will be incorporated into the SOPs issued by the SPCC. Any complaints received during these inspections must be directed to CM Connect for appropriate action.

5.13. Crisis Communication Strategy: The true test of any communication policy lies in its effectiveness during times of crisis. Thoughtfully crafted Crisis Communication Plan plays a pivotal role in mitigating the situation and minimizing damage. Crises can be of various natures—manmade, such as tensions at state borders or communal tensions, or natural, like natural disasters. As natural disasters are addressed in the State Disaster Management Plan, they may fall outside the scope of this policy. A comprehensive Crisis Communication Plan must entail the identification of vulnerable areas within the state, the types of vulnerabilities present, individuals likely to be impacted, key influencers, methods of reaching out to vulnerable populations, and strategies for crisis mitigation. In times of crisis, resorting to internet shutdowns should be considered a last resort, with every effort made to communicate with and assist affected communities. The Police Department shall be responsible for preparing the Crisis Communication Plan, which will be submitted to the SPCC for review and consideration."

5.14. Promoting Responsible Social Media Use: The online presence of officials on social media platforms, while seemingly personal, can significantly influence the government's image and public perception. To maintain professionalism, officials should ensure that content shared on personal social media accounts is strictly limited to personal interests, such as hobbies and extracurricular activities, and refrain from discussing official duties. Commentary on government operations should exclusively be communicated through official social media channels. The Digital Media Cell is responsible for monitoring adherence to these guidelines and the SOPs issued by SPCC. Any deviations will be presented before the SPCC for assessment, and upon recommendation, forwarded to the Personnel Department for appropriate action.

5.15. Village Councils: Heads of the Village Councils (including Sordars) play a crucial role in facilitating communication with the people of the State, serving as key conduits for last-mile communication. To enhance their effectiveness, these village councils will receive support in establishing relevant infrastructure for public announcements and regular feedback collection. Village councils will be encouraged to provide their wish list, village development plans, complaints, or feedback to the government once every three months or as frequently as necessary. The process for collecting feedback from village councils will be determined by the SPCC, with a standardized format prepared for this purpose. District Public Relations Officers will establish virtual communication groups with the heads of village councils on mobile messaging platforms to facilitate two-way communication between the government and the public. Complaints received from villages through this platform will be channelled into CM Connect for follow-up and resolution.

6. Implementation of the Meghalaya Public Communication Policy 2024: Information & Public Relations Department, Government of Meghalaya will serve as the nodal department responsible for executing the policy, operating under the guidance of the State Public Communication Committee (SPCC) for achieving the objectives of the policy.

7. Powers of the State Government: Notwithstanding anything contained in the foregoing paragraphs of the Meghalaya Public Communication Policy 2024, the State Government by issuance of notification in the Official Gazette may amend or withdraw any of the provisions mentioned herein above.

8. Order: It is hereby ordered that the copy of this Policy be published in the Extra-Ordinary Gazette and wide publicity be given and be circulated among all Departments/Heads of the Departments.

By order and in the name of the Governor of Meghalaya

VIJAY KUMAR MANTRI,
Commissioner and Secretary to Govt. of Meghalaya,
Information and Public Relations Department,
Government of Meghalaya.

Annexure-1**List of Departments in SPCC**

1. Agriculture & Farmer's Welfare Department
2. Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department
3. Commerce & Industries Department
4. Community & Rural Development Department
5. District Council Affairs Department
6. Education Department
7. ERTS Department
8. Finance Department
9. Fisheries Department
10. Food Civil Supplies & CA Department
11. Forests & Environment Department
12. General Administration Department
13. Health & Family Welfare Department
14. Home (Police) Department
15. Mining & Geology Department
16. Personnel & A.R. Department
17. Planning Department
18. Power Department
19. Public Health Engineering Department
20. Public Works Department
21. Revenue & DM Department
22. Social Welfare Department
23. Sports & Youth Affairs Department
24. Tourism Department
25. Transport Department and
26. Urban Affairs Department.