



LGPro VICTORIA  
Public Relations Network

## **BENCHMARKING SURVEY #1**

**February 2011**

# **MEDIA, SPEECHES AND COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENTS**

### **CONTENTS**

- Respondent and sector profiles (2)
- Media releases, speeches and writing (3)
- Media environment (4)
- The department, the boss's boss and budgets (5)
- Effort put into departmental functions (6-7)
- The organisation, the CEO's reports & Councillors (8)
- Verbatim comments made in the survey (9)



a council connector survey © 2011 ivars krastins - [verne@sectorconnector.com.au](mailto:verne@sectorconnector.com.au) 0411 258 455

The information in this report is free to use by Victorian local government authorities and their staff for business planning purposes. Please enquire to gain permission for other uses, especially commercial ones. Reproduction only permissible for councils' internal use.

## PROFILES

This page presents the profile of survey respondents compared to:

- The Victorian Local Government sector.
- The PRN group councils that received the survey.

THE NUMBERS	
<b>79</b>	Councils in Victoria.
<b>67</b>	Councils represented in the PRN email group (recipients of the survey).
<b>31</b>	Councils who responded to the PRN Benchmarking survey.
<b>17%</b>	Representation in the survey in favour of Metro/Interface Councils (vs Regional).
<b>39%</b>	<b>Victorian Councils responded to the survey.</b>

COMPARISONS							
	Survey (31)		Victoria (79)	Survey vs Sector	PRN Group (67)		Survey vs PRN
Melbourne	11	35%	22%	13%	16	11%	11%
Interface	6	19%	16%	3%	13	0%	0%
Regional City	3	10%	15%	-5%	11	-6%	-6%
Regional Shire	11	35%	47%	-12%	27	-5%	-5%
<b>Melb / Interface</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>Regional</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>-17%</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>-3%</b>	<b>-3%</b>

### Representation among survey respondents

Melbourne Councils were over represented by 17-18% compared to both the Victorian sector and the PRN councils that received the survey.

Sector wide, regional councils were underrepresented to the same degree, but nearly on par compared to the PRN profile.

### Terminology for "Council Type"

A point was made about the use of "Outer Metro" as opposed to "Interface Council", or in one instance "Growth Area Council".

In this survey, Outer Metro was meant as Interface. This may have confused responses in two instances, but fortunately not to the degree of skewing results.

Standardisation is important, so one solution would be to provide a "Council Type" look-up table for survey respondents to refer to. The term "interface" is used in this report, reflecting future reports.

## MEDIA OUTPUT

MEDIA RELEASES								
	Releases per week			When issued		Approvals Loop *		
	Up to 5	6 to 10	> 10	On a certain day	When approved	2 people	3 people	4 people
Melbourne	8	1	0	2	4	4	2	0
Interface	3	2	0	1	3	1	1	2
Regional City	0	1	1	1	2	1	0	1
Regional Shire	6	5	0	1	6	5	4	2
<b>Melb / Interface</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Regional</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>

\* Approvals loop - the usual number of people who approve media releases before they go out.

SPEECHES				
	Speeches per week			Usual length in minutes
	Up to 5	6 to 10	> 10	
Melbourne	9	0	0	
Interface	3	0	0	
Regional City	1	0	0	
Regional Shire	2	0	0	
<b>Melb / Interface</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5.00</b>
<b>Regional</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3.95</b>

WRITER DUTIES			
	The person who writes media releases usually writes speeches	Speech writing and media are done by different people	The Mayor and Councillors write their own speeches
Melbourne	1	6	0
Interface	2	2	0
Regional City	1	0	1
Regional Shire	7	2	3
<b>Melb / Interface</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Regional</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>

MEDIA RELEASES ACROSS THE SECTOR - AN EXTRAPOLATION					
	No. VIC Councils	Weighting on releases pw	Weekly Output	Annual Output @ 50 weeks	Yearly estimates for the sector
Melbourne	16	5.0	80	4000	Metro/Inter – 7600 pa
Interface	13	5.0	72	3600	Regional – 16,550 pa
Regional City	12	5.0	84	4200	<b>Sector – 24,150</b>
Regional Shire	38	5.0	247	12,350	

## MEDIA OUTPUT

### Written output

For Melbourne councils, “up to 5” media releases seems to be the norm, but head into shire country and you find that half are writing “5 to 10” media releases a week, and one regional city is in high gear with “over 10” a week.

For speeches, no Council prepares more than five a week. Speeches by Melbourne councils seem to be longer than those of regional councils (by 63 seconds).

### Approvals loop

The most common loop size is two to three people, typically the Mayor, a Director/CEO and a responsible manager or officer.

\* The table excludes two responses: one Interface council @ five approvers, and one metro Melbourne council @ seven. The latter is because all of the executive management team (CEO +4) get a look in.

My expectation was that the loop would be smaller in regional councils than in metro, because the organisations are generally smaller and more intimate there. But these figures show similar patterns for metro and regional. On the other hand, the two councils with the biggest loops are both metro.

### Writer duties

Here, the country-city difference is stark.

The norm around Melbourne is that different people write media and speeches. The opposite applies among regional councils, the task often done by one and the same person.

Regional councils also seem to have the benefit of the Mayor and Councillors word smithing in as well.

The comment was often made that source copy is often written by an officer or manager, and the communications' task is more about redrafting, getting approvals and media liaison thereafter.

### Timing of media releases

The commonest regime is to issue media releases as and when needed and approved.

## MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

MEDIA ORGANISATIONS & JOURNALISTS								
	Local Newspapers			Local TV		Local Radio		Journalists
	1 to 2	3	> 4	1 to 2	> 3	1 to 2	> 3	no. in weekly contact *
Melbourne	6	3	1	0	0	7	0	4.1
Interface	2	2	1	0	0	3	0	6.2
Regional City	1	2	0	2	0	1	2	7.7
Regional Shire	3	4	4	6	3	7	4	7.6
<b>Melb / Interface</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4.9</b>
<b>Regional</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7.6</b>

\* These figures are calculated averages (though some might believe there are journalists who are not entirely all there – vk).

TARGETING						
	We often target metro Melbourne media		We actively target niche media		We actively use social media for public relations	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Melbourne	2	7	4	4	3	4
Interface	1	3	4	0	3	0
Regional City	0	3	2	0	2	1
Regional Shire	2	8	7	3	3	8
<b>Melb / Interface</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Regional</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>

### Media environment

If anyone doubted that communications departments in the regions are under the pump, these tables prove it.

The regional councils have many more media organisations to deal with, including a significant amount of local TV and radio to handle, and on average, more newspapers too.

The number of journalists regional communications departments are in weekly contact with is proportional greater as well.

### Targeting

**Metro media** gets comparatively little attention as a target it seems. Many commented that they only target metro media as a reaction. (I find the lack of proactivity a bit of an omission in priorities, thinking about the sector as a whole and those 250 media releases going out every week – vk).

**Niche media** fares much better. This term wasn't defined though, so responses may include niches within metro mass media.

Use of **social media** is getting there, and many commented that policies were about to be adopted or tools were being developed. Social media is being taken seriously by everyone, and the area is in a stage of flux and growth.

## THE DEPARTMENT

<b>THE BOSS'S BOSS</b>				
<b>What level does the manager/leader responsible for corporate communications/marketing report to?</b>				
	<b>CEO</b>	<b>Director/GM</b>	<b>Manager</b>	<b>Team Leader Coordinator</b>
Melbourne	5	4	1	1
Interface	2	3	1	0
Regional City	2	1	1	0
Regional Shire	8	0	3	0
<b>Melb / Interface</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Regional</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>

<b>DEPARTMENT BUDGETS – Staff and Operations</b>								
	<b>Staff Budget pa</b>		<b>Staff \$ as % of Ops \$</b>	<b>Ops Budget pa <sup>1</sup></b>		<b>Ops \$ per EFT (ave.) <sup>2</sup></b>	<b>EFT</b>	
	<b>Ave.</b>	<b>High Low</b>		<b>Ave.</b>	<b>High Low</b>		<b>Ave.</b>	<b>High Low</b>
Melbourne	<b>\$597k</b>	\$2.1M \$250k	56%	<b>\$1.07M</b>	\$3.4M \$510k	\$162k	<b>4.6 <sup>3</sup></b> <b>8.4 <sup>4</sup></b>	7.0 2.8
Interface	<b>\$327k</b>	\$500k \$198k	49%	<b>\$670k</b>	\$1.0M \$316k	\$140k	<b>5.0</b>	7.0 4.2
Regional City	<b>\$242k</b>	\$300k \$163k	48%	<b>\$503k</b>	\$700k \$311k	\$141k	<b>3.5</b>	4.5 3.0
Regional Shire	<b>\$122k</b>	\$270k \$55k	52%	<b>\$220k</b>	\$474k \$70k	\$130k	<b>2.1</b>	3.6 0.6
<b>Melb / Interface</b>	<b>\$493k</b>		<b>54%</b>	<b>\$194k</b>		<b>\$153k</b>	<b>4.7</b>	
<b>Regional</b>	<b>\$158k</b>		<b>52%</b>	<b>\$305k</b>		<b>\$133k</b>	<b>2.6</b>	

<sup>1</sup> Operations budget includes staff.

<sup>2</sup> EFT - Effective Full Time staff.

<sup>3</sup> One council reported an EFT of 30.7 (those with their noses to the ground may guess who that is, and it's not capital city).

For the sake of EFT averages, this council has been removed from the EFT analysis (the two RH columns).

However, it has been retained for the column "Ops Budget pa" and calculation of "Ops \$ per EFT", as the relativity between the department's EFT and budget isn't as variant.

<sup>4</sup> The average EFT for Melbourne councils is 8.4 if this large department is included.

### Observations

Not surprisingly, the budgets and EFTs diminish as you depart Melbourne. This also applies to total EFT averages.

However, the relationship between staffing and the total spend by the department is not far off consistent across councils anywhere – the figure for "Staff \$ as % of Ops \$" ranges from 48% to 56%, a narrow margin indeed.

A **metric** like this should be quite useful for a benchmarking exercise. Any council diverging markedly from the norm is either doing something special, or not doing something.

## DEPARTMENTAL FUNCTIONS

**Scoring** - The survey asked you to estimate the effort going into each function listed, in terms of EFT, and if it's also a shared function. As given in the survey: \* High (1.0 EFT or more). \* Medium (at least 0.5 EFT). \* Low (less than 0.5 EFT). \* Not responsible. \* Shared responsibility. The data is derived from 31 councils.

**Reading the tables:** 1. Shaded cap X boxes indicate that this was the most frequent level of attention given to the function per type of council. 2. Other small x boxes indicate that one or more councils responded in this way as well. 3. Blank boxes indicate no responses.

FUNCTIONAL AREA	1. Management					2. Team leader / coordination					3. Customer Service Mgmt.					4. In-house design/origination					5. In-house printing/production				
	None	Low	Med	High	Share	None	Low	Med	High	Share	None	Low	Med	High	Share	None	Low	Med	High	Share	None	Low	Med	High	Share
Melbourne		x		X	x			x	X		X	x		x	x	X	x	x	X	x	X	x		x	X
Interface			x	X				x	X		X	x	x	X		x			X		x		x	X	
Regional City			X	x				X	x		X	X		X					X				X	x	
Regional Shire	x	x	X	x		x	x		X		X	x		x	x	x	x	X	x	x	X	x	X	x	x
FUNCTIONAL AREA	6. City or corporate marketing					7. Service & campaign marketing					8. Enforcement brand-processes					9. Community or major events					10. Media liaison & PR				
FUNCTIONAL AREA	None	Low	Med	High	Share	None	Low	Med	High	Share	None	Low	Med	High	Share	None	Low	Med	High	Share	None	Low	Med	High	Share
Melbourne	x	x	x	x	X	x	x	x	x	X		x	X	X	x	x	x	x	x	X		x	x	X	x
Interface	x	x	X	x	x	x	x	X	X	x		x		X	x	x	X	x	x	x			x	X	
Regional City		x		X				x	X					X				X	X	X			x	X	
Regional Shire	x	x	x		X	x	x	X		x		x	x	X	x	X	x	x		x			x	X	
FUNCTIONAL AREA	11. Community engagement					12. Corporate planning					13. Research and consultation					14. Direct mail & distribution					15. Writing				
FUNCTIONAL AREA	None	Low	Med	High	Share	None	Low	Med	High	Share	None	Low	Med	High	Share	None	Low	Med	High	Share	None	Low	Med	High	Share
Melbourne		X	x	x	X	X	x		x	x	X		x	x	x	X	X			x		x	x	X	x
Interface	x	X	X	x	X	X	x	x	X		X	X		X		x	X	x	X	x				X	x
Regional City	X		X	X			x	X				X	X	X				X	X					X	
Regional Shire	x	x	x	x	X	X	x			x	x	x			X	X	x	x		X	x?	x	X	x	x
FUNCTIONAL AREA	16. Council newsletter					17. Corporate/service publicatns					18. Web comms/website					19. Social media					20. Internal comms/intranet				
FUNCTIONAL AREA	None	Low	Med	High	Share	None	Low	Med	High	Share	None	Low	Med	High	Share	None	Low	Med	High	Share	None	Low	Med	High	Share
Melbourne			x	X	x			X	X	x			x	X	x		X	x	x	x	x	x		X	x
Interface			x	X	x			X	X	x			x	X			X		x	x		x	X	X	x
Regional City				X				x	X			x		X			X	X	X			x		X	
Regional Shire			x	X		x	x	XX	x	x	x	x	x	X	x	x	X	x	X		x	x	X	x	x

## DEPARTMENTAL FUNCTIONS

### Question design

The author admits that this question could have been presented in a number of ways.

When doing the analysis, I found the data too dense (and patchy) to lend itself to a numeric analysis without blinding everyone with numbers, multiple charts or a whole lot more pages.

The author is chuffed however, to have condensed this into a one-page table, and hopes that readers are able to make some inferences.

If people feel it is important to nail this down – i.e. slicing and dicing information about where the effort goes (or perhaps should go) – I am open to alternative methods.

One of the issues here is about definitions and lacking standards for what some terms mean.

### Observations

If people want a more numerical analysis, that can be done. For now, here are some inferences.

High input areas	Highest shared responsibility	Least input
1. Management & 2. TL/Coordinator	6. City or corporate marketing	3. Customer Service Mgmt. <sup>2</sup>
4. In-house design/origination <sup>3</sup>	7. Service & campaign marketing	4. In-house design/origination <sup>3</sup>
8. Enforcement brand-processes <sup>1</sup>	9. Community or major events <sup>4</sup>	5. In-house printing/production
10. Media liaison & PR <sup>1</sup>	11. Community engagement <sup>1,4</sup>	9. Community or major events <sup>4</sup>
15. Writing	14. Direct mail & distribution <sup>4</sup>	11. Community engagement <sup>4</sup>
16. Council newsletter <sup>1</sup>		12. Corporate planning
17. Corporate/service publications		13. Research and consultation
18. Web comms/website		14. Direct mail & distribution <sup>4</sup>
20. Internal comms/intranet		

<sup>1</sup> Highest in area category.

<sup>2</sup> Least in area category.

<sup>3</sup> Those who have gone to the bother of setting up in-house design will obviously put the effort in, and if not, there then the ask is externalised.

<sup>4</sup> Least input and sharing go hand in hand.

### Respondents' comments about this question

It would have been easier to answer this question if was reflected against the amount of time spent on these tasks per week - perhaps in %.

Language of task breakdown reflects a marketing and metro bias! I would add reputation management, communications planning, advising senior management and councillors and photography.

Not sure what this question means - needs to be reworded. Needs too much time to decipher.



## THE ORGANISATION

NUMBER OF DIRECTORS & MANAGERS REPORTING TO THE CEO							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Melbourne	1			5	2	2	1
Interface				3	2		1
Regional City			2	1			
Regional Shire			3	4	2	2	
<b>Melb / Interface</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Regional</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>

NUMBER OF COUNCILLORS + APPOINTED DEPUTY MAYORS						
	No. of Councillors				Deputy Mayor	
	7	9	10	11	Yes	No
Melbourne	4	3	2	1	6	2
Interface	2	2		1	4	1
Regional City	2	1			2	
Regional Shire	7	1			3	4
<b>Melb / Interface</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Regional</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>

### CEO's reports

- > The norm is 3 to 5 people (directors and managers) reporting to the CEO, generally represented by the executive management team.
- > Some CEOs have chosen to take on particular portfolios, partly explaining why six CEOs at least have more than directors or GMs reporting to them.

### Number of Councillors

- > The most frequent number here is seven Councillors, though nine is also popular.
- > The two Councils that cited 10 may have left off the Mayor (I thought the number of Councillors needs to be an odd number – can anyone help with that? – vk).

### Deputy Mayors

- > The appointment of a Deputy Mayor is more common than not, especially the closer to Melbourne you get.
- > One responded from a shire said their council has a Deputy Mayor “occasionally”, which for the purposes of this survey was taken as a no.

### Cross tabs

- > One of the reasons to capture this information is to see if there is a relationship between higher levels of organisation (e.g. the number of the CEO's reports and number of Councillors) and the nature of the communications department (budgets, staff).
- > The author hasn't had time to do this yet, but could do in due course.

## VERBATIM COMMENTS BY RESPONDENTS

### Comments about media and speeches

We operate in a regional media environment with mostly weekly and monthly local publications.

Pesky varmints!

Social Media Policy currently being developed for adoption.

Tend to send reactive responses to Melbourne Metro media re: queries about local issues or Victoria wide issues for local governments.

Our practice is being reviewed for all 3 areas it is inefficient. We are committed to using social media - just wouldn't be fair to say 'actively' right now.

We get up to 50 inquiries a month from local media that take anything from 10 minutes to half a day to find answers for.

Speeches are written by the department concerned the Communications Coordinator only writes those related to bushfires.

We rarely write speeches for Councillors and the Mayor. This is generally done by the officer involved with the project or the CEO's office. We are then involved in 'tidying' up the notes where needed or give advice to the speech writer before they start writing

If a speech is requested with less than 2 weeks notice and the event has been planned for longer the relevant staff member is encouraged to write the basis for a speech.

We additionally send releases out to various ethnic media

Use of social media will be adopted this year. Niche media targeted as suitable.

Niche media: We will be doing CALD media and we currently target property media

Although we don't currently use social media - we will be using that far more in the future.

It is anticipated to use social media in future as part of planned web site redevelopment