TOOLKIT

School Communications

Testimonials

The School Communications Toolkit is the result of extensive research into the communication practices of individual schools, clusters and school communities. Eight focus groups and 21 school-based discussion groups provided insights into the range of attitudes towards Victorian education, school communication and public education in general.

A pilot version of the Toolkit was tested by two clusters of schools – one metropolitan and one regional. Most of their suggestions have been incorporated into this final version. We were also very encouraged by their positive comments, some of which are listed below.

'Information was clear, easy to read and motivating. Very practical resource, one of the best we have seen from the DE&T.'

'Probably the most useful Toolkit I have seen. Lots of practical ideas/samples/templates/case studies… seems to cover every contingency. Very well set out, well done!'

'Easy to refer to, brief and to the point, gives realistic examples of successful approaches.'

'We used the web tool to build our website which we launched last week. A tremendous platform for evaluating and improving current practice. Pro formas are excellent!'

'The other school examples and the incredibly useful pro formas make this a very practical asset to school administration.'

'Loads of ideas and the benefits of other people's hard work. All the sections (and specifically the pro formas) inform as to the DE&T policy and legal requirements.'

'Easy reading, comprehensive and very relevant to current expectations of school communities.'

'Thank you for this kit…it is long overdue.'

Acknowledgments

The School Communications Toolkit has been made possible through the input of a wide range of schools across Victoria. The initial Toolkit was informed by ideas and contributions gathered through focus group research in 21 schools. These focus groups consisted of principals, administration staff, teachers, school councillors, parents and students. Their assistance and guidance resulted in a better understanding of how to best develop a communications guide for schools that is simple, direct and user focused.

Thanks is extended to the following focus group schools:

Beulah Primary School

Black Hill Primary School

Braybrook College

Brimbank Secondary College

Camberwell High School

Cobden Technical School

Eaglehawk Secondary College

Kangaroo Flat Primary School

Leopold Primary School

Maryborough Education Centre

Mill Park Secondary College

Monbulk Primary School

Murtoa P–12 College

Parkdale Secondary College

Ringwood Secondary College

Sebastopol College

Thomas Chirnside Primary School

Tullamarine Primary School

Vermont Primary School

Warrnambool East Primary School

Western Heights Secondary College

Following its development, the Toolkit was piloted by a number of schools to test for accuracy and usability.

A special thanks is extended to the participating pilot schools for their time, suggestions and counsel:

Altona Gate Primary School

Baringa Special School

Bayside Secondary College

Glengarry Primary School

Grey Street Primary School (Traralgon)

Hobsons Bay Primary School

Kurnai College

Laverton Secondary College

Lowanna College

Moe (South Street) Primary School

Seabrook Primary School

Spotswood Primary School

Traralgon Secondary College

Tyers Primary School

Williamstown Primary School

Yarraville Special Developmental School

Yarraville West Primary School

Yinnar South Primary School

Gratitude is extended to all the schools that provided us with case studies for this Toolkit. Special acknowledgment also goes to the insights and advice from our parent and school council organisations.

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Using this tool

1. **Bring together staff, school council members and parents (e.g. representatives from the Parent Association) to review how your school currently communicates with parents.**

2. **Identify what you are doing well, as well as the areas you would like to develop.**

3. **Use this tool to address areas that you would like to improve and to generate ideas for ways to create better relationships with parents.**

Building better links between your school and your students' homes encourages positive learning experiences for students. The more parents know about your school, the more likely they will be able to improve and support their child's learning. Better communication also supports your efforts to build your school's reputation.

Even the strongest school-parent relationships can benefit from ongoing revision. This tool encourages you to think about how you engage with parents. It also provides suggestions for new approaches to keep parents involved and interested in your school and their child's education.

This kit contains information on:

- understanding the needs of parents
- encouraging parents to get involved
- written communication to parents
- meeting parents
- ideas for connecting with parents.

Templates/samples included:

- Parent Contact and Medical Information Form
- Sample Student Excursion Consent Form
- Getting the Most Out of Parent-Teacher Interviews Guide
- Parent Skills and Assistance Registration Form.

Understanding the needs of parents

Parents generally have high expectations about the information they want to receive. Most importantly, they want honest, open and timely information.

What do they want to know?

Despite the best efforts, many parents often feel 'left out of the loop' and can be overly reliant on information from word-of-mouth sources.

As a starting point, consider the way you currently communicate with parents. For example:

• How do they find out about activities happening at your school?
• Are they satisfied with the information they receive about your school?
• What other information would they like to receive?
• Do they know where to get assistance or information if they need it?
• Do they feel comfortable coming to the main office for help?

The best way to answer these questions is simply to ask parents. Not only will they be able to provide you with useful information, but they will appreciate someone taking the time to ask.

Case study

Reaching all members of the school community: Lowanna College

Every school has its own unique community due to cultural, socio-economic and religious diversity. Effective communication to parents can pose a challenge if schools do not understand their community's needs.

Lowanna College has shown that they are committed to reaching all parents in their community. With over 1200 students from Years 7 to 12, Lowanna recognised the importance of effective communication and its ability to impact student engagement and participation, and family support.

The school identified that their traditional approach to contacting parents, which relied on newsletters and other paper-based communication, was not working well with all parents. Some parents seemed to have little contact with the school and were not involved in many school activities.

Close to 45 per cent of parents at Lowanna College receive the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). Understanding the needs and priorities of families who may be experiencing unemployment or financial stress was an important factor in knowing what information they wanted to receive and in what form.

The school took an innovative approach and used research to consider new ways of reaching parents. This research involved external consultants meeting with a range of focus groups to identify communication issues and the use of international research on poverty.

Lowanna College is planning to apply this research to their own day-to-day communication practices. This includes:

- changing the language in all communication with parents (avoiding 'eduspeak' or a patronising tone)
- designing a webcast-style newsletter
- revamping the traditional newsletter with more pictures and personal stories
- holding events outside of the college
- arranging for a school staff member, such as a coordinator, to call parents on a regular basis.

These changes are expected to improve communication between Lowanna and parents from all sectors of the community.

Here are some ideas for capturing parents' thoughts, opinions, and feedback:

- Ask them directly during individual conversations (e.g. at the end of parent-teacher interviews or school drama performances).
- Provide a feedback section at the end of your newsletter inviting comments on what articles they liked, what they would like to see more of and what they thought of the layout and readability.
- Create a short survey and insert it in the school newsletter.
- Post a short survey on your website and email parents the link.

How do they want to receive information?

There are a number of ways that your school can communicate with parents. The most common methods are via a printed newsletter/information sheet, over the telephone or face-to-face contact. Your school may already use modern technologies such as email and SMS, or may be considering these methods in the future.

Make use of as many distribution methods as possible. For example, send home a written newsletter with students but also add a copy to your website.

Think about how parents would most like to receive information. It may depend on the nature of the information, for example, is it urgent? Is it a delicate topic? Again, asking parents directly is the best way of obtaining this information. Although you may not always be able to tailor your approach for each parent, you will get a sense of the method that most parents prefer.

Don't forget this may change over time as more people gain access to the Internet and other technologies or when their circumstances alter.

The Toolkit includes a Parent Contact and Medical Information Form which you can ask parents to complete at the beginning of the year.

You can regularly prompt parents about updating their situation or needs. For example, your newsletter can include a small, highlighted text box reminding parents to update their contact details if there have been any recent changes.

Sometimes it's worth stepping back and thinking about what parents want out of your written correspondence or forms. Have you covered everything? For example, attached is a Sample Student Excursion Consent Form that may cover points you have not considered before.

TIP

Consider offering an incentive for families to reply to a survey. For example, enter the names of those who responded into a prize-draw.

Case study

Revealing research from Harvard

The benefits of effective home-school communication are many:

- Parents and teachers consider communication the number one factor to increase trust (Adams and Christenson, 2000).

- Strong communication can also encourage higher and realistic parental expectations. When teachers and parents are on the 'same page' they can engage in more individual and concrete discussion around student progress and develop realistic goals and plans of action that are linked to student achievement (Drake, 2000; James, Jurich and Estes, 2001).

- Parents who receive more consistent information about their children's school performance report a higher degree of commitment to helping children improve (Helling, 1996).

- Communication serves as the first step to other types of parent involvement to follow (Elman, 1999)[1].

[1] Compiled by Family Involvement Network of Education (FINE) at Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP).

Encouraging parents to get involved

Communication with parents is most effective when it is two-way. That means encouraging parents to contact the school and giving them opportunities to get involved.

So how do you encourage parents to approach you?

For the most part, it's about providing opportunities and creating the right environment for parents to feel comfortable using them.

Like all relationships, first impressions are powerful – and can set the tone for the school-parent relationship. So it's important that your school makes a good first impression.

Here are some things you might like to consider:

- Front office or administration staff are often the first contact parents have with the school; encouraging a friendly and responsive manner can go a long way to making parents feel welcome.
- Provide a welcoming reception area that is inviting to parents.
- Treat student visits to the office the same way as adults are treated – these messages travel home.
- Welcome parents and visitors when they arrive at your school; helpful staff on playground supervision can give directions to the front office or assist with an enquiry.
- Always give parents the facts and 'good stories' to enhance your school's reputation.
- Create a call-out rather than a call-in culture. Being proactive with phone calls to parents shows you are interested in their child and creates goodwill.
- Set the expectation that all staff should respond to parents the day they contact the school – even if it is to say that the issue will be resolved later.

TIP

Provide school contact details to parents including the school phone number, address, fax, email and relevant contacts on a fridge magnet. Even a business card that can fit into parents' wallets or diaries is a good idea.

Case study

Taking the time to meet parents: Maryborough Education Centre

Maryborough Education Centre paves the way for good parent-teacher relationships from the beginning of the school year.

All Year 7 students and their parents are invited to attend the first day of the term where students are presented to the school in their full school uniform.

The first day is seen as an opportunity for students and their parents to meet the homeroom teacher and familiarise themselves with the school.

Each homeroom teacher spends time meeting individually with the student and their parents. This enables parents to put a face to a teacher's name and also provides them with a personal school contact that they can approach directly.

During these meetings, parents are invited to share any information that they feel is necessary for the teacher to know. Teachers also inform parents about the role of the student diary to maintain regular communication throughout the year.

Although separate interviews with each student and their parents is a time-consuming process (there were approximately 130 students in the last Year 7 intake), the school believes that this sets the foundation for good communication for the rest of the school year.

There has been a positive response from parents who feel better connected to the school because of this initiative. Homeroom teachers keep contact with parents throughout the year by means of student diaries, class newsletters, telephone calls and during class activities.

Case study

An easy-to-access fridge magnet planner: Western Heights Secondary College

Western Heights Secondary College has found a simple solution to help keep parents informed about important school dates. By introducing a fridge magnet planner, parents are always prepared for upcoming activities.

Designed by the assistant principal, the planner is an A4 colour plastic sheet with an attached magnet.

The planner provides a calendar highlighting major college dates for each term. Information includes school holidays, curriculum days, report days, VCE information nights and graduations.

School contact details are also provided, along with the names of key staff on the back of the planner.

Unlike paper notices, a fridge magnet is less likely to be misplaced or lost. It acts as a quick, easy reference point. Parents know where to go to find out what is happening and when.

The planner is mailed out to parents towards the end of Term 1. The calendar covers the period from the beginning of Term 2 to the end of Term 1 the following year.

Parent feedback suggests that the planner acts as a support to formal reminders, notices or newsletters. A parent may read about an upcoming event in a newsletter, but will use the fridge magnet to confirm the date closer to the day.

Getting back to parents

Many parents contact the school using the phone, email, and in writing. As staff are responsible for a number of tasks, it can be challenging to get back to parents promptly. At the same time, parents become understandably anxious when they do not hear back from the school.

Consider developing a set of guidelines for responding to parent-initiated contact. This may include guidelines outlining appropriate turn-around times. Once these are confirmed, communicate these to parents so that they are clear about when they should expect a response. Try to ensure that the guidelines are manageable because once set, it is critical that they are adhered to. Some recommended turn-around times are suggested in the table below:

Communication from parents	Suggested turn-around time
Phone calls	Returned within 24 hours of parent's call
Email	Email reply within 48 hours of receipt
	(set up an automated 'out of office reply' when away on camp, excursion, or in-service)
Written letter	Acknowledge receipt of letter within 72 hours

Written communication to parents

Written notices and newsletters to parents are the most common form of communication between schools and parents. Because parents rely so heavily on these sources of information, it is worth spending some time reflecting on your written communication.

Things you need to be mindful of:

- ensure correct grammar, spelling and punctuation
- summarise the key points at the beginning of the notice
- choose vocabulary that shows consideration of the social and cultural backgrounds of parents
- avoid using education jargon. If you have to use it (e.g. name of a program or curriculum area) describe what it is or does in everyday language and explain how it impacts on the students at your school
- keep notices short and to the point
- be clear on what is required of parents. Consider adding a 'requested action' box at the end of notices so parents know exactly what they need to do (e.g. return the bottom section to school by Monday, sign the form, tick to volunteer for the committee).

TIP

Colour-code your notices according to their content. For example, pink notices may require parents' signatures, yellow might indicate an upcoming event and green could indicate general information.

Case study

Colour-coded letters to parents: Vermont Primary School

Vermont Primary School has developed a creative 'letters home to parents' initiative. This involves colour-coding all letters sent to parents according to their content.

The school uses pink forms to indicate important information, which needs to be read, signed and returned to the school. Yellow forms are used to provide parents with a calendar of activities occurring over the next two months. This includes camps, ride-to-school days, sport days and pupil-free days. Green forms are year level specific and keep parents updated on what is being taught in the classroom each week.

Feedback from parents has been extremely positive. Parents have become accustomed to the information contained in each coloured form and report that they are always on the 'look-out' for the pink forms that need to be returned to the school. Pink forms often request parental permission for activities such as excursions, incursions and bus trips.

The school reports that the colour-coded system has significantly improved the number of forms received back from parents. It has also saved time and energy associated with chasing up these forms at the last minute.

Pink forms were chosen especially for the most important information because businesses tend not to use the colour for promotional purposes. It is therefore more likely to stand out among a mass of brochures, documents and letters.

Colour-coded forms have been used for three years at Vermont Primary School. Based on parents' feedback the school plans to continue to use the system to assist their communication efforts in the future.

Develop a Parents' Information Kit

Many of the questions that parents ask themselves during the year can be easily addressed in an information kit. It might be worthwhile developing a Parents' Information Kit that can be distributed to families at the beginning of the year. Parents can then access it throughout the year. Try to make your kit as comprehensive as possible.

Some of the content you might like to address in the Parents' Information Kit includes:

School operations	Student activities	Security and safety
• school department contacts (e.g. phone numbers, addresses, fax, email, reception, sickbay) • who to contact when child is sick; need to collect them early • traffic flow/parking • structure of school day • codes of conduct • school philosophy/values • lunch/tuck shop menu with prices and process • planned curriculum days • term dates	• assembly dates and times • sports/physical education • music programs • camps • Languages Other Than English (LOTE) • transition programs • curriculum details • information about pathways (secondary)	• lost property • use of lockers • accidents/emergency procedures • illnesses and medication book/ infectious diseases exclusion table • security
Facilities and services	**Parent resources and advice**	**School procedures and policies**
• library • before-and after-school care program • information and communications technology • second-hand book stall • teaching expertise • custody and access • co-curricular offerings	• tips for parents on 'how can I help my child?' • advice on how to get involved in the school • calendar of events • booklists • head lice management (visit: www. education.vic.gov.au/aboutschool/ childhealth/head lice	• class sizes • voluntary contributions • Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) • policy statements (e.g. peer relations and bullying, SunSmart policy, homework, behaviour guidance, harassment) • attendance policy • learning behaviours and expectations for children • birthdays and birthday party guidelines

Meeting parents

Some parents find visits to the school intimidating or uncomfortable; however, personal contact is a great opportunity for you to build rapport. When meeting with parents try to be conscious of ways to make them feel more welcome.

Some basic considerations include:

- ensuring meeting rooms are comfortable and appealing. Try to remove any subtle suggestions of authority or power imbalance (i.e. sit in a circle or around a coffee table instead of behind a desk)
- using opening comments to set a tone of collaboration about working towards best outcomes for students
- leading meetings with open-ended questions (e.g. if a parent has requested the meeting: 'Thank you for initiating this meeting. How can I be of assistance?')
- always thank parents (e.g. thank you notes, small mementoes).

Parent–teacher interviews

For some families, parent-teacher interviews are the only formal contact that parents have with your school. They are a great opportunity to present your school in the best possible light. Here are some suggestions to make your parent-teacher evening a positive experience for both parents and staff.

Setting up

Try to give yourself at least an hour before the first interview to set up. Your parents will notice if time and effort has been put into ensuring that the room or hall is comfortable and accommodating. There are some simple ways to improve the atmosphere for both parents and staff. These include:

- playing soft background music. This can also help to keep conversations private
- providing refreshments such as water, tea, coffee and biscuits
- ensuring that the students have tidied their locker areas before they leave for the day
- conducting a general clean-up of noticeboards, displays and entry areas
- keeping the teacher's and parents' chairs at the same height to create an atmosphere of equality.

Directions

Parent-teacher interviews are normally held during the evening when it is dark. Remember that your parents are not always familiar with the school grounds and buildings. It is a good idea to assign someone to greet parents and point them in the right direction.

Good signage on doors and in corridors can also reassure parents that they are on the right track.

Timing

Most parent-teacher nights follow a tight schedule. This makes it difficult when parents are late or interviews run over time.

Try to ensure that schedules give parents enough time to ask questions without feeling like they are pressured to move on. It can be useful to draw up a schedule of possible interview times and assign a double slot for students with special needs or if you anticipate that parents will want to discuss an issue in more detail.

If you sense that parents feel there has been insufficient time, you can offer to meet with them on another occasion with less time constraints.

You may also need to consider split families. In some circumstances this will require two separate time-slots for the one child if the parents would prefer to have individual interviews.

Process

Interviews are a chance to inform parents about the academic progress of their child. Below are some ideas to make the process more interesting and informative. It is also important to capture parents' evaluation of the process.

- Consider showing samples of student work to parents. Student work can be used to demonstrate the student's strengths and areas for development. This may require prior preparation but parents will appreciate the effort.
- For primary-age children, you can encourage parents to write a letter to their child at the end of the interview. This can help parents focus on the positive aspects of the interview and plan for providing feedback to their child.
- Address any challenges that have arisen in the past. Some parents might appreciate a year level coordinator sitting in on the interview if their previous experience has been negative.
- Provide a feedback and follow-up form for parents to fill out at the end of the interview. This will give them the opportunity to reflect on their experience. Ask questions, such as 'Was the feedback about your child helpful?'; 'Was the venue suitable (e.g. temperature, lighting, easy to locate)?'; 'Did the timing of the interview suit you?'. Provide a drop-box so that parents can respond anonymously.
- Publish a snapshot of parents' feedback in the newsletter following the interview sessions. Develop a list of themes, issues and areas for improvement for the next round of parent-teacher interviews. This will show parents that you are both interested and responsive.
- If parents are unable to attend the parent-teacher interview evening, offer them alternatives such as a phone interview or a meeting on another day.

TIP

Parents may find the attached Getting the Most Out of Parent-Teacher Interviews Guide useful to read before the interview. Send it home with the Notice of Parent-Teacher Interview Time with the student.

Ideas for connecting with parents

Involving parents in your school can be fun, informative and helpful. Many parents would like to be more involved in their child's school but are not sure how to go about it.

Try to identify as many opportunities as possible to increase parents' direct interaction with your school. It is also important that the quality of the interaction makes the parents feel welcome and heard. The list below outlines several methods to achieve this.

Direct contact with your school

- Introduce a parents' room for parents to drop into after they have dropped off their children. The room could provide tea/coffee facilities, a noticeboard and, most importantly, offer parents the opportunity to meet other parents. Assign staff members to drop in on different days to meet parents.

- Principal coffee mornings offer parents the opportunity to meet the school principal over an informal coffee (e.g. once a term).

- Invite parents to help out in the classroom (e.g. to conduct a reading group or assist during art classes).

- Consider assigning a 'communication liaison representative' who can act as an intermediary between the parents and the school. Parents could use the representative as their first-point of contact when they have a concern or need further information.

- Set up a Parent Association Committee to represent the views and concerns of your parents. Advertise committee positions and invite contributions in your school newsletter. For more information, visit www.parentsvictoria.asn.au

- Set up a regular *Parent Ring-in Time* on a weekly, bi-weekly, monthly or term basis. During this time, parents can call to discuss their questions or concerns. These *Parent Ring-in Times* can be announced in the newsletter, notes sent home with students or at school meetings.

Case study

Introducing a parents' room: Kangaroo Flat Primary School

Kangaroo Flat Primary School works hard at integrating parents in their school community.

The school has introduced a 'parents' room' on the school campus. The room offers a space where parents can interact before, during or after school hours.

Many parents visit the room after dropping off children at school while others use the room as a get-together when they have arrived early at the end of the school day.

The room provides parents with a relaxed and comfortable environment at their child's school. There are tea and coffee-making facilities, a microwave and a fridge for parent use. A library of parenting resources is also made available for borrowing. Parents can find out more about each other, the school, DE&T and other relevant information from pamphlets, brochures and newsletters provided.

A regular coffee meeting is held every Tuesday morning and teachers are welcome to call in to meet with parents at any time.

The school's welfare officer regularly visits the room to discuss issues that parents face when raising children.

Other purposes for the room include Parent Club meetings and a space where fundraising preparation and activities can occur.

In many ways, the parents' room demonstrates that the school is willing to put its 'open door policy' into practice. The school feels it communicates well with parents and maintains a sense of community spirit and pride as a result.

Case study

A smooth transition: Ringwood Secondary College

Many parents are uncertain about the changes that occur when their child moves from primary to secondary school. Secondary schools are often much larger than primary schools and parents can be unfamiliar with the school grounds, teaching staff and the general way things are done.

Ringwood Secondary College has introduced a program aimed at offering advice and support to parents who are new to secondary school.

The program involves assigning a parent representative for each Year 7 class. The parent is a voluntary representative and is the person that other parents can go to if they have any questions or concerns.

The parent representative offers an easy-to-access point of contact for parents who may not be comfortable approaching the school directly. Having another parent as the representative encourages parents to be open and honest with their questions. Parents appreciate being able to share their experience and find it reassuring to hear that other parents have felt the same way.

A particular strength of the program is that it involves providing feedback to teachers. Parent representatives meet with teachers during the year to discuss the issues raised by parents. This feedback is used to look at ways the school can further facilitate the transition process next year.

Co-curricular support

Think about setting up committees related to various co-curricular activities. Parents can then become involved in activities that interest them or that their children participate in. For example, you may set up a 'Friends of Music Committee' or a 'Friends of Netball Committee'.

Information sessions and seminars

Information sessions and seminars are an effective way to inform parents and students. They provide the opportunity to share knowledge and discuss concerns with other parents who may be in a similar position. You might like to consider:

* conducting information sessions and curriculum evenings at the beginning of each year. It is important to allow time after the session for parents to discuss what they have heard. Teachers should be available to address any immediate questions or concerns
* holding parent seminars to discuss topics such as safe parenting, school readiness, VCE support, cyber-bullying, challenges of and for teenagers, healthy eating or self-esteem. Consider inviting subject matter experts to present at these seminars
* organising workshops on how to help children with reading or maths (primary)
* running sessions on how to make home learning materials and games (primary).

Programs

Programs to include parents who may find it more difficult to interact with the school, include:

* starting a playgroup for preschool children. This can increase parents' and children's familiarity with the school and offer opportunities for parents to meet before their children start school
* setting up international parent groups. Consider the different cultural backgrounds of parents and organise for parents of similar backgrounds to meet and attend social activities.

School operations support

Invite parents to volunteer their knowledge, skills and expertise in planning, coordinating and running school activities. They may be able to offer their assistance in marketing, fundraising, maintenance, graphic design, sewing etc.

It can be difficult to identify parent expertise and ascertain whether they are interested in helping out. Consider inviting them to help out with a specific activity so that they don't feel like they are making too much of a commitment. If they enjoy the experience, they will probably be willing to help out again.

TIP

Send all parents a Parent Skills and Assistance Registration Form (sample form attached) and start building a local skills and talents register. This can become a useful tool for schools when looking for help at special events, enrichment of curriculum activities, fete or music soirées. If requested in a non-threatening way, it provides a rich bank of ideas and possible parent helpers when the need arises. It also provides an avenue for those parents who find it difficult to be a regular part of the school volunteer system (e.g. parent associations, tuck shop duty or school council). Most parents welcome the opportunity to be connected with the school and contribute to school life, even if it is in an adhoc or one-off way.

Case study

Parents as a valuable resource: Vermont Primary School

Most principals and teachers recognise that parents possess a range of skills and expertise that can help with their school. The challenge is often identifying which parents can help out with specific school activities and projects.

Vermont Primary School has addressed this problem by capturing information on parents' skills and expertise when they first enrol their child.

A section of the enrolment package invites parents to self-nominate for a volunteer roster. They are asked whether they are interested in helping the school with projects and/or activities during their child's education. If so, they are then asked to list details on their expertise such as their educational background, nature of employment, interests, hobbies etc.

The school has found that nine out of ten parents are keen to offer their assistance, which may include attending excursions, supervising swimming classes or helping out with reading in the classroom.

One parent has helped run a special art program on ceramics and another has taken classes on cake decorating.

The information obtained in the enrolment package is stored in a parent job description register. This allows the school to target parents with relevant skills for specific tasks. For example, if a parent has noted that they have a horticulture degree, the school will contact them directly to help out with gardening activities.

The parent job register was also useful when the school undertook a new building project. During the process a parent with an engineering background was invited to act as a reference point on the school council. The parent's involvement led to the school being able to obtain an engineering certificate and helped to identify an architectural error.

Vermont Primary School's experience suggests that many parents welcome the opportunity to be involved in their child's school. The parent job register provides them with a tool to reach parents who are likely to be interested and experienced in specific activities and projects.

Parent Contact and Medical Information Form*

Child's name

Date of birth   Sex   ☐ M   ☐ F

Parent/Guardian's name (primary carer)

Home phone   Work phone   Mobile

Email

Address

Post code:

Please select your preferred method of communication:

☐ Phone   ☐ SMS   ☐ Email   ☐ Post   ☐ Information sent home with child

What is the best time of the day to contact you?

☐ Morning   ☐ Afternoon   ☐ Evening

Additional information

Parent/Guardian's name (secondary carer)

Home phone   Work phone   Mobile

Email

Address

Post code:

Please select your preferred method of communication:

☐ Phone   ☐ SMS   ☐ Email   ☐ Post   ☐ Information sent home with child

What is the best time of the day to contact you?

☐ Morning   ☐ Afternoon   ☐ Evening

Additional information

*Note: parents/guardians should take responsibility for ensuring that the school is notified of any changes to information provided in this form.

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Parent Contact and Medical Information Form (continued)

Special family arrangements: Please outline any information we might need to assist us to contact the most appropriate parent/guardian/case manager etc.

_____

_____

_____

Alternative Emergency Contacts

Note: This can include relatives, neighbours or other trusted adults

Primary emergency contact
_____

Home phone	Work phone	Mobile

Email
_____

Address
_____

Post code:
_____

Secondary emergency contact
_____

Home phone	Work phone	Mobile

Email
_____

Address
_____

Post code:
_____

Medical Information

Hospital/clinic preference
_____

Medical practitioner	Phone

Health insurer	Policy number

Please tick if your child suffers any of the following:

☐ Asthma   ☐ Bed wetting   ☐ Blackouts   ☐ Diabetes

☐ Dizzy spells   ☐ Fits of any type   ☐ Heart condition   ☐ Migraine

☐ Sleepwalking   ☐ Travel sickness   ☐ Other _____

Allergies to:

Penicillin:
_____

Other drugs:
_____

Any foods:
_____

Other
_____

Any special care needed:
_____

1.20

Student Excursion Consent Form

1. Name of school:

2. Title of excursion:

3. Destination of excursion:

4. Date(s) of excursion:

5. Information about the excursion:

Note:

Schools need to provide sufficient information to parents about the nature of the proposed excursion, including a description of the activities to be undertaken and the degree of supervision, to enable the parents to give informed consent to their child's participation. This information should be included here or provided as an attachment. As a minimum, such information would normally include:

- departure and return times
- a description of the excursion, including the premises to be used, sleeping arrangements, general and specific activities, and travel arrangements (if another parent is providing transport, include parent's details and car registration number)
- staff members and supervision
- cost (and refund policy)
- clothing and equipment needed
- name of excursion contact person and contact details
- other matters that may apply, such as behaviour, dress, selection of students (if places are limited).

If the above information is provided as an attachment, the school should identify and list in this part of the form the specific documents that are attached under a subheading 'attachments'.

6. Student behaviour:

Note:

Schools may choose to also include the following statement:
'I acknowledge that during the excursion, acceptable standards of behaviour will be expected of the students.
I understand that in the event of my son's/daughter's serious misbehaviour during the excursion, he/she may be sent home. I further understand that in such circumstances I will be informed and that any costs associated with his/her return will be my responsibility.'

7. Parent consent:

I have read all of the above information provided by the school in relation to the excursion, including any attached material.

I give permission for my daughter/son   to attend.

Parent/guardian   (name)

(signature)

(date)

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Student Excursion Consent Form (continued)

CONSENT TO MEDICAL ATTENTION

Where the teacher in charge of the excursion is unable to contact me, or it is otherwise impracticable to contact me, I authorise the teacher-in-charge to:

- consent to my child receiving such medical or surgical attention as may be deemed necessary by a medical practitioner

- administer such first aid as the teacher-in-charge may judge to be reasonably necessary.

Signature of parent/guardian:

Date:

Prior to a child taking part in any excursion approved by the school council, the Department of Education & Training requires this consent form to be signed by the parent/guardian.

Consider including the link to the excursion section of the Victorian Government *School Reference Guide* in the footer: www.education.vic.gov.au/referenceguide/enviro/4_4.htm. Parents can then access relevant excursion policies if they are interested.

Student Excursion Consent Form (continued)

Confidential medical information for school council-approved excursions

please complete and return by

This information is intended to assist the school in the case of any medical emergency. All information is held in confidence. Under the *Information Privacy Act 2000* and the *Health Records Act 2001*, schools have a duty to protect the privacy of the individual with regard to their personal and health information. All the personal and health information collected by this form will be kept confidential and only used for the purpose of providing appropriate care of your child. Health information is requested so that staff can properly care for the student and withholding health information that may be required can put the student's health at risk.

Child's name:

Date of birth: School year:

Parent/guardian's full name:

Address:

                                                                  Post code:

Emergency telephone numbers: after hours: business hours:

Name and address of family doctor:

Medical/Hospital insurance fund:

Contribution number: Medicare number:

Please tick if your child suffers any of the following:

☐ Asthma   ☐ Bed wetting   ☐ Blackouts   ☐ Diabetes

☐ Dizzy spells   ☐ Fits of any type   ☐ Heart condition   ☐ Migraine

☐ Sleepwalking   ☐ Travel sickness   ☐ Other

Allergies to:

Penicillin:

Other drugs:

Any foods:

Other:

Any special care needed:

Tetanus immunisation: year of last tetanus immunisation _____ (tetanus immunisation is normally given at four years of age (as Infanrix vaccine) and at fifteen years of age (as ADT vaccine))

Tablets and medicines: Is your child presently taking tablets and/or medicine? ☐ YES   ☐ NO

If YES, please state name of medication, dosage etc.

All medication must be handed to the teacher-in-charge prior to departure. All containers must be labelled with your child's name, the dose to be taken and when it should be taken. (These will be kept in the first aid centre and distributed as required.) If it is necessary or appropriate for your child to carry their own medication (i.e. asthma puffers, insulin for diabetes) it must be with the knowledge and approval of both the teacher-in-charge and yourself.

Previous experience: Is this the first time your child has been away from home? ☐ YES   ☐ NO

1.23

Getting the Most Out of Parent-Teacher Interviews Guide

[Insert school logo]

Parent-teacher interviews offer an important opportunity to speak to your child's teacher face-to-face and find out how your child is progressing at school.

By asking questions and gathering information about your child's work habits, participation, behaviour and learning style, you have an opportunity to become more involved in their learning and provide support where needed.

Here are some useful tips for getting the most out of parent-teacher interviews:

- Determine what information you need before the interview. Ask your child before the interview what they enjoy about school. Are there any areas where they need extra help, or have concerns? Be prepared to share this information with your child's teacher during the interview.

- Write a list of specific questions you wish to ask your child's teacher. During the interview, take notes so that you can share the comments with your child.

- If you need a translator arrange this with your school prior to the interview.

- If you want to know about a specific area of your child's progress (for example, how they are progressing in English) let your child's teacher know this from the outset so you can focus the interview on this topic.

- Ask your child's teacher what the expectations are in their subject area with regard to homework and assignments. How much time should they be spending on their homework? Are there any areas or ways you can help your child at home?

- Find out how your child is participating in classroom activities and whether there are any general issues with behaviour or discipline that need discussing.

- If your child is finding the work too easy, ask your child's teacher whether they can provide extension activities.

- If the conversation moves away from the topic, to an area that is not about your child, be prepared to refocus it.

- End the interview on a positive note and keep in regular contact with the teacher to follow up on a mutually agreed plan.

- If, after the interview, you feel there wasn't sufficient time, request to meet again for a longer period.

- Talk with your child about the interview and discuss how you can work together to improve their learning.

Parent Skills and Assistance Registration Form

(School letterhead/logo)

(Date)

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Throughout the year we have many events, activities and initiatives at our school to support your child's education.

Your assistance is always greatly appreciated. All contributions are welcomed; however, we understand the busy schedules of parents and carers.

Please complete this form and return to *(insert)* so that we can create a resource and confidential information list to help us with our planning.

Don't be modest! There are a huge array of skills and talents among our parent community that could be a great resource for our school.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form and share this information with us.

Yours sincerely,

(School Principal, School Council President, and Parent Club President)

Parent Skills and Assistance Registration Form (continued)

Parents'/Guardians' names: (1)

                                   (2)

Children/s name   (1)

                                   (2)

Year level (class)   (1)

Contact details: Phone/Mobile   (1) Email

                                   (2) Email

Can you share a little bit about yourself?

Do you have any skills, interests, hobbies or aspects of your profession that may be of assistance for our planned events and school activities?

For example:

❏ Graphic designer – help design and lay out invitations and newsletters

❏ Nurse/doctor – help at events or sporting activities

❏ Tradesperson – help build, design and construct props and sets for musicals; school maintenance at working bees

❏ Musician – play, perform or help with rehearsals

❏ Sports and fitness – assist with netball, football, athletics to train or umpire; nutrition

❏ Publicity – help fundraising, sponsorship, advertising efforts, PR

❏ Financial services – assist with budget preparations and collection of funds

❏ Organisational skills

❏ Editing and writing skills

❏ School council experience or interest

❏ Supporting specific curriculum areas (e.g. science, art, languages)

❏ Dressmaker/sewing skills

❏ Computer and Internet skills

❏ Photography skills

❏ Keen, interested, enthusiastic, and willing to have fun – this kind of help is always in high demand!

Occupation

Interests/hobbies

Other skills and talents

Please tick the box below if you would like to help with an event or activity:
I/We would be interested in helping with:

☐ Art show   ☐ Fashion parade
☐ Fete   ☐ Musical
☐ School council   ☐ Excursions
☐ Dance   ☐ List other events/activities which may be of interest to you

(Schools can insert own events, activities, councils, committees etc.)

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2 Using this tool

1. **Bring together the key people responsible for running school events. This may include your principal, relevant teachers, office staff, school council members and parents (e.g. representatives from the Parent Association).**

2. **Decide on what type of event you would like to hold and when you want to hold it.**

3. **Use this tool to help you select the most appropriate event for your school and to help you during the planning and implementation of the event.**

Events are one of the best ways to get parents and the local community involved in your school. Whether you are trying to choose an event, need some tips on running an event or want some helpful advice on what to do after the event, this section of the Toolkit will help you get the most out of your school events.

You may also be required to organise an official school opening after capital works at your school have been completed. Procedures have been included in this Toolkit to help this event run smoothly.

This kit contains information on:

- choosing your event
- getting sponsorship for your event
- planning your event
- promoting your event
- running your event
- protocols for visiting ministers
- after your event.

Templates/samples included:

- Analysis of Activities for Risk and Safety Management Form
- Parent Skills and Assistance Registration Form
- Event Checklist.

Choosing your event

Choosing the right type of event is the first step towards holding a successful school event. Here's some information to help you choose an event with a clear purpose that meets your needs, is manageable, and more likely to attract the crowd you're after.

Why are you holding the event?

The first thing to think about when choosing an event is its purpose. For instance:

- do you want to get parents involved?
- do you want to raise money?
- is it about information and education?
- is the key aim to promote the school or build relationships?

Your answer will probably be a combination of these. By establishing a clear reason for holding the event you are more likely to choose an event that will achieve the desired results.

Who do you want to attend the event?

Once you know why you're holding the event, who you should invite is probably pretty clear. To get the most out of your event, it might be worth having a quick brainstorm to help identify who else you might invite. Would inviting a particular group of parents, ex-students or someone from a local community group, such as the Lions Club, help you achieve your aims?

With a clear picture of who you want to invite, start jotting down ideas about what you think would be of interest to them. It seems obvious, but if you spend some time thinking and discussing what would be of interest to the people you are going to invite, you're more likely to get a good turn-out.

If appropriate, consider inviting local MPs, councillors, and Education Ministers to your event. You are more likely to get the interest and attention from local media if you have a VIP attending your event. See the section on protocols (page 2.14) for hosting visiting ministers.

How much is it going to cost?

Work out an estimated budget as early as possible. The cost is an important part of choosing the right event. A good starting point is how much similar events have cost in the past. If your school hasn't run a similar event before, maybe another school in your area has – why not give them a call to find out?

With an approximate cost in mind, it can be helpful to break it down into the main costs and then check your estimate against current prices. At this stage, you can begin thinking about whether you can approach someone for sponsorship or donations and start looking into any external funding options, such as community grants from your local council.

You should definitely consider whether you will need public liability insurance for the event and, if so, how much it is going to cost.

Do you have the time and resources to make it happen?

Once you have established a budget, there are other things you might like to consider to determine if your event idea is achievable, such as:

- Do you have enough time to organise and plan the event?
- Are the key people available?
- Are the required facilities and equipment available?
- Do you need to obtain any approvals?

Remember, it's usually better to cancel an event than for it to proceed and fail.

Are there other people you can work with on the event?

It's worth thinking about who you can get involved in your event to share the costs, responsibilities or resources. This could include local businesses and business groups, emergency services, sporting groups, and cultural, religious and community organisations.

Event ideas

Think about doing something different, as this is a great way to generate interest and get people involved.

School communities are often made up of a mix of people with different backgrounds, interests and values. Remember to take into account any cultural, religious or social sensitivities, particularly when it comes to catering and the type of event you choose. The best way to know if you're on the right track is to ask potential participants.

Here are some ideas to spark your thinking:

- before-school breakfasts
- panel discussions on issues important to your audience
- expert talks (e.g. travel, health issues, financial advice)
- information seminars (e.g. TAC 'Keys Please' or 'How to support your child in the final years of school')
- comedy nights
- trivia nights
- art and craft and farmers' markets
- holding an event off school grounds
- linking with external events (e.g. Education Week, Literacy Week and Environment Week)
- fashion parade
- wine tasting
- spring racing carnival
- PC training involving parents
- school plays
- debutante balls.

Case study

A simple idea works some twilight magic: Warrnambool East Primary School

A twilight school day for the whole of Warrnambool East Primary School took much planning and organising. The efforts paid off when the event was deemed a huge success by everyone involved.

On the day, the official starting bell rang at 1.30pm, although the number of hours allocated to teaching was equivalent to a normal school day.

Classes, including a recess break, ran from 1.30pm until 6.00pm when the whole school gathered for an end-of-day assembly. This was followed by a picnic tea for students, teachers and families.

For students to be involved, parents had to agree to attend the picnic tea at the end of the day. The timing of the picnic meant that many parents, including dads and grandparents that the school had never met, were able to share in the children's school life.

Parents were given the option of whether they would like their child to attend. If it was too difficult because of working commitments etc., these parents were invited to drop their child at the school at the normal time where teacher supervision was provided.

The school was careful to address the safety issues that the event raised and developed appropriate safety and risk management plans. For example, it was important that the evening finished at a central point from which students and parents could depart.

Children were thrilled with the uniqueness of the twilight school day and many families welcomed the opportunity to be involved with the school at an informal occasion.

Some ideas for primary schools

- international day
- grandparents/special friends day
- transition events (e.g. Year 6 moving to secondary school)
- induction for new school leaders (e.g. invite parents to special leaders assembly, presentation or recognition followed by morning tea)
- fundraising and charity events (e.g. shave head for a cure)
- picnic
- art exhibition
- Father's/Mother's Day breakfast

Case study

Review and revitalise: Kangaroo Flat Primary School

Kangaroo Flat Primary School built on previous experience to help them understand the formula for a successful school event.

In the past the school held sit-down forums where parents and students were invited to come along and listen to a guest speaker. Because attendance at these events was low, the school looked at ways they could better involve both students and parents.

The school has introduced free interactive workshops where parents and students across all year levels participate in four rotational activities over an evening. Each event wraps up with a supper for everyone involved.

The workshops are often focused on a specific curriculum area, such as information technology, science or health; however, they can incorporate a range of subjects. During workshop activities, parents and students interact with different teachers and become familiar with other classrooms.

Often the staff member responsible for managing the evening is the curriculum leader of the specific workshop but there are always other staff members available to assist with timing, supper or facilitation of an activity.

The school finds these interactive workshops are an improvement on the old guest speaker nights. These evenings always experience a good turn-out and the principal feels they go a long way towards establishing a sense of community at the school.

Some ideas for secondary schools

- parent cocktail parties to commence the year
- information evenings for parents (start of the year)
- sporting dinners (e.g. netball and football team end-of-season celebrations)
- dinner dance
- art show
- end of year celebrations
- tennis day
- golf day
- dinner for parents of Year 12 students
- school history anniversary events – 20 year/30 year/50 year/ 100 year.

Case study

Getting creative juices flowing: Maryborough Education Centre

Maryborough Education Centre runs a Year 7 autobiography evening, where parents watch their children perform a short autobiographical piece.

The night is designed to build relationships between parents, children, and the school, while also forming part of the students' Studies of Society & Environment (SOSE) curriculum.

The evening is a huge success, achieving 95 per cent attendance rates. Its popularity has also led to the school introducing a Year 8 biography evening, where student performances are based on another family member such as a parent or grandparent.

The night is full of proud tears, smiles and laughter as parents recall and reminisce while their child performs excerpts from their life.

The principal and teachers have found that parents are responsive to such efforts aimed at increasing their interaction with the school.

Getting sponsorship for your event

Approaching groups or organisations to ask for sponsorship can be daunting. Think about what you have to offer potential sponsors. Exposure and a reputation as a community-oriented and supportive business are two obvious benefits of sponsorship. Make sure you don't compromise your goals in trying to meet the needs of sponsors.

People to approach

- sponsors from previous years or other events
- local sporting groups
- local businesses, particularly those with children attending your school

How to approach potential sponsors

The best person to approach potential sponsors will vary and can include the principal, teachers and members of the organising committee or students. Regardless of who is doing the approaching, your chances of success increase if you present yourself professionally. It is best if you have detailed information on the event and can provide relevant samples, photos etc.

Some tips on approaching sponsors include:

- sending a letter to potential sponsors before approaching them in person. Suggest in the letter that you will be contacting them to speak about sponsorship; include details of the event and direct them to any additional information they can look at in the meantime
- offering several sponsorship options or levels
- offering sponsorship of specific elements of the event, for example event programs
- devising a sponsorship agreement so both parties are clear on what the sponsorship entails
- writing a thank you letter to everyone you approach, even if they decline to be involved. This will help build your chances for next time.

Remember to look at the Department's advice on sponsorship before commencing. This can be found in the Victorian Government *School Reference Guide* 6.23 'School Community Relationship, including Sponsorships' online at www.education.vic.gov.au/referenceguide/management/.

Planning your event

Planning is the most important part of an event and should start as early as possible. It can be very helpful to speak to, and learn from, other schools who have hosted similar events.

Obviously, the safety and security of students and parents should override all other considerations. Please see the Analysis of Activities for Risk and Safety Management Form included in this Toolkit to help you develop a safety management plan.

Timing

Choosing the right time to hold your event is a key factor in determining its success. What is the best time for the school to focus on the event? When will the target audience most likely be available to come? You may need to consider:

- time of the year – have you considered school holidays and exam times? What about other events on the school and local community calendar?
- the best day – is it close to a long weekend? Will you have enough time to set up and wrap up?
- start and finishing times – when are the participants most likely to be free? Will people be required to travel long distances? Is parking an issue at particular times?

Whatever the timing, make sure you give parents and other people you want to attend as much notice as possible. Aim for at least three months' notice.

Budget

Setting a budget and sticking to it is easy if you put in place some basic controls. At a minimum you should:

- work out a budget and track against it as frequently as required
- have one person who is accountable for the budget. This person should be the only one who can authorise expenses
- provide regular budget reports detailing income and expenditure – include estimates where possible
- mention that you are representing your school when obtaining quotes or buying something for your event. There's a good chance that local businesses will give you a discount.

Some typical revenue opportunities include sponsorship, ticket sales and donations.

Expenses may include printing, permits, insurance, food, other supplies, and security.

Event coordinator

It makes sense to have one person responsible for coordinating the event and to make final decisions. The event coordinator can make the day-to-day operational decisions about the event and help to solve any conflicts or issues that might arise. A good coordinator should:

- be involved as early as possible
- have the authority to fulfil this role with the trust and respect of those involved
- be approachable and a good communicator.

Getting a team together

Getting a team together, such as an organising committee, to help out with the event will help spread the workload and cover your bases. Different people will bring different skills to the event, so think about what's important and who can offer the skills, experience and contacts you need. Do you need technical expertise? Do you need someone to represent parents? Is there going to be any manual work involved? Can the event be included in some way in the students' curriculum?

Consider building a database of parent skills and interests by handing out the Parent Skills and Assistance Registration Form, included in Tool 1 of this Toolkit, at the beginning of the year or term. It will become a good reference when planning events so you can work out who is best to approach for a particular job. Don't forget that you can ask parents to complete this form when you meet with them at other occasions (e.g. parent-teacher interviews).

It can be hard to get people involved, so here are some techniques you can use to get people interested:

- Start by saying, 'we need your help to make this a great school' or 'your support will help us provide your kids with a better education'.
- Use your newsletter or parent-teacher night to ask parents what they are good at. Then you can approach them about specific jobs you need a hand with, which is more likely to get a positive response than just asking to help out.
- Spread the load. Look for gaps and approach parents to fill a particular role (e.g. hot food coordinator or meet and greet).
- Teachers may be reluctant to ask parents directly. Think of other ways to approach parents, such as through your newsletter.
- Always thank people publicly for their help – this will help next time around.

Parent Associations and school councils are a good starting point for getting volunteers.

Once you have identified your team, hold a planning meeting to establish clear roles for everyone – before, during and after the event.

Facilities and equipment

As most school events will occur on school grounds, remember to think carefully about the appropriate use of school facilities. You can look at the Department's guidelines if you have any questions about this.

Some points to think about when looking at possible facilities include:

• Is there enough lighting?
• Could parking be a problem?
• Are there enough toilets?
• Will any areas need to be sectioned off?
• Do you need security – if so, are professional security guards required?
• Can you meet your catering requirements?
• Do local residents need to be informed?

As part of your budgeting process you should have identified any equipment that needs to be bought or hired. Basic equipment for events usually includes:

• signage
• audiovisual equipment – speakers, microphones, projectors
• registration/welcome table and chairs
• lectern/speakers table
• sufficient seating for attendees.

Don't forget to take into account:

• the need for permits or approvals – possibly including parents, local council, and the Department
• the needs of people with disabilities.

Delivering to plan

Starting with a simple timeline and action plan (i.e. who needs to do what by when) will help you keep on track. A sample checklist is included in this Toolkit, listing a range of tasks an event can involve and a timeframe for getting each done.

It's crucial that the organising committee takes responsibility and keeps track of progress. Track against the plan at regular meetings and keep a record of any decisions or actions committed to in meeting minutes.

It is important to make contingency plans for vital elements, in case a problem arises (e.g. cancellation by a special guest, exceeding the capacity of the venue, or poor weather predictions for outdoor events).

Checklist for Event Planners

❑ **Plan it out**

Decide what you're doing, what needs to be done and the resources you need to make it happen. Set up a working group to help plan and organise the workload. Give yourself plenty of time to consider different ideas and develop a thorough plan.

How much can you spend? Draw up a budget and obtain quotes to help make it as accurate as possible.

❑ **Delegate**

You can't do it all, assign responsibilities to those involved. Often people have special skills, expertise or particular interests. It can help to identify these attributes and distribute jobs accordingly. Record who is doing what, set dates for completion of tasks and check that each job is done.

❑ **Get connected**

Start talking to people. Use all the networks at your disposal – revisit old partnerships and form new ones. Have the working group look at developing ideas for sponsorship, collecting any relevant information and other resources.

Develop some approaches for publicity and promotion. This needs to be worked out in the early stages and a timeframe arranged for executing it.

❑ **Stay on track**

Plan what needs to be done and put it all in a timetable style checklist. Use it to track your progress on a weekly basis (and daily when the event is only weeks away). Keep tabs on your spending, checking back to your budget regularly.

Running sheets are good for 'on the day', so it's best to put one together and then test it.

❑ **Take stock**

Keep everyone updated on what is happening and the progress you are making.

Bring your team together at the end. Thank them and organise a 'thank you' for other people involved (including sponsors and participants). Run through feedback on the event (i.e. how they felt it ran, what could be improved, what worked etc.).

Record any feedback and file it away for next time along with all resources and contact information collected. Think about storing this information at the school so others can use it when planning an event.

Promoting your event

There are many opportunities to promote your event. When deciding on the best time to start your promotional campaign, remember that the more time people have to spread the word, the better your chances are of a successful turn-out. Word-of-mouth is always a powerful form of communication among the school community.

Be creative about how you promote your event while keeping what you say simple and clear. Always make use of school resources, community networks and local media that are at your disposal.

Whatever you do, plan your pre-publicity activities and set a timeline for when these will take place to help maximise their impact.

School resources

- Newsletter – use it to promote the event and invite offers of assistance for planning, managing and staging the event
- School website – include details of the event on your website. If people need to register, provide a form they can download and print out. As the date draws nearer, include a feature on the home page with a link to more information
- Use the recorded message on your school telephone to promote your event – students can get in on the action by recording a mini-advert
- Invitation to parents – insert an invitation into the school newsletter
- Consider making a large, durable banner to hang on the school fence. Check if you need any permits to display signage

Community networks

- Place A4 flyers in the local library, shopping centres and on church noticeboards.
- Link in with local council and service groups such as Apex, Lions or Rotary for support.
- Brainstorm a list of local community groups and send each a personalised invitation.
- Ask local groups if you can speak briefly (e.g. five minutes) before their regular meetings to mention the event, and if necessary, ask for support.
- Organise putting a link to your event (or advertisement for it) on parents', community and sponsor websites (including the local council, library and sporting associations).

Local media

- Research the cost of advertising in local and trade media – your budget will determine whether you can afford paid advertisements.
- Try having your event included in a 'Listings' or 'What's On' section in publications.
- Contact your local newspaper and radio stations and ask if they would be interested in featuring a story on the event (see Working with the Media (Tool 5) in this kit).
- Organise with local radio stations to have students interviewed regarding the upcoming event.
- Arrange a pre-event photo opportunity.

Other ideas

- Contact local university or TAFE institutions to ask if public relations or marketing students can develop a promotional campaign as one of their subject assignments.
- Use video footage of past events to show at a community venue (e.g. the local library).
- Speak with local real estate agents about designing a board advertising the event (that includes their logo).
- Hold a performance or set up a stall that promotes your event in a public space in the lead-up to it (e.g. local shopping strip or precinct, at a local football match or Saturday netball competition).
- Offer prize-draws as incentives for attending and publicise this in all promotion efforts.
- Consider organising a launch week or day at local cafes or restaurants. You can arrange special invitations for diners or hand out event 'postcards' with menus.

Running your event

Before the event

Formal invitations should be sent to guest speakers and any other VIPs. A general invitation to the event should be sent out as early as you can (i.e. allow at least a month).

If you plan to have performances or speeches at your event it is crucial that you hold rehearsals beforehand. A rehearsal will help you get the timing right and should identify any problems with equipment or staging. If you can't have a full rehearsal with the people involved, at the very least consider having a technical run-through.

Make sure you leave plenty of time for set-up. Start the process as soon as you can and allow time to clean up all areas being used by the attendees – the condition of school facilities is one of the key factors affecting parents' impression of a school.

Here are a few things that can help your event run smoothly:

- Inform the cleaners of what is happening.
- Develop a running sheet and distribute it to everyone involved in the committee.
- Prepare briefing notes for speakers and special guests.
- Distribute maps and a program of events for your guests.
- Gather any school or sponsor signage you may need.

Some other things to think about:

- who will take photos on the day?
- types of questions you might get asked about the event
  – prepare answers in advance.

Considerations for setting up your event venue may include:

- how do you need the venue to be set up?
- if seating is required, will it be lecture style, u-shape, semi-formal or round table?
- will seating be allocated or unallocated?

On the day

Hold a meeting with everyone who will be involved in the running of the event. At the meeting, the event coordinator should:

- go through the running sheet in detail
- make sure everyone understands their role and responsibilities:
  - it is vital that the process and accountability for handling money is clearly understood
- discuss any likely issues and how to address them
- set some ground rules for communication and decision-making during the event
- organise for someone to welcome guests and inform them about the proceedings
- make a great impression by welcoming guests at the school gate
- allow time for teachers and parents to mingle after the event has finished.

Wrapping up

- Make sure all valuables are secured and lost property is kept in a central location.
- Ensure that all equipment is returned to its rightful owners.
- Have a clean-up plan in place.

Ministerial events

For events where the Minister will attend you need to follow the right protocols. For further information contact Susan Ure, Manager Events, Communications Division at DE&T on (03) 9637 2884.

Protocols for hosting visiting ministers

1. Addressing officials

The table below outlines forms of address for elected officials.

Title:	Referred to as:	Salutation in correspondence:	Addressed as:
Prime Minister	The Honourable… The Prime Minister…	Dear Prime Minister	'Prime Minister' or 'Sir' or 'Mr/Mrs/Ms'
Premier of State	The Honourable… The Premier…	Dear Premier	'Premier' or 'Sir' or 'Mr/Mrs/Ms'
Minister of the Crown (federal or state)	The Honourable… Minister for…	Dear Minister	'Minister' or 'Sir' or 'Mr/Mrs/Ms'

2. Order of speakers

When welcoming officials or preparing a running sheet, use the following order:

- parliamentarians
- local government
- other important dignitaries
- school staff
- builders, architects etc.
- departmental attendees.

In the case of federal ministers present at the opening of new school buildings and/or refurbishments, the order of who speaks first is dependent on project funding.

If the building has been principally funded by the Victorian Government and partially funded by the Commonwealth Government, the Victorian minister speaks first, followed by the Commonwealth minister.

Conversely, if the building has been principally funded by the Commonwealth Government and partially funded by the Victorian Government, the Commonwealth minister speaks first, followed by the Victorian minister.

After your event

There are a few things you should do after the event, including:

- thanking the organising team, special guests and attendees
  - a good way to thank the team is to get everyone together to acknowledge his or her hard work and review what has been achieved
  - send special guests a thank you letter
  - attendees can be thanked through your school newsletter or at assembly
- reconciling the budget so that you can be clear about all of the costs and, if relevant, what money was raised
- gathering feedback from the attendees; it can be the most valuable source of evaluation. Ask for feedback through the school newsletter or by using an evaluation form
- conducting a review of the event to identify any outstanding actions, what worked well and what could be done better next time
- having someone write a short report on the event covering:
  - acknowledgment of those who supported the event, including sponsors
  - event highlights
  - how many people attended
  - money raised
  - future plans
- sharing all your feedback with the school and the wider community
- preparing a comprehensive handover kit to assist next year's organisers.

Analysis of Activities for Risk and Safety Management Form

Activity and venue

List safety issues, risks, hazards

Can a satisfactory plan be developed to keep participants safe? If NO, avoid activity

If YES, develop safety management plan

Consider/include:

☐ Nature of the venue – special characteristics of this location, specific checks for immediate hazards, weather, venue check prior to activity

Notes:

☐ The activity and level of the activity – its appropriateness for the age, maturity, physical stature, ability level and readiness of the students; the suitability of this location for this group

Notes:

☐ Staff qualifications and/or experience specific to the activity, the nature of the group and the venue to be used

Notes:

☐ Participant preparation, including skill development, fitness development and advance briefing

Notes:

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Analysis of Activities for Risk and Safety Management Form (continued)

☐ Equipment safety – maintenance procedures and checks (including personal equipment, special equipment for specific activities, transport, equipment for emergencies)

Notes:

☐ Protective clothing

Notes:

☐ Organisational arrangements for conducting the activity, including staff–student ratios, location, roles of staff and use of safety measures

Notes:

☐ Group management arrangements, including additional activities if waiting time is long

Notes:

☐ Alternatives to the activity plan in case of weather changes, injuries or other circumstances

Notes:

☐ Procedures to be implemented in emergencies, a communication plan

Notes:

Note: This pro forma provides one suggested way of documenting an analysis of activities for risk and safety management purposes.

Event Checklist

	ACTIVITY	STATUS
3 MONTHS OUT	choose your event	
	know why we're holding the event	
	identified who to invite	
	estimated cost	
	time and resources available	
	identified potential partners/supporters	
	agreement reached on event	
	SPONSORSHIP	
	potential sponsors identified	
	items of potential value identified	
	approach to sponsors agreed	
	potential sponsors approached	
	PLANNING	
	event coordinator appointed	
	organising team in place	
	jobs assigned and agreed	
	team meetings scheduled	
	date and time set	
	venue booked	
	budget set and tracking process in place	
	event plan completed	
1 MONTH OUT	article published in newsletter	
	flyer developed and distributed	
	equipment booked	
	catering organised	
	contingency plans in place	
	mailing list for invitations compiled	
	invitations sent	
	team clear on roles on the day	
	sponsorship agreements secured	
	media approached	
	permits obtained	
	promotional signage up	

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Event Checklist (continued)

	ACTIVITY	STATUS
2 WEEKS OUT	cleaners organised and informed	
	speeches/briefing notes prepared	
	materials printed	
	activities organised (e.g. games)	
	bookings confirmed (e.g. photographer)	
	local residents notified (if applicable)	
1 WEEK OUT	media alerted (sent a few days before the media release)	
	media release sent	
	reminder sent to invitees	
	event signage ready	
	running sheet drafted	
	running sheet checked	
	venue/facilities cleaned	
	rehearsal completed	
ON THE DAY	venue set-up completed	
	event signage up	
	technical run-through completed	
	ready to welcome guests	
	feedback obtained	
	venue secured before leaving (e.g. lights off, check no-one is left inside)	
AFTER	venue facilities cleaned	
	rubbish disposed of appropriately	
	valuables returned or secured	
	monies banked	
	organising team thanked	
	sponsors thanked	
	budget reconciled	
	feedback reviewed	
	short report written	
	records compiled for next time	

3 Using this tool

1. **Bring together the staff, parents or students who work on your newsletter.**

2. **Decide what type of newsletter you would like to produce, how often you are going to publish it and the method of distribution.**

3. **Use this tool for content ideas, writing tips and advice on production and distribution methods.**

Your newsletter is probably the most trusted source of information about your school. Although written mainly with parents in mind, newsletters are also read by other family members, teachers, students, members of the local community, local businesses and the local media. Some schools even send their newsletter to local Members of Parliament to keep them informed.

Newsletters can be time-consuming to produce and sometimes stressful for the staff responsible for pulling them together and getting all of the contributions in on time.

This tool is designed to help you produce a school newsletter that is interesting and appealing.

The kit contains information on:

- why a newsletter is important
- types of newsletters
- how often you should publish your newsletter
- what makes a good newsletter
- distributing your newsletter
- ideas for stories
- sourcing feedback on your newsletter.

Templates/samples included:

- Release Form for Publication of Student Work/Images
- Newsletter Publication Schedule Template
- School Newsletter Template – 1
- School Newsletter Template – 2

Why is a newsletter important?

As you know, parents rely on your newsletter for information and important notices. Your newsletter enables parents to feel more connected to your school.

Producing newsletters that are engaging and easy to read is an important way of:

- keeping parents and your community informed about what is happening in your school
- building pride in your school and celebrating achievements
- generating positive word-of-mouth stories about your school
- building stronger community relationships.

Newsletters can remind families about important dates, promote student achievements, and help parents understand elements of teaching and learning.

You might like to consider collecting sample newsletters from other schools to find fresh ideas for your newsletter.

Case study

Printing a professional cover for our newsletter: Kangaroo Flat Primary School

Kangaroo Flat Primary School embarked on an innovative newsletter initiative that has led to new working relationships with the wider community.

The initiative began after the school met with a member of the community who was interested in working with the school and local businesses to develop a front and back cover to the newsletter.

The first step involved identifying which businesses support the school and play an important role in the community. These businesses were approached and invited to sponsor the newsletter. Sponsorship entitled each business to a colour advertisement on the back cover of the newsletter.

With this sponsorship the school was able to produce 5000 colour-printed covers for a six-month period.

While the front cover is designed and determined by staff at Kangaroo Flat Primary School, the back page is devoted to local business advertisements. There is an opportunity to update the front cover, and invite other businesses to participate, every six months.

Printing costs for the front and back cover are funded entirely through sponsorship. Businesses such as the local plumber, newsagency, florist, bakery and the supplier of electrical fittings have all been keen to participate.

Kangaroo Flat Primary School, along with other schools in the Bendigo area, is finding the arrangement very beneficial. The initiative provides a win-win situation for the school and local businesses – Kangaroo Flat Primary School has an impressive front and back cover for their newsletter and local businesses can support the school while promoting their services.

Types of newsletters

There are several types of school newsletters that your school might produce at different times of the year.

Some schools produce a big newsletter each term, which covers many different activities, and smaller update-type newsletters every week or fortnight during the term. The advantage of the big issue approach is that the newsletter is usually mailed home to parents so that they are likely to receive it; when newsletters are sent home with children they don't always reach their destination. It also means that it is easy to provide a term-wide perspective on things that are coming up, the curriculum that might be covered etc.

Other types of newsletters might include a one-off special event or themed bulletin, such as a well-being newsletter or a curriculum update (e.g. 'What's new in this subject?').

When choosing a type of newsletter, the best approach is to consult readers with options and ask them what they would like. Getting feedback from readers can help a school understand the type of newsletter that might best suit reader needs.

Primary/secondary school newsletters

Primary schools and secondary schools produce different types and styles of newsletters. Primary school newsletters tend to include more photos and illustrations, comments or stories from students, and examples of student work.

Secondary schools, because of their size and complexity, often have more to cover in their newsletters than primary schools and have to be more selective about what to include. Sectioned newsletters can be very useful for secondary schools because it can help organise a wide range of material.

How often should you publish your newsletter?

How often you publish will depend on the specific needs of your school community, how much news you have to share, and how often you need to inform parents and others about events and activities.

Most schools publish a regular newsletter on a weekly or fortnightly basis. These newsletters typically range in length from one to four pages.

Don't forget that you can publish other newsletters at different times during the year. You might decide to publish end-of-term newsletters and special-themed newsletters three or four times a year.

Once you decide on the frequency of your publication, it is useful to develop a publication schedule (see template provided in this Toolkit). This includes an outline of the stages of production and a recommended timeframe for each task.

What makes a good newsletter?

Schools often have different approaches to producing newsletters. There is no absolute right way, but there are elements and methods you can incorporate to provide unambiguous and relevant information to readers.

The audience is more likely to value your newsletter as a source of information if it is written in an easily comprehensible style. People usually don't have the time or patience to sift through masses of text, so check that your writing follows some basic principles.

The table below can be used as a checklist when writing your newsletter. How does your current newsletter measure up?

When you start…	When you have finished, check that your writing is:	
Be aware of: • your reader and their specific needs or preferences • what information you need to cover • why you are writing the newsletter (e.g. to keep people updated, to encourage them to act, to celebrate an achievement or milestone etc.).	Clear…	• is there a clear structure for the overall newsletter? • are the headings easy to identify? • are the sentences short and punchy? • is the language easy to understand? • have you eliminated jargon and explained acronyms?
	To the point…	• no gaps or overlaps • no irrelevant material • no unnecessary phrases
	Thorough…	• is all the information necessary? • are the obvious questions answered? • is there a feedback mechanism in place?
	Human…	• helpful • courteous • tactful

Designing your newsletter

Most school newsletters are produced and printed at school. Parents are aware that funds spent on producing newsletters could otherwise be allocated to their children's learning. Aim for your newsletter to look modest and professional but not costly.

As with any design, there are no hard and fast rules, but there are some general tried and true principles that can help turn your newsletter into a more aesthetically pleasing publication. Of course, no newsletter can survive without good content but good design can help present your content in an effective and readable package.

The first lesson of newsletter design is to practise the '3Cs': consistency, conservation (cutting out clutter) and contrast.

The best recipe for design success is 'keep it simple and keep it consistent'

You need to get rid of 'busyness' and clutter. This does not mean your newsletter has to be boring. However, consistency helps the reader by organising your words and eliminating distracting clutter. It unifies the many different elements – headings, text, clip art, photos, captions etc. – and doesn't distract the reader from the message. Try to incorporate the following principles to achieve consistency:

• Use either headers or footers that feature the newsletter title and page number.
• Be consistent with the font and size used in headings.
• Keep the same basic layout on each page.
• Maintain the same 'look' for every issue.

It is worth developing a newsletter template that will help to keep elements in the same place from one issue to the next. It also works well if you use sections in your newsletter.

The Toolkit provides primary and secondary newsletter templates for use in your school.

It can be tempting to overload your newsletter with fancy fonts and clip art to add interest. Fonts and artwork should be used to lead the reader through your publication and illustrate your words. Tips to consider:

• Use no more than three font types. For instance, use one font for text, another for headings, with only one extra font used sparingly in occasional boxed text to promote special events or activities.
• Use frames and boxes sparingly – you don't have to box every story/article.
• Try to limit clip art, photos etc. to one or two per page.

Story length

You should keep each story in your newsletter as brief and succinct as possible. Your readers have busy lives and might only scan the newsletter in the first instance. Remember to state the main point of each story early in the piece.

If appropriate, provide details on where parents can go for further information, such as a website, noticeboard at school or a specialist teacher.

Tone and language

- Keep the language clear and simple. Parents often complain when newsletters contain education-specific language.
- Maintain a friendly and conversational tone.
- Use inclusive words such as 'us', 'we' and 'our'. These words help to create a sense of belonging to the school community.

Page formatting

A page layout usually consists of text, headings, pictures and white space. These different elements must relate to each other and be balanced. For instance, a page dense with type and no white space does not invite reading. Margins and column widths can be manipulated to alter this. Things to consider include:

- a margin of at least 25 mm (2.5 cm) at the top, bottom, and sides of each page
- formatting text into newspaper columns. An A4 page should be divided into two columns with a minimum space of 5 mm in between. One wide column of text may be too difficult to read. Keep in mind that a line of text should be no more than 12 words, as the eye can only comfortably take in 10 to 12 words per line (or 27 to 60 characters)
- the use of ranged left text. In justified text each line is stretched out to the same length, which creates 'rivers' of space on the page and is harder to read.

Text font size

- Use standard fonts for your main text, such as Helvetica, Arial or Times New Roman. These are classic fonts that are easier to read. Don't be tempted to use many different fonts in your newsletter. Overuse of fonts and sizes confuses the reader and decreases readability.
- Type size is measured in units called 'points'. A font size of 12 pt is recommended. If space is a problem you can go down to 10 pt, but don't go below that. Text font and size should be consistent throughout. Stick with the same family of fonts.
- You can use the bold, bold italic, or italic of a given font for your headings. Another idea is to use a bold serif for headings (e.g. Times New Roman) and a sans serif for the text (e.g. Arial or Helvetica). Serif fonts, such as Times New Roman, have 'feet' or serifs at the base of each letter to link them, while sans serif fonts, such as Arial, are plain.

- If you are using Microsoft Word, make sure the automatic hyphenation is turned off to avoid multiple word-breaks at the end of lines. Go to Tools/Language/Hyphenation and make sure the 'Automatically hyphenate document' icon is not ticked.

Headings

- Avoid using all capitals for headings, as it makes words hard to read and looks as if YOU ARE SHOUTING. Use caps for the first word only or for the first letter of words (not prepositions).
- Your headings are the reader's guide to the information, so you need to work out a heading hierarchy. Decide what are main headings (first level heading), what are sub-headings (second level), and sub-sub-headings (third level). Your sub-headings should be less prominent or smaller than your main heading, and your next heading down should be less prominent and smaller again. Headings should be at least 2 pts bigger than the text.
- Headings also need to have breathing space around them. To link a sub-heading with the following text you should have more space above than below it. For example:

Main headings

16 pt bold, upper and lower case, two lines of space above, one line below

Sub-headings

14 pt bold, cap on first letter only, two lines of space above, one line below

Sub-sub-headings

12 pt or text size, bold italic, initial cap only, one line of space above, one line below

- Specialty fonts are fine for occasional headings as they are a great way to make stories stand out or to promote an event, such as news of the school fete. They should be used selectively (no more than one in addition to your text and heading fonts) so as not to make the page too busy or decrease readability. Even if different fonts are used for headings, they should be kept the same size throughout the newsletter.

Text boxes

The use of one or two breakout boxes may be effective to add variety or to promote an event or activity. They should be used sparingly (no more than one per page) and not be too thick or they detract from the message.

They work better if you have a margin of space between the text and the border (at least 6 pts). In Microsoft Word, go to Format/ Borders and Shading/Options.

Colour

Reserve colour for headings only. Keep your text black as it is the easiest colour to read. Headings can look effective when colour is used, as long as colours are kept to a minimum and are dark enough for the viewer to read. Keep reversed-out text headings (white text on black bars) to a minimum as they create a 'show through' problem on the other side of the page.

Background colours can work well on a page; however, toned or colour boxes that appear behind text should never be more than 30 per cent of a solid colour. Avoid clashing colours together. A red or orange heading will not work on a green or blue background no matter how pale! The best background colours are pale pastels. However, if your newsletter is being printed in black and white only, always run a sample of the newsletter through a photocopier to test how your colour work will reproduce. Red usually does not reproduce well in black and white copying.

The use of white space can make a page more appealing to the viewer and add to readability. Think of it as blocks of the colour white which you need to balance with your other blocks of colour, such as text.

Clip art

Clip art can add visual interest to your newsletter, but don't use it for its own sake to make your page attractive. Only use those images that convey key pieces of information or serve a specific purpose. It should make sense in the context that it is being used: to illustrate a point or support a message.

Pictures and graphics

Using images, photographs, and graphics is an effective way to complement your story and maintain reader interest.

You can also include student or teacher photos and student work to make your publication more newsworthy. Students, in particular, are more likely to read the newsletter when they feature in it themselves.

If you are going to include student work (such as their artwork) or images of students, you will need to ask parents to sign the Publication of Student Work/Images Form included in this kit. If you wish to use pictures of parents, you will need them to sign an Adult Release Form.

There are some traps with using pictures taken with digital cameras. While images from digital cameras are suitable for downloading to the Internet, not all digital images are suitable for print reproduction. Lower resolution is fine for the Web, but only high resolution images (300 dpi and over) are suitable for print reproduction.

Images downloaded from the Internet or created for the purpose of the Internet are not high resolution and therefore cannot be printed successfully.

To get high resolution on your digital camera change the image size/resolution setting to large or high.

When using images or graphics, a fine ½ pt black line can be used around them as a way of framing them. To achieve this in Microsoft Word, go to Format/Borders and Shading/Box/Width.

TIP

To save time chasing consent forms at the last minute you can ask parents to sign a general Release Form for Publication of Student Work/Images as part of the enrolment package at the beginning of the year. Keep this information stored in a file or Excel spreadsheet and check that consent has been given when preparing your newsletter.

TIP

To ensure that images supplied are suitable for print, use the following high resolution specifications:

• Size: at least 100 per cent

• Resolution: 300 dpi

• Formats: EPS, TIFF or JPEG (GIF and other file formats are not acceptable).

You want to use images that support text, not detract from it. An incorrectly sized image can make your newsletter look cluttered or disorganised. Images should line up as much as possible with the full width of the text columns (either one or both columns). If there are several pictures together, they should be aligned top and bottom, or side by side. The following shows the difference between images that are too small, too big, and adequately sized.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum iriure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie consequatluptatum zzril

Too small

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Just right

Captions below the picture, or a descriptive title above it, will let the reader know what information the picture is conveying. Captions should appear adjacent to an image.

Distributing your newsletter

After all your hard work, it is important to ensure that your newsletter reaches its audience. Reliable distribution is a crucial part of ensuring your newsletter is effective.

Besides distributing the newsletter through class teachers or year level coordinators, you could publish a link with a PDF version on your school website and also offer parents the option to receive the newsletter via email.

It is important to have a system in place for making sure that absent students receive a copy of the newsletter. Teachers are often responsible for distributing the newsletter to children the next day but you can also provide copies in a pigeon-hole or a stand at the front office.

Creating a distribution list

Where possible, ask your parents how they would prefer to receive the newsletter – including via their child, in the post or by email.

Remember to consider the special needs of split and blended families. This may involve distributing two newsletters per family – one to each parent.

The school calendar can highlight when each publication will be released. Special events or themed newsletters (e.g. after a major event) can be flagged on the calendar to alert parents to these special editions.

Consider distributing your newsletters beyond the school community, as this will help to build a strong community network for your school. For example, your local community centre may add the newsletter to its noticeboard.

You might choose to send your newsletter to:

- your regional office
- libraries, churches and community centres
- businesses, such as milk bars, coffee shops and newsagencies
- sporting clubs
- kindergartens and child-care centres
- the media
- community leaders.

TIP

To ensure that both parents in a split family receive the school newsletter, you might offer them the opportunity to have a copy posted to the parent who does not usually receive the newsletter via the student. You can advertise this option in the newsletter at the beginning of the year.

Case study

Getting the basics right: Murtoa P–12 College

The principal and administrative staff at Murtoa P–12 College have developed an approach that considers the best way to manage all elements of publishing a newsletter, including preparation, production, and distribution.

The newsletter is prepared by the administrative staff and is overseen by the principal. The front page always includes a personal letter from the principal.

Sections of the newsletter are designed for different school levels, i.e. junior, middle and senior. News relevant to specific school levels is included under each section.

The newsletter is written in a friendly, conversational tone and incorporates student quotes and anecdotes throughout.

A special feature of the newsletter is 'Health Habits', where information about maintaining a healthy, balanced lifestyle is shared. Latest topics include 'Hand washing – why it is important', 'Managing colds and the flu', 'Healthy eating with fruit and vegetables' and 'Staying physically active in winter months'.

The school aims to distribute the newsletter as broadly and effectively as possible. It is handed out to students at the end of the day, added to the school website and distributed at the local newsagency.

Murtoa P–12 College's experience shows that the newsletter is most likely to reach parents if it is given to the younger child of a family. This is in contrast to many schools that distribute the newsletter to the eldest family member.

Parents and members of the broader community can easily access current or previous newsletters by downloading these from the school website. Newsletters are in Adobe Acrobat format and the website includes a link to download the program for those who do not have it installed.

The school has attracted a number of local businesses to sponsor the newsletter and place advertisements in it. They are negotiating a major sponsor for next year.

Ideas for stories

School life	Community focus
• principal's reports and news • sports reports • school assemblies • music reports • reports on school competitions – internal and external • excursion reports and stories from students • Student Representative Council reports • school council decisions • teachers' professional development	• local library news and programs • parents and friends association reports • broader community news that impacts on the school (e.g. plans for road upgrades around the school, changes to local parking or public transport etc.) • other local news, such as festivals, rural shows, plays, art exhibitions • details of your school's business or community partnerships
Education issues	**Advice**
• school readiness advice • curriculum updates • what's new in education, including flagship projects and new policies • new teaching practices • samples of student work • Maths or English activities or games for parents to play at home with their child (primary schools)	• general advice to parents (e.g. reading to children, how to help with homework, health and well-being suggestions for children/teenagers etc.) • issue-specific advice (e.g. dealing with head lice) • preparing for secondary school (primary schools) • articles prepared by local recruitment firms on how to get a part-time job (secondary schools) • details of part-time jobs available in the local area (secondary schools). • advice on pathways for students
Human interest	**Alerts and notices**
• staff profiles and interviews • parent profiles • school leader profiles • 'This day in the history of our school…' feature (e.g. this day in 1966 there were 50 students enrolled in the school, 14 teachers and our school musical had just begun production) • vox-pop interviews with students capturing what goes on in the school from a student's perspective • 'What makes our school unique' feature written from a variety of perspectives, including parents, teachers, and council members • interviews with members of the school alumni • poems and short stories from students • recent accomplishments of students in academic, artistic, sporting, and community areas	• note pad or diary about a unit of work undertaken during the term • 'The week/month ahead' (a calendar of events, activities, important reminders, e.g. the week/month ahead etc.) • other local schools' events • information sessions and open days for local secondary schools (for primary schools), universities and TAFE institutes (for secondary schools)

Sourcing feedback on your newsletter

The Communications Division in DE&T puts out a newsletter to parents called *Parent Update*. Parent Update is an opt-in, periodic e-newsletter that is sent directly to parents and covers a wide range of issues in education. *Parent Update* can be used as a source of possible articles for school newsletters. Writers and producers of school newsletters can become part of the mailing list at www.education.vic.gov.au/parentupdate/.

From time to time, consider asking your readers for feedback on the content, style and frequency of your school newsletters.

You can do this via a short survey in an edition of your regular newsletter or through informal conversations with parents.

Ask parents for their thoughts and ideas on:

• content – what is in the newsletter now and what would they like to see less/more of?
• appearance of the newsletter, including its readability
• tone of the language
• length of the newsletter
• consistency of the messages
• frequency of the regular newsletter and other newsletters
• effectiveness of the distribution.

Release Form for Publication of Student Work/ Images

WHERE STUDENT IS UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE

From: Position:

Name   *(i.e. teacher/principal)*

Class/subject area:

School name: Phone no:

Date............/............/............

Student's name:

Dear

The schoolwork/image of the student named above has been selected for publication in the school newsletter.

Reason for publication:

Please sign below to give permission for publication.

(Signature of parent/guardian)

(Print name clearly)

Date............/............/............

Newsletter Publication Schedule Template

Task	Alert	Draft deadline	Set up/layout of newsletter	Edit	Publish	Distribution	Follow-up
	Send email notification and/ or phone call to all newsletter contributors to remind them about their newsletter article and deadlines.	Set date for submission of articles, photography, advertisements or images for publication in newsletter.	Layout of newsletter in publication format.	Proofreading and editing of final version of newsletter. Principal (or appointed person) to sign off that they have read and edited final version of the newsletter.	Send newsletter for publication.	Distribution date – deliver to students, staff and other agreed recipients. Mail second copies where applicable, post on school noticeboards, and deliver to outside agencies.	Website – publish copy on school website. Collection and response to feedback about newsletter.
When? * Based on a weekly newsletter – schools to adapt as required for their own publication schedule	7 days prior to publication date.	4 days prior to publication date.	3 days prior to publication date.	2 days prior to publication date.	Allow 1 day for printing/publishing.	Distribution deadline. Receive newsletters from printer/ publisher. Sort in year/class groups – delivery to classes. Additional copies distributed.	Website publication. Published same day as distribution deadline. Feedback and follow-up within one week of distribution deadline.

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School Newsletter

October 2007 Issue no x

Dates to remember
22 Nov – Christmas Stall
22 Nov – Christmas Stall
22 Nov – Christmas Stall
22 Nov – Christmas Stall

School Address and contact details
www.websitehere.com.au
Tel: 9999 0000

Heading one

Every article you post needs its own title. It's also a good idea to use clip art and graphics to illustrate themes, activities, or events. When you don't have enough text, fill empty spaces with graphics or classroom photos.

Keep the tone simple and positive. Occasionally you might need to remind parents about classroom rules.

Use the body of your newsletter to keep parents apprised of major assignments and class events, as well as any school district news. Provide explanations of how projects and daily work conform to the state standards.

You might also want to include the week's spelling words, test alerts, and any upcoming events such as field trips or special school events.

Heading one

A newsletter also can extend classroom learning. Give students experience in writing for an audience by having them write articles describing class projects. Ask children to help you choose the colors of your newsletter, pick out clip art, put together story ideas, write and edit articles, and distribute the newsletter.

Every article you post needs its own title. It's also a good idea to use clip art and graphics to illustrate themes, activities, or events. When you don't have enough text, fill empty spaces with graphics or classroom photos.

Keep the tone simple and positive. Occasionally you might need to remind parents about classroom rules.

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Heading one

Use the body of your newsletter to keep parents apprised of major assignments and class events, as well as any school district news. Provide explanations of how projects and daily work conform to the state standards.

You might also want to include the week's spelling words, test alerts, and any upcoming events such as field trips or special school events.

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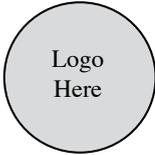
School Newsletter

Term dates

Feb 12 – Mar 23
Feb 12 – Mar 23
Feb 12 – Mar 23
Feb 12 – Mar 23

Dates to remember

Friday 16 June
- open day
- spellathon

Monday 20 July
- school assembly
- spellathon

Monday 20 July

- school assembly
- spellathon

Monday 20 July
- school assembly
- spellathon

Monday 20 July
- school assembly
- spellathon

Friday 16 June
- open day
- spellathon

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- spellathon

Welcome

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Using this tool

1. Assemble a web development team made up of the staff, parents or students who will work on your website (including information technology experts).

2. Discuss why you want to develop a website, who is the intended audience, what you are going to include on the site and how you are going to store your web pages (i.e. your Internet Service Provider).

3. Use this tool to help you develop, maintain, and benefit from your school website.

A website is an opportunity to showcase the creative and vibrant nature of a school environment. Many schools have already established their web presence, while others are in the process of building a website for the first time.

This kit contains information on:

- why publish a website?
- how to get started
- identifying your audience
- identifying the website purpose
- developing the website structure
- website design
- tips for writing on the web
- learning HTML
- adding graphics
- accessibility issues
- testing and approval of your web pages
- storing your web pages
- maintenance of your website
- keeping children and staff safe
- web resources.

Templates/samples included:

- Sample site map
- Sample website structure
- Student Release Form for Publication of Student Work on the Internet.

Why publish a website?

No doubt you can identify several reasons why a website is an effective way of communicating with teachers, parents, students, the media, and the local and international community. However, there may be opportunities associated with your school website you haven't considered.

Your school website can be used to:

- promote what your school has to offer (e.g. specialist programs)
- promote upcoming activities (e.g. fundraisers)
- enable teachers to access information and share resources
- support students' web learning and experience
- support collaborative projects with other schools/organisations
- promote students' achievements
- identify useful contacts for parents wanting specific information
- provide information on school policies (e.g. bullying, homework)
- provide a way for ex-pupils to keep in touch with their year level
- attract new teachers to your school
- provide a forum for community consultation.

How to get started

So how do you go about setting up a website? Every school will approach this differently depending on their access to resources and their level of internet and computer knowledge.

Running a website, keeping it updated and in good working order takes some effort and planning. Sharing the load makes it easier – think about setting up a group of people responsible for managing the website.

Whether you plan to do it yourself or have it professionally built, it helps to do some research. Seek advice from IT technicians and people with publishing, public relations, marketing, and internet and programming knowledge. What does your school IT provider say? Do your office and library staff have some thoughts? What about your English coordinator and your Computer Science teacher? Maybe some parents or students are tech-savvy or have already built their own sites. It's even worth talking to other schools with websites to find out about their experience.

Another way to gain some web know-how is to enrol in a training course. Short courses are offered at many TAFE institutes and adult education centres. An introductory course may be all you need to get you started while other courses can help you gain specific skills or experience with programming and software packages.

And don't forget, the Internet is a great free resource. There are plenty of references, helpful tutorials and people offering advice online. A list of online resources is provided at the end of this Toolkit.

Identifying your audience

The first thing to do is identify who the audience will be for your website.

Any internet user worldwide can access your website once it is online. Realistically though, you are probably developing your website to communicate with a smaller audience. Try to keep them in mind when building your site. Your audience may include:

- your own school (e.g. parents, students, teachers)
- the wider school community
- the local community (e.g. people living in your geographic region)
- other students – locally, nationally and internationally
- colleagues and others who might be interested in your school's work
- parents considering enrolling their child in your school.

Once you have decided who your main audience is, it will be easier to define the purpose and structure of your website.

Identifying the website purpose

The second thing you should do is identify the purpose of the website.

- Is it intended to be a promotional tool?
- Is it a resource used by staff, students or parents, or both?
- Is it a collaborative resource with other schools or organisations?

Having a clear sense of the purpose of the website will make it easier to design a site that meets your needs. This enables you to more accurately judge the relevance of proposed content, and it will also help you to measure the effectiveness of the site.

Case study

A journey of web discovery: Gresswell Cluster

The four schools in the Gresswell Cluster (Macleod College and Kingsbury, Rosanna Golf Links and Rosanna primary schools) took website activity one step further when they set up a site to support the Schools for Innovation and Excellence initiative.

The website initially supported the cluster's environmental management, restoration and monitoring projects undertaken on a multi-age, multi-school basis. Since its humble beginnings, the site has developed into a popular information resource for people inside the cluster and around Victoria.

This website is an example of the flexibility a site can offer. Initially catering for students and teachers, the site provided basic information on resources, contacts for excursions and ideas for assessments. It now includes topic areas such as professional development, strategies for embedding the *Principles of Learning*

and Teaching into classroom practice and implementation strategies for the *Victorian Essential Learning Standards*. A section is also dedicated to helping parents support their children's education needs at home.

Setting it up took some self-education and a little advice from the college IT technician. It is managed using the web program, *Front Page*, which the site developer found easy to learn and use. Periodic updates are made every few weeks. Each term a different focus is promoted on the 'contents page' to keep the site looking fresh and new.

Feedback and input is critical in creating a site that your audience wants to use. In putting together the Gresswell Cluster website, teachers were asked what they would like it to include. A bit of 'road-testing' was also undertaken to fine-tune layout and improve navigation for site users.

The site reaches a variety of audiences including teachers, students and families in the cluster region.

Audience reach also extends beyond the local community, with other schools and organisations in Victoria and interstate tapping into it.

People learn about the site in a number of ways including word-of-mouth or by stumbling across it when surfing the Net. Conscious efforts are made to promote it through meetings, professional development presentations and discussions with people who may be potential users.

The website has worked publicity magic for the schools and for cluster initiatives. The cluster has received media coverage and fielded many calls about the site each week over the past 18 months. Also, many external organisations involved in cluster activities are impressed with the site because it provides a tangible output of initiatives undertaken, and they can link their site to the Gresswell Cluster site. These external links help promote and further expand the cluster's work and its online audience.

Developing the website structure

Planning the structure of a website is about organising content so that the audience can move around the site easily.

Developing website content

One of the first things to look at when designing your website structure is what information should be included on the website. It is a good idea to speak with principals, teachers, parents and students about what they think should be included on your website. Some ideas worth considering include:

About us	Teaching and learning
• school contact details – staff and general enquiries • principal's welcome • principal's update • mission and vision • history of the school • school policies • school council • who's who (teacher contact details) • employment opportunities	• curriculum areas • co-curricular activities • curriculum updates

Resources	News and dates
• copies of school newsletters • enrolment information • neighbourhood zones • booklists • school policies • uniform information • before- and after-school care details • parent forms available for downloading (e.g. excursion and camp approvals, permission to publish student work, change/update of contact details, release form for any photography or filming involving students)	• school calendar • upcoming school events • school and student achievements • excursions • exams • curriculum days • parent-teacher evenings • sport days • school term/holiday periods • work experience • music nights • information sessions • school tours • other local schools' events • school news • local community news • Department of Education & Training news

Links	Networks
• local libraries • local government • Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority www.vcaa.vic.edu.au • Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre www.vtac.edu.au • Department of Education & Training www.education.vic.gov.au/ • booklist provider • TAFE www.education.vic.gov.au/tafecourses/ • study guides and strategies www.studygs.net/ • other schools (e.g. feeder primary schools) • Local Learning and Employment Network • local TAFE • Victoria's Vocational Education and Training program website www.education.vic.gov.au/waytogo	• alumni program (i.e. reunions, networking opportunities) • parent and friends associations • community organisations

Websites also provide you with the chance to dabble in the creative side of new media production and communication. While accessing information is a key purpose for your online audience, you can also think about adding some creative content that engages them in a broader view of school life. It can add a different dimension to interacting and communicating with your school community.

Once you know what content you want on the site, the next thing to do is map your pages. This kit includes a sample of a basic website structure (see below). If you don't have a well-defined structure for the way a user will move through the web pages, there is a good chance that they will become lost.

Sample website structure

One of the most basic website structures is called the 3-level website structure.

- Your home page (otherwise known as your index page or top level page) is referred to as a Level 1 page. This page is the main index to your site, not unlike the index in a book or magazine.
- Links from your Level 1 page should connect to Level 2 pages. These are sub-index pages which break down the index items on the Level 1 page even further.
- Level 2 pages normally link to Level 3 pages. Level 3 pages are single topic content pages.

The sample website structure below represents a basic website. Your school may include additional pages at Level 2 and Level 3.

Level 1

Home page

Level 2

About us
(i.e. your school)

Level 2

Teaching and learning

Level 2

Resources

Level 3

e.g. School contact details

Level 3

e.g. Principal welcome

Level 3

e.g. Curriculum areas

Level 3

e.g. Co-curricular activities

Level 3

e.g. School newsletters

Level 3

e.g. Enrolment information
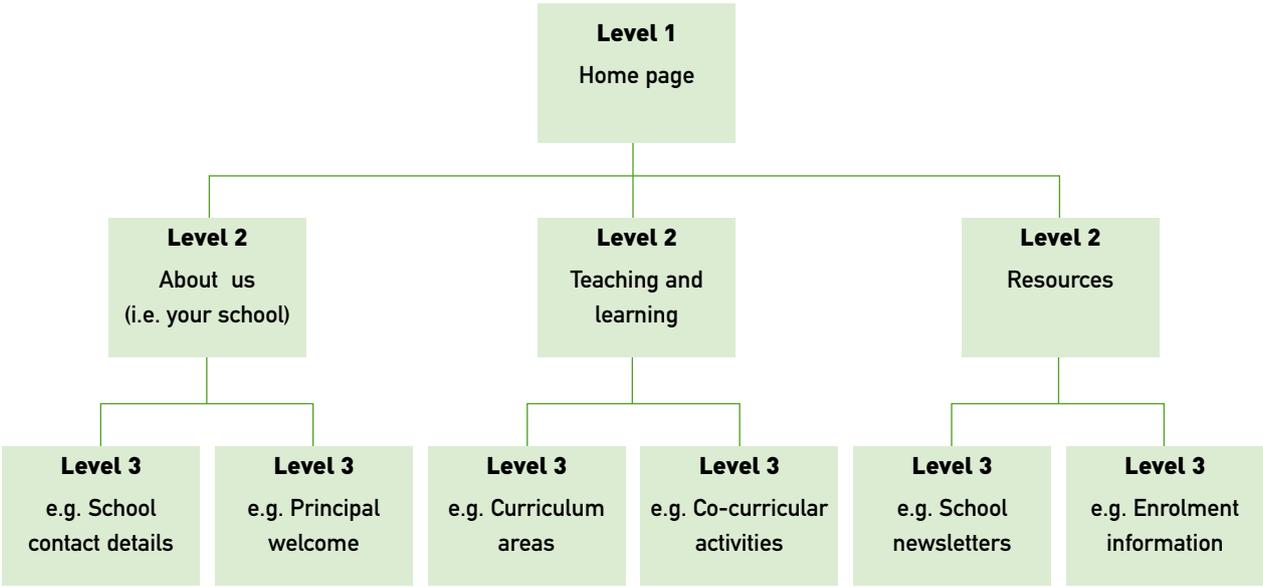
Website design

Your home page provides a gateway to the rest of your site. Try to keep your home page creative, original and fun. You can then offer links to other pages on your website with much more content.

Navigation

The best way to encourage people to visit your site, and to return to it, is to make your website easy to navigate. Navigation is much easier if you have a well-designed website structure and clear directions.

Using coloured backgrounds

Avoid using brightly coloured backgrounds in your website. White or very light-coloured backgrounds are best because sites with dark backgrounds are hard to read for extended periods.

Design tips

Ideas for ensuring your website is user-friendly include:

- Place clear navigation links/buttons on every page.
- Split large pages into groups of smaller ones when appropriate.
- Include links back to the home page or the start of a section on each page.
- If you must have links to pages which are 'under construction' (i.e. to help conceptualise the completed webspace or indicate what is coming), turn off those links until there is content on the page. An 'under construction' notice is frustrating to users.
- Ask someone who has never seen your site before to visit it. Watch what they do and where they go, noting any difficulties they encounter during the process.
- If possible, include a site map (see page 4.11).
- Leave room in your website structure for expansion later on.

Case study

The case of the travelling bear: Vermont Primary School

Having a website gives schools a chance to communicate with the school community in creative ways.

Vermont Primary School's website adds a fun dimension to the practical policy and procedural information living on its site. It set up a subsection that showcases Vernon, the staff mascot, and his travelling expeditions around the world. It's a creative,

entertaining way of incorporating some humour and pictures into the site.

Parents and the wider school community can see a different, relaxed side of staff as opposed to their official roles and responsibilities encountered in day-to-day interactions with the school. Capturing a more personal view can add to relationships parents

and students share with staff as it's always nice to be reminded of the human side of others.

Integrating ideas such as a travelling mascot that is shared among staff can help build morale and a sense of school spirit. Most of all – it's a fun, cooperative activity that is ongoing.

Sample site map

About us
For example:
- school contact details
- principal welcome
- principal update
- mission and values
- history of the school

Teaching and learning
For example:
- curriculum areas
    - English
    - Information Technology
    - Languages
    - Maths
    - Physical Education
    - Science
- co-curricular activities
    - Music
    - Sport etc.
- curriculum updates

Resources
For example:
- copies of school newsletters
- enrolment information
- neighbourhood zones
- booklists
- school policies
    - sun protection
    - excursions

News and dates
For example:
- school calendar
- upcoming school events
- excursions
- exams
- curriculum days

Links
For example:
- local libraries
- local government
- Department of Education & Training
- Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority

Networks
For example:
- alumni program
- parent and friends associations
- community organisations

Tips for writing on the Web

Writing for the web is unique. It provides an interactive experience for the reader that is very different to traditional print media (e.g. written newsletters). It also means there are some additional points to consider when writing content.

What's not different?

Good writing standards are just as important on the Internet as in print media. Because your website might be someone's first impression of your school, it is important to ensure it is an accurate reflection of your school's standards. Spelling mistakes and poor grammar show little attention to detail and will create a negative impression of your school. It is a good idea to consult a style manual such as The *Cambridge Australian English Style Guide* or *News Limited's Style*. Such books will help with all your writing, not just writing for the Web and can be purchased at any good bookstore.

The web writing style

Most content on web pages is scanned rather than read, so it helps if your web writing is direct and concise. Readers respond well to brief sentences, short paragraphs and simple language. Sub-headings, bold text and italicised text can also break up the information.

Avoid using underlined text, as this can be easily mistaken for a link.

Links and anchors

Links and anchors are an integral part of web writing. Links give the reader the ability to interact with a web page. This can be as a link to a 'named anchor' on the same page (i.e. you are taken to a sub-heading on the same webpage). Links can also be to another page on the same site or to an external site.

When using a link, it is important to choose the most suitable words to describe the link. Try to avoid using 'click here' for link descriptions.

Consider including links to local kindergartens, other schools in your area, libraries, local businesses, local government and the Department of Education & Training. It is courteous to let them know that you are considering doing so. It may also be worth contacting some of these groups to ask whether they will provide a reciprocal link to your website.

Using white space

White space is the blank space not used for text or images. Liberal use of white space makes a page look less cluttered and allows the reader to find information more easily.

TIP

Always remember to advertise your website on school promotional material, newsletters, letterheads etc. This helps publicise your web presence and makes it easier for your school community to find you online.

Learning HTML

HTML, or Hyper Text Markup Language, is the language of the World Wide Web. It is used to format text and graphics into files ready for the web. HTML consists of additional formatting code in a text file, called 'tags'. If you select Source from the View menu in Internet Explorer (or the equivalent in your browser) you will see the contents of the HTML file you are browsing.

HTML editing programs are especially designed to make writing HTML easier. Although they can make the task of building your website less time-consuming, it is worthwhile becoming familiar with the actual tags.

The Resources section at the end of this tool provides links to online tutorials, web references and further detail on the technical aspects of building your website.

Adding graphics

Graphics are a great way to capture the attention of visitors entering your site. Keep in mind that not everyone will have the same type of computer, browser or internet connection as you. Too many graphics can actually lose your audience, as the internet can be slow and graphics slow it down further. Visitors tend to lose patience and move on.

Photos from school activities and events are a great way of adding colour and interest. When selecting graphics and images for your website, ensure that you have approval to use them and that you do not breach copyright.

It is important to read the 'Keeping children and staff safe' section on page 4.17 of this kit to ensure that you are following safe procedures when using photos of students and staff.

Accessibility issues

Consider accessibility issues when creating your site. This might include the bandwidth (internet speed) available to your audience or issues related to disabled user access. Most web authoring software includes functionality to improve accessibility (e.g. 'ALT' tags for graphic images). See the Web resources section on page 4.18 for further information.

Testing for accessibility is important if you wish to reach a wide audience. Any website that is developed should be tested on a variety of computers with varying speeds, browsers, settings and screen sizes. In addition, testing your site against the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) guidelines for accessibility is a good way to ensure you are meeting accessibility standards. See the Web resources section on page 4.18 for further information.

There are a variety of tools available to assist you in testing your site's accessibility; some of these are offered free and others will incur a charge. Ask your IT technicians, people with internet and programming knowledge, your computer science teacher, parents or students who are tech-savvy or have already built their own sites, to help.

Testing and approval of your web pages

One important aspect of quality control is ensuring you have appropriate guidelines for publishing and an acceptable procedure for signing pages off before publication. This may involve forming a publication committee that is responsible for approving all material that is electronically published on your school's website. This committee could consist of students, teachers, parents and members of the wider community.

You should also check your website for broken links on a regular basis. Broken links frustrate visitors and could give a poor impression of your school. Automated link checking programs are available that will help you check for broken links.

Storing your web pages

Talk to your Internet Service Provider (ISP) to see if they can store your web pages on their server machine. This is normally a standard service provided by ISPs but you may like to ask the following questions:

- is there a charge for this service?
- how much space is available?
- is there direct File Transfer Protocol (FTP) access? (FTP is used on the Internet to send files from one computer to another. It is the quickest method of transferring files from your computer to your ISP and pages will be updated almost instantly)
- if they do not provide FTP, ask your provider how long it will take to implement changes to the site.

Schools are required to obtain their Internet services from a DE&T-approved service provider. The Department has worked with ISPs to establish a range of affordable internet services for schools.

Maintenance of your website

Maintaining your website is as important as the original design. If visitors feel that the information is outdated or no longer valid they probably won't return (even though you may have updated it in the meantime). Ideally, your website should be constantly updated. This may sound like a huge task but remember that some pages need more attention than others. For example, school policies may require little or no change, whereas a page providing information on upcoming events may need to be updated regularly.

Ideas for maintaining your website:

- Enter today's date on your pages whenever you revise them, so that people know how old the material is (your web software may do this automatically).
- If you have links to other sites, try and include links to the home page rather than actual pages on their site. Home pages are less likely to be altered than specific pages in an external site.
- If you include the school newsletter on your website, assign a regular day of the week and time that it is added. Parents will then learn when they are able to access the information. Consider file formats that can be used by people with accessibility issues (e.g. Rich Text Format (RTF) and Portable Document Format (PDF)).
- Prioritise the pages that need regular updating and ensure that someone is responsible for managing these web pages.

Case study

New website attracts new students: Serpell Primary School

Serpell Primary School created a simple website that downloads quickly and is aimed at encouraging people to visit the school. Principal Wilma

Culton reports that the website paid for itself within three months through prospective parents who found the school via a web search.

The successful strategy included tuning the website to rank highly under Google searches and a 'Parents' section with testimonials.

Case study

Saving resources via the school website: Mount View Primary School

At Mount View Primary School, 520 copies of the School Charter were downloaded from the website in one year. If those online enquiries had to be handled manually, the cost would be something like this:

Parent of a prospective student phones the school and requests the School Charter			x 520
Administrator	Answers the phone, takes the person's details, puts a copy of the School Charter in an envelope and sends it	2 mins	16.4 hours
Document cost	Print, collate, bind Envelope Stamp	$3.00 $0.20 $0.50	
			$1924

Counting newsletters, forms and price lists a total of 9071 documents were downloaded from the website in the same year. By moving high-volume and high-cost documents onto their website, Mount View Primary School achieved significant savings.

Keeping children and staff safe

The safety of students and staff is of paramount importance when publishing a school website. This includes obvious things such as not publishing addresses and telephone details, and not publishing details that might enable the identification of individual staff and students. If your home page provides an email link to the school, the mailbox should be checked by teachers first.

If you wish to publish student photographs or student work on the web you need to make sure that you get signed permission from parents using a release form (see template on page 4.19).

Here are some simple steps you can take to protect students when publishing student images or work on the web:

- Do not publish students' last names or other information that might make students individually identifiable.
- Do not publish students' personal contact details (e.g. home phone numbers, addresses or personal email addresses). Where contact details are to be included use class email addresses or the school's telephone number.
- Where possible, publish group photographs rather than individual images of students. It's preferable to publish the image of a class or a group activity, and identify the student group generically (e.g. 'Grade 4A', or the 'Year 7 hockey team').

Web resources

The Internet offers an abundance of resources to help you build your website. You can start by searching with Google (www.google.com). Search using terms like 'website design'. You might make use of the many website templates available for free or for a small cost. Here are some sites that offer free web pages:

- **Aussie School House** (www.schools.ash.org.au/) Aussie School House, with Microsoft and Optus Vision, are providing schools with the opportunity to store their pages on a school listing with 10 MB free disk space each.
- **Geocities** (geocities.yahoo.com/) Home pages up to 1 MB in size are offered to users.
- **PowerNet** (www.pwrnet.com/) Personal home pages up to 100 k are available to anyone.
- **Tripod** (www.tripod.lycos.com/) Tripod offers free 100k home pages using a forms-based creation system when you register. The main rule is that you may only have one page. If you accidentally create an extra page you are required to delete it.

The Department of Education & Training resources:
- Website Tool Kit (www.sofweb.vic.edu/toolkit/)
- Internet Services for schools (www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/ict/edunet/compare.htm)

For information on the more technical aspects of website design, you can start browsing the following sites:

- webreferences.com provides information about the Internet, from learning how to use the web through to advanced web design.
- World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) (www.w3.org/)
- www.egov.vic.gov.au provides a link to the Victorian Government website guidelines and detailed information regarding accessibility.

Online tutorials help you pick up skills quickly. Here are a few sites offering tutorials and advice on programming language:

- an introduction to Java Script tutorial (www.w3schools.com/js/default.asp)
- an introduction to HTML tutorial (www.w3schools.com/html/default.asp, www.htmlcodetutorial.com/)

Release Form for Publication of Student Work on the Internet

WHERE STUDENT IS UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE

From: _____ Position: _____

Name   *(i.e. teacher/principal)*

Class/subject area: _____

School name: _____ Phone no: _____

Date.........../.........../...........

Student's name: _____

Dear _____

[Insert name of parent or guardian of student]

The schoolwork* of the student named above has been selected for publication on the Internet at: [insert web address here]

Permission is granted to:

(please tick relevant sections below)

☐ publish the student's schoolwork on the Internet

☐ name the student on the Internet in direct reference to the published work

☐ only publish the student's first name

☐ publish a photo of the student

Name of work: _____

Reason for publication: _____

Please sign below to give permission for publication.

_____

(Signature of parent/guardian)

_____

(Print name clearly)

Date.........../.........../...........

*Please note that student work published on web pages can be accessed by a global audience.

4.19

5 Using this tool

1. **Bring together the principal and relevant staff to determine the role you would like the media to play in your school's activities.**

2. **Identify what media you are familiar with and who you would like to work with during the year.**

3. **Use this tool to help you identify opportunities to work with the media and how to manage your ongoing relationship with them.**

Media coverage can help to build a positive school image by celebrating your achievements and building school pride. It also keeps your community informed about your school and its activities.

The local media always want good stories on local issues or a local angle on a national story. Some local papers allocate specific pages to school material and there is an education section in most major newspapers.

Your school can be proactive in developing a good working relationship with your local media. You can use the media to:

- draw attention to school events, achievements or issues affecting the school
- improve perceptions about your school
- develop your school's voice in the community
- encourage sponsorship from local businesses and community groups.

This kit contains information on:

- getting to know your local media
- contacting the media
- types of media coverage
- story ideas
- using photos
- tips for building good relationships with the media
- spokespeople
- managing issues
- developing a media kit
- advertising your school.

Templates/samples included:

- Education Times Guidelines
- Education Times Story Pro Forma
- Parent/Guardian Recording Authorisation Form
- Sample Media Release
- Sample Fact Sheet
- Sample Media Alert.

Getting to know your local media

One of the best ways to get to know the media is to assign someone within your school to familiarise themself with local newspapers, magazines, and radio and TV programs. It is useful to identify the amount of coverage that schools receive from each of the different media outlets and the stories they are interested in covering.

Remember that no outlet is too small and often the local papers circulated in residential areas are more widely read in your community than the national dailies. You may also get a list of any education advertising supplements in which your school might promote itself.

Some of the media in your area might include:

Print	Broadcast	Internet
• weekly newspapers • weekly magazines (i.e. *Melbourne Weekly* consortium) • local or regional business magazines or newspapers • daily newspapers • metropolitan or regional magazines • trade, industry or specialist publications • community group or association newsletters (e.g. Neighbourhood Watch).	• community radio programs • regional radio networks • TV and radio news programs • radio talk shows.	• online newspapers or bulletins • e-zines (e.g. Australia.edu online magazine www.australia.edu/magazine/; Boomerang magazine – student forum www.boomerangmagazine.com.au/default.htm) • community group sites (e.g. sports clubs, environment groups) • local council website • library websites • school website • industry websites • community websites (e.g. ourcommunity.com.au, Better Health Channel www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au, Go for your Life www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au, Youth Central www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au (particularly for event listings).

Contacting the media

Do you have any media contacts already? Personal contact with journalists, whether from previous coverage, family and friends, or just a friendly phone call, can be the quickest way to gain media coverage of your school.

If you don't have any contacts, identify the name of the most suitable journalist or editor. You can do this by looking through your local paper and finding out the name of the journalist who writes about education issues.

If you are cold-calling a newspaper or local radio station, you can ask for the name of the most relevant person to your story (e.g. the news editor, features editor or picture editor for photos).

It is advisable to get to know journalists before you approach them with a story idea. Take some time to call them up and organise a meeting to introduce yourself. You could suggest having a coffee together or inviting them to the school. If they are busy, you might consider going out to meet them.

Once you have made contact with someone from the media, make sure that you record their details (i.e. name, phone number, fax, email and postal address). Over time, you should develop a contact list that can be accessed easily and quickly. It is important to keep this list up-to-date as people working in the media move around frequently. Think about reviewing your list every six months.

You should also consider submitting story ideas to DE&T's publication, *Education Times*. Guidelines and a story pro forma are included in this Toolkit.

TIP

Websites are often a good starting point for obtaining the contact details, advertising guidelines and names of relevant journalists and media outlets.

TIP

Liaise with other government schools that fall into the same distribution areas to coordinate media opportunities so you are not competing for valuable space.

Case study

Enjoying the benefits of regular contact with the media: Murtoa P–12 College

Murtoa P–12 College has experienced first-hand the benefits of working with the media. The school enjoys regular contact with staff from their local newspaper, *Wimmera Times Mail*, and benefits from frequent coverage throughout the calendar year.

The relationship developed after the principal made a conscious effort to communicate regularly with the paper.

Each week the principal and assistant principal set aside time to brainstorm activities, events and other points of interest happening around the school. This may include long-term staff departures, the opening of a memorial garden, a building project or successful sports teams.

Once a list has been generated, the principal sends an email outlining these ideas to the newspaper's news desk. The principal ensures that appropriate contact details are provided for each topic. This allows journalists to contact the relevant staff member directly rather than having to navigate through the school's switchboard.

Because images provide newspapers with quick and appealing stories, the school also flags any upcoming photo opportunities. As a result, journalists often come out to visit the school.

The school usually features in the newspaper 2–3 times per month. This amount of coverage is an important source of pride for Murtoa P–12 College's school community.

Types of media coverage

There are several ways that you can be represented in the media. Types of coverage may include news, features and listings.

Type	Elements
News	A news item is linked to a specific date, a one-off event or a new piece of information (e.g. your school's recent success at a state championship or the participation or endorsement by a celebrity of a local school event).
Features	Features come in all shapes and sizes and cover a range of themes. A 'human interest' feature is a personal story such as a student's triumph over challenging circumstances. An 'analytical' feature could be an opinion piece, or a look at the background to current enrolment statistics. Feature articles depend more on personal contact with journalists.
Listings	Listings provide information on forthcoming events. This is particularly important for local radio as they will often cover an event if they know about it in advance and can send a reporter to attend. They are much less likely to cover an event retrospectively.

Story ideas

Every day your school is involved in a range of activities that the media may be interested in covering. Use the school newsletter as a springboard for story ideas.

Think about your school's strengths and expertise. This may be in areas such as:

• school diversity and multiculturalism
• sports, the arts or community service
• academic achievements
• strong family orientation and/or relationships to the community
• discipline and respect
• innovation or progress in some aspect of education
• links with industry through Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs.

Ideas for stories include:

Upcoming events

These provide excellent photo opportunities, which are key to local media attendance:

• fetes, plays, musicals, awards
• visits from Members of Parliament, celebrities, or prominent local citizens
• visiting international students
• community service projects.

Sporting activities

• school athletics, swimming, cross-country etc.
• inter-school competitions
• successful students at state or national championships.

TIP

Almost all media outlets have a sports desk. Send any sport-related media materials directly to the sports desk to increase your chances of gaining coverage.

Events in the local or broader media environment

- school initiatives proposed to help students gain good driving experience
- successful relief effort organised by the students for an international disaster (e.g. collecting blankets for Bushfire Appeal).

School projects affecting the wider community

- environmental projects (e.g. beach clean-up, tree planting)
- participation in a local council event or competition
- student technology support for less computer-savvy community members
- reading groups led by local residents.

Education-related issues

- profiles of students with exceptional VCE or VCAL results
- profiles of students embarking on interesting career paths, apprenticeships or tertiary courses
- awards (e.g. Duke of Edinburgh's Award, literacy competitions, sports championships)
- competitions entered by students
- combined inter-school co-curricular projects.

A school event, achievement or project may have broader public appeal. In these cases you may consider contacting media outside your local area (e.g. state daily newspaper). It is also a good idea to keep a library of all your media coverage. You can use this to recall what coverage you received in previous years, and identify what worked well and what was less effective. It can also help to identify the journalist who covered a particular story in the past.

Using photos

Photos bring stories to life. A story is much more likely to be printed with a good photo, especially in local papers. Even a photo with a caption is a good way to get coverage.

You can prepare for the use of photos by:

- getting to know a local photographer with news experience and inviting them to school events and other 'photo opportunities'
- building up a bank of good quality photos. Often the media will ask for photos at the last minute and it is useful to have some at your disposal
- knowing the laws relating to publishing photos of minors and securing permission before using photos (see Parent/ Guardian Recording Authorisation Form provided in this kit). In circumstances where consent cannot be obtained in time, consider using long-shots or other photos where students cannot be identified (i.e. non-front-on angle).

You can also ask the media to send you a digital version of any photos they have taken. They are usually happy to send you the photo as long as you agree to include 'courtesy of (media outlet)' when you use the photos.

TIP

Don't miss out on any photo opportunities. Equip all groups leaving the school with a camera. Encourage parents, teachers and students to hand in good photos to be included in media materials.

Tips for building good relationships with the media

Building and maintaining good relationships with the media requires continuous effort. Most media outlets work within tight deadlines. Try to understand their needs so that you can work towards making their job easier.

If it is possible, try to arrange to speak with the media face-to-face. This gives you the opportunity to get your point across better, build rapport and listen to their questions more carefully.

Below are some tips for working with the media which can help to build stronger relationships.

Consider the way you communicate with the media

There are some simple ways that you can make your communication with the media more effective. These include:

- Stay clear of jargon, technical terminology and obscure words.
- Use correct grammar, spelling and punctuation, especially with quotes.
- Be accurate with information, facts and figures.
- Keep sentences short and succinct.
- Use conversational English.
- Maintain eye contact, speak slowly and remain calm. Don't be afraid to say you don't agree.
- Always be friendly (never aggressive, defensive or abrupt).
- Know their production deadlines.

Be a credible and reliable source

Credibility is critical for journalists. Some guidelines on improving the way the media views your school include:

- Always get back to journalists with a response, even if it is only to say that you are still in the process of getting an answer.
- Never suggest you have a great story or photo opportunity – that is for them to decide.
- Offer stories that are suitable for their audience and information that will make their job easier.
- Check the spelling of all names – journalists expect that the information provided is accurate.
- Be accessible, return their calls and respect their deadlines.
- Understand if you can't see the story prior to publication.
- Stick to the facts and avoid making unsubstantiated claims.

Deliver information according to their needs

Ask your media contacts how they would like to receive information. Some journalists prefer email over fax or vice versa. Others may appreciate a phone call prior to sending through information or afterwards.

By asking how the information should be delivered, you are showing respect for the journalist and increasing your chance of obtaining coverage.

At the same time, don't forget that timing is everything. You may have done everything according to the journalist's needs but your story could still be overlooked because you missed the deadline or it was a busy news period.

Sometimes you can prepare materials in advance of a story. For example, if you know details such as who will be involved and when the activity will occur, you can have this information ready and insert the final details at the last minute. This can help to get the materials to the media in a timely fashion.

Plan ahead and consider contacting the media at 'slow' times during the day or year. For example, newspapers tend to be quieter in the mornings and pick up pace later in the day. The best way to learn about this is by speaking to your local journalist. Be mindful, you won't always get media coverage, but there will definitely be another opportunity.

TIP

Think about visiting your local media outlet and delivering a media release and photos to them personally. They are more likely to take up the offer.

Case study

Putting media relations skills into practice: Camberwell High School

Camberwell High School principal, Elida Brereton, is no stranger to the media. Her school has enjoyed coverage from local and state outlets spanning television, print and radio news.

The school recognises that building media relationships takes time. It pays to plan and be organised and the school has also benefited from employing a part-time promotions and publicity officer.

Stories are constantly 'dripped through' to the media via press releases and photos. Not all stories are published, but when they are, the school finds journalists appreciate this material as it cuts down their workload. It also has a media contact list and finds knowing the name of the person you need to speak with assists in building rapport.

The principal's relationships with media are guided by trust. Ms Brereton finds it best to be reasonable with their enquiries and not change the rules or situation agreed upon. She also believes it is important not to control what students say. Instead, you can maintain some selectivity in who is offered as potential interviewees. She never sits in on interviews with students either as she finds giving the media some space is part of building trust.

Alongside trust, flexibility is important. Media often run to deadlines and the school has found they sometimes turn up outside agreed times. While this can be inconvenient, the media are accommodated and they appreciate the school's efforts. However, this is balanced by the need to be reasonable with them. The school has found that some media requests have to be turned down due to timing and resource constraints.

It also helps to have some practical parameters in place. The school insists media adhere to privacy laws and obtain appropriate permissions. It also tries to set up times and locations for filming or interviewing to minimise any potential disruption or intrusion to students.

Strong community networks have also added to building media contacts and coverage for Camberwell High School. Rotary representatives sit on its school council and the principal serves on the local city council's Safety Advisory Committee. These networks lead to word-of-mouth recommendations that feed into community and media networks. Ms Brereton finds this often means more people know about what the school is doing and that increases the chance of the media getting word and chasing it up.

The school has found that once you have a reputation for working well with the media it sticks. Journalists talk among themselves and the school has been approached on several occasions by some media sources it has not dealt with before.

The school keeps an album of all media coverage of its life and events in its lobby. Parents, staff, and visitors are always impressed by the school's positive coverage.

Spokespeople

Your school might consider assigning a staff member as the media spokesperson, so that they have authority to speak on your school's behalf. They can also provide the media with opinions on broader education or local community issues. Your principal is often the most appropriate choice.

The spokesperson's role is made easier by having some well-rehearsed key points you wish to make in the lead-up to pitching your story or dealing with a difficult issue.

When you are contacted by the media, it is acceptable to say you are not sure, or need time, provided you actually do call them back promptly. Not responding can ruin your credibility and chances for future coverage.

Ask if it is possible to have a draft set of questions from the journalist so you have time to consider your responses and prepare fully for the interview.

Managing issues

The media are drawn to issues and crises. There may be a time when your school is at the centre of an issue and the media are chasing you up for further information. If you find yourself in this situation, the first thing you should do is contact the Department's Media Branch (9637 2871) for advice on how to proceed. The Media Branch is staffed by experienced journalists who are available to help you manage issues in your school.

It is wise to never say 'no comment'. Here are some phrases to manage the media while you are forming a plan of action in consultation with DE&T:

'We are aware of the problem and are looking into all of its aspects.'

'We are aware of the situation and more information will be provided once it's available.'

'We are aware of the issue and are undertaking the following…'.

Developing a media kit

A media kit provides a comprehensive package of all the information needed to cover your event or story.

Media kits can include an array of information packaged in different formats such as photos or profiles on school staff and students. Below are some of the basic elements that you can include in your kit.

Media release

A media release should tell the story as you would like to see it presented, using a news style. It gives you a chance to show your school, event or issue in the best possible light. But whatever you write must be truthful and backed up with facts. It should always cover: WHO was involved; WHAT happened; WHERE it happened; WHEN it happened; and WHY it happened (if relevant).

Basic tips include:

• Present weighty, important facts early on, descending to least relevant (known as the 'inverted pyramid' approach).
• Use opening sentences to summarise the most important facts or points for readers.
• Keep your media release to one page with less than 15 short paragraphs.
• Include quotes throughout your story; they help break up the text and give the journalist a primary source of information.
• Include a short, catchy headline.
• Use correct grammar, punctuation and spelling.
• Don't overload the media release with detail.
• Use your school's letterhead.
• List full contact details at the end of the media release.

This kit provides a sample media release. For more details on writing a media release go to:

• www.press-release-writing.com/10_essential_tips.htm
• www.prinfluences.com

Fact sheet

A fact sheet often accompanies a media release. It is a list of facts about an organisation, event or issue presented in bullet point or 'question and answer' style. It delivers background information to journalists without cluttering your story (see sample fact sheet provided in this Toolkit).

Media alert

A media alert is a one-page notice advising the media about your upcoming event (see sample media alert provided in this Toolkit). It is always on letterhead paper with information clearly set out and includes:

• a catchy headline
• only a handful of important facts
• details of WHAT, WHERE and WHEN (including date, time, location, directions of how to get there, details of parking, and whether refreshments or food will be provided).

Advertising your school

One of the challenges of working with the media is that you have limited control over whether they will publish your story and what content they will include. This differs from a paid advertisement, which allows you to determine the content and timing of your coverage.

There may be times during the year when you are willing to pay for media coverage (e.g. advertising for new enrolments or promoting an upcoming event). Leader newspapers, for example, provide an opportunity for schools to advertise in the Education Supplement that coincides with Education Week.

Here are some things to consider when advertising:

• Decide on an advertising budget and stick to it.

• Ask about readership profiles and circulation to determine if the audience for the advertisement is the one you want to reach and if it is wide enough for your purpose.

• Be clear about your message and test the advertisement by showing it to other people.

• Make use of the free editorial space option that often accompanies paid advertising.

• Consider teaming up with other schools when purchasing your advertising to be more cost effective.

• If there are any students appearing in your advertisement you are required to obtain permission. Relevant permission forms can be found at www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/intranet/communications/templates.htm

Government Agency Advertising Requirements

All Victorian government departments and agencies, including schools, are required to purchase their advertising through an appointed media buying agency. This ensures value for money and an opportunity for discounted rates.

From 1 September 2006, all advertising, including recruitment, is to be planned and booked with two new service providers:

• ZenithOptimedia Melbourne – for recruitment advertising

• Mitchell & Partners – for all other advertising. Examples of this kind of advertising are school fetes, open days and school plays. It also includes paid advertising in guides such as The Good Schools Guide and Choosing a School.

By using the appointed media buying agencies you will have access to:

- the best rates in the market for media placement
- media planning, booking and buying
- media advice and strategy
- specialist advice (e.g. communicating with people from different cultures)
- creative and dispatch services
- translation services
- training services.

Recruitment Advertising

This includes all advertising for individual applicants for specific positions and usually appears in newspapers or on the Internet. You may use recruitment advertising to attract applicants for principal class, teaching or non-teaching positions.

Steps to booking recruitment advertising

Step 1 Contact ZenithOptimedia and advise them of your upcoming requirement.
Sarah Moon
ZenithOptimedia
Level 2/55 Southbank Blvd
Southbank 3006
Ph: 03 9685 3145
Email: sarah.moon@zenithoptimedia.com.au

Step 2 Prepare and submit your advertising requirements (include size, where you would like your advertisement to appear, and date of placement). Ask for advice from ZenithOptimedia if required.

Step 3 Receive your media plan (details of the advertising) from ZenithOptimedia, and undertake review and discussions as required. Based on your discussions, modifications may be made to the media plan. Once completed, ZenithOptimedia will give you a final plan for approval.

Step 4 To approve the plan you need to fill out a Master Agency Media Service (MAMS) booking form. You will find all the information your need to fill in the MAMS form in your media plan from ZenithOptimedia. You will also need to obtain relevant financial delegation approval and signature. Once the MAMS form has been completed fax it to ZenithOptimedia. This will give ZenithOptimedia official confirmation to purchase the media plan on your behalf.

A MAMS form can be downloaded at: www.dpc.vic.gov.au/communications

Steps to developing material and forwarding your recruitment advertisements

If you already have access, you must use FastArt to produce and send off your recruitment advertisements. FastArt is an online tool you can use to produce your own recruitment advertisements and then send them to the media. If you are uncertain about how to use this tool, contact ZenithOptimedia for assistance. Contact ZenithOptimedia to arrange access to FastArt software.

If you don't have access to FastArt, you can purchase the in-house production services provided by ZenithOptimedia.

Steps to using the creative service provided by ZenithOptimedia

Step 1 Let ZenithOptimedia know that you would like to use their design service.

Step 2 Send ZenithOptimedia your approved text for the advertisement and also specifications (include size, media and date placement).

Step 3 ZenithOptimedia will then send you a proof for your approval. Review and, if required, re-submit the proof to ZenithOptimedia with alterations.

Be careful to check your proof thoroughly. Author's correction costs will apply after two sets of alterations, and this will be a direct cost to you.

Step 4 Receive your revised proof from Zenith Optimedia. Once you are happy with the proof, sign and fax it to ZenithOptimedia. They will then send your material to the relevant media on your behalf.

Advertising (other than recruitment)

Advertising can be allocated to two categories, campaign and non-campaign.

Campaign advertising includes all advertising designed to inform, educate, motivate or change behaviour. It will generally appear in a mix of media such as television, newspapers, direct mail, cinema, radio or posters. An example where you might require campaign advertising is to gain enrolments for a new school. You should contact your regional office for advice if you are planning an advertising campaign of this nature.

Non-campaign advertising includes notices about school fetes, plays or open days. Non-campaign advertising often appears in newspapers, on the radio or the Internet. This type of advertising generally requires minimal creative input and strategy planning. Deadlines for booking, production, approval and distribution to media are often extremely tight.

Steps to booking advertising (other than recruitment)

Step 1 Contact Mitchell & Partners and let them know about your project. Provide them with indicative timelines and requirements.

To contact Mitchell & Partners
email: mams.briefs@mitchells.com.au
Telephone enquiries should be directed to:
Anthony Clarke on 9690 5544

If Anthony is unavailable call Dan Andrew on 9690 5544.

Step 2 Prepare and submit a written media brief/instructions (include size, media and date of placement) and ask for advice from Mitchell & Partners regarding media placement if required.

Step 3 Receive your media plan from Mitchell & Partners and undertake review and discussions as required. Based on your discussions, modifications may be made to the media plan. Once completed, Mitchell & Partners will submit a final plan to you for approval.

Step 4 To approve the plan you need to fill out a MAMS booking form. You will find all the information you need to fill in the MAMS form in your media plan from Mitchell & Partners. You will also need to obtain relevant financial delegation approval and signature. Once the MAMS form has been completed fax it to Mitchell & Partners. This will give Mitchell & Partners official confirmation to purchase the media plan on your behalf.

Step 5 You will receive a confirmed schedule of your booked advertising from Mitchell & Partners.

Step 6 If your advertising material already exists send it to Mitchell & Partners. Mitchell & Partners will send your material to the relevant media on your behalf.

Steps to using the creative service provided by Mitchell & Partners

If you need your advertisements to be created you can purchase the services provided by Mitchell & Partners.

Step 1 Let Mitchell & Partners know that you would like to use their design service.

Step 2 Submit your approved text for the advertisement and also specifications (include size, media and date placement).

Step 3 Mitchell & Partners will then send you a proof for your approval. Review and, if required, re-submit the proof to Mitchell & Partners with alterations.

Step 4 Receive your revised proof from Mitchell & Partners. Once you are happy with the proof, sign and fax it to Mitchell & Partners. They will then send your material to the relevant media on your behalf.

Creating Your Advertisement

You have the following options for creating advertisements:

- In-house, if you possess graphic design skills and professional design software (QuarkXpress or InDesign). (Note that Microsoft Office software is not compatible with commercial printing processes.) Alternatively, you can use FastArt software (contact ZenithOptimedia for access to this software).

- Purchase the creative services of ZenithOptimedia (for the development of job advertisements) and Mitchell & Partners (for other non-campaign advertisements), or

- Use a creative agency.

Please be aware that if there are any students appearing in your advertisement you are required to obtain parental permission. Relevant permission forms can be found at www.eduweb.vic.gov. au/intranet/communications/templates.htm

For more information about advertising please contact the DE&T Communications Division on 9637 3487.

Education Times Guidelines

Background

Education Times is a well-established fortnightly publication produced by the Department of Education & Training (DE&T), targeting teachers, principals, school support staff and other key stakeholders. It is also circulated to DE&T central and regional office staff, education authorities such as the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) and the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA), government, school council members, members of the Victorian Parliament and some 600 paid subscribers. Research has shown that most copies of *Education Times* are read by at least two people.

The circulation averages more than 70,000 per fortnight, with 20 copies produced per annum (five copies per school term).

Education Times is divided into four basic sections: news, advertorial supplements, opportunities and display advertising.

Editorial submissions are assessed on their individual news merit and relevance to the Victorian Government education sector. *Education Times* reserves the right to reject, modify and edit story submissions. The newspaper welcomes story submissions and ideas that meet the following criteria.

1. Promote and celebrate excellence in Victorian government school education

Story topics could include; sport, professional development, health and well-being, literacy, numeracy and general news submissions. For further information please contact the editor, David Sheridan via email: sheridan.david.d@edumail.vic.gov.au or by phone on 9637 2914.

2. *Education Times* does not publish any paid-for editorial or comment pieces that would lead readers to reasonably infer that the Department endorses the opinion or comment.

The Department is legally liable for any civil action, including any defamation action, which may arise from the publication of the opinion or comment. As the Department cannot test the truth or otherwise of the editorial or comment, it will err on the side of caution and not publish paid-for editorials.

Education Times Story Pro Forma

Do you have a story suggestion? *Education Times* would love to hear about it. Fill out the form below and email: sheridan.david.d@edumail.vic.gov.au

Alternatively, phone 9637 2914 to discuss in person.

WHO: Who is involved with the project/activity and who is the appropriate contact person?

_____

_____

_____

WHAT: What is the crux of the news story? PLEASE INCLUDE FULL-LENGTH QUOTES

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

HOW: How did the project/activity come about?

_____

_____

WHERE: Where is the project/activity taking place?

_____

_____

_____

WHEN: When is the project/activity taking place?

_____

_____

_____

Are there photos?

If so, please include high resolution digital photographs in jpeg format. To ensure the digital photographs are high resolution, you will need to select the high quality setting, or large image size, from your digital camera's settings menu before you take the photographs. High resolution jpeg files are over 500 K in size and, as such, you will only be able to send a limited number per email.

Submitted photographs should only feature students who have written parental permission to appear in publications. Photos featuring students without parental permission to appear in publications will not run in the newspaper.

Parent/Guardian Recording Authorisation Form

(FOR STUDENTS UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE)

I, _____ , the parent/legal guardian of the student named below, agree to and provide permission for the photographic, video, audio or any other form of electronic recording of the named student to be used by [*insert media outlet name*].

I acknowledge and agree that ownership of any photographic, video, audio or any other form of electronic recording will be retained by [*insert media outlet name*].

I authorise the use or reproduction of any recording referred to above for any reasonable purpose within the discretion of [*insert media outlet name*] without acknowledgment and without being entitled to remuneration or compensation.

I understand and agree that if I wish to withdraw this authorisation, it will be my responsibility to inform [*insert media outlet name*] via the school principal.

Date: /   /   Signature: _____

                                              (parent/guardian)

Name of parent/guardian: _____

Contact telephone number: _____

Name of student: _____

Name of school: _____

Name of principal: _____

School telephone number: _____

Media Release

Use letterhead.

News style:
WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE,
WHY and HOW

Insert date at top.

Include 'media release'.

Use a catchy headline to grab the editor's attention.

A sub-heading can be used.

FIRST PARAGRAPH is the LEAD – state the most important fact succinctly. Try to keep it to 30 words or less.

KIS – Keep it Simple!
Keep it short, brief and avoid fancy or technical words.

Funnel points down from most to least important.

Break up text paragraphs with snappy quotes.

Mix up paragraphs – mostly short peppered with some longer ones.

Use correct grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Keep to one page.
(extra information can go in a background filler such as profiles or fact sheets)

List contact person's name and contact details.

Melville Secondary College
Education for tomorrow's adults today

16 Sturt St, Melville
Tel: +61 3 9598 5566
Fax: +61 3 9598 5577
Email: info@melville.gov.au
www.melville.gov.au

14 October 2005

MEDIA RELEASE

MELVILLE SECONDARY COLLEGE STUDENTS 'ON TRACK' WITH EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND UNIVERSITY

One year on – graduating class of 2005 a success

Melville Secondary College's graduating class of 2005 are employed, in training or studying at a TAFE institute or university, according to the *On Track* survey, released today by the Education and Training Minister.

College principal Joe Education congratulated the former students on their achievements.

'No matter whether they have taken up an apprenticeship or traineeship, are undertaking further study or are in paid work, the class of 2005 should be proud of their accomplishments,'
Mr Education said.

The survey reveals that of the 120 Year 12 students at Melville Secondary College in 2006:

• 66.5 per cent are continuing their education in university or TAFE

• one in five or 19.7 per cent are working

• 13.8 per cent have taken up an apprenticeship or traineeship.

Mr Education said the *On Track* data was further evidence that Melville Secondary College was a great place for young people to learn.

'At Melville Secondary College we are proud that our diverse curriculum has provided students with a range of different pathways,' he said.

'Our school prides itself on preparing students with individual needs for further study, training, employment, and career choices.'

*Interviews available with school principal and former students

For more information contact:
Joe Education, 0411 532 220 or 9598 5544
jeducation@melville.vic.gov.au

Fact Sheet

FACT SHEET

ON TRACK AT MELVILLE SECONDARY COLLEGE

On Track data

On Track is a Victorian Government initiative designed to ensure that Years 10–12 government and non-government school students are on a pathway to further education, training or employment after leaving school.

On Track builds on the Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) program available in government schools. MIPs assist 15–19 year-old students with individual career and education plans and support to implement those plans.

On Track has been operating since 2003 and will ensure that Years 10–12 students are:

- contacted after leaving school
- assisted with further advice if they are not studying or in ful-time employment

At Melville Secondary College the *On Track* data has revealed:

- 66.5 per cent are continuing their education in university or TAFE
- one in five or 19.7 per cent are working
- 13.8 per cent have taken up an apprenticeship or traineeship.

…Page 1 of 1

Melville Secondary College
16 Sturt St, Melville
Tel: +61 3 9598 5566
Fax: +61 3 9598 5577
Email: info@melville.gov.au
www.melville.gov.au

5.23

Use letterhead.

Melville Secondary College
Education for tomorrow's adults today

16 Sturt St, Melville
Tel: +61 3 9598 5566
Fax: +61 3 9598 5577
Email: info@melville.gov.au
www.melville.gov.au

Insert date at the top.

1 April 2006

Include 'media alert'.

MEDIA ALERT

A catchy headline will grab the editor's attention.

ONE HUNDRED MELVILLE SECONDARY COLLEGE STUDENTS HULA HOOP FOR CHARITY

One hundred Melville Secondary College students are aiming to raise $10,000 for local charities with a non-stop hula hoop session.

Include two to three paragraphs covering who and what.

The charity event, which has been organised by students, will be held at Melville Secondary College next Friday.

Participating students have received overwhelming sponsorship support for their effort and will receive up to $1 from friends, families and local businesses for each minute they hula hoop.

State exact time the event starts (i.e. not 9am for 10am start).

When: Date

Give full details of where the event is taking place including how to enter the venue, parking details and Melways references.

Time: Exact time the event will begin and end.

Where: Location including details of where to park.

Interviews Timeframe – when can the media interview you on the day? (i.e. principal and participating students will be available for interviews between 11.00am–12.00pm).

Make sure your venue is easily accessible for the media.

If you can provide interview and photo opportunities give details.

Excellent photo opportunities

Include name of contact person and all contact details.

For more information contact:
Joe Education, 0411 532 220 or 9598 5544
jeducation@melville.vic.gov.au

5.24

6

Using this tool

1. Bring together staff, school council members, and parents (e.g. representatives from the Parent Association) to discuss opportunities to work with the community.

2. Identify the type and level of community involvement your school wishes to engage in.

3. Use this tool to identify who makes up your community and how you can create opportunities to work together with the local community.

Connecting with the community is about positioning schools as learning centres where teachers, students, and their families work in partnership with business, industry, and the wider community.

It is important to remember that your school makes up a significant part of your local community. Other community groups are often interested in working with you because schools provide a hub for further connections within the community.

This kit contains information on:

- the benefits of connecting with the community
- understanding your community
- ideas for working with your community
- developing your *Annual Report to the School Community*
- school leaders and representatives
- evaluating your community involvement.

The benefits of connecting with the community

You may ask yourself why you need to work with people outside your own school. One important reason is that collaboration with the community can improve learning outcomes for students, as they are exposed to a wider range of experiences and opportunities.

More specific reasons for working with your community are that it can:

- enhance the visibility and reputation of your school

- contribute to feelings of school pride

- offer the opportunity to run specialist programs, such as LOTE, Music and the Arts across schools

- encourage continuity of learning between the early, middle and later years

- create pathways for students to enter further education, training or employment

- enhance the provision of resources and facilities (e.g. sharing of the school hall, sports centres, information technology)

- foster a collaborative working environment

- encourage involvement in school events and activities

- build community partnerships

- assist with school fundraising

- develop students' knowledge of their community and a sense of belonging to it.

Case study

Partnering on community news: Western Heights Secondary College and the northern Geelong school cluster

Western Heights Secondary College recognises the opportunities associated with building good relationships with your community.

Together with schools in the northern Geelong cluster, the school coordinates the production of a newspaper, *College and Community News*, six times per year. Although the newspaper is compiled by a teacher at Western Heights Secondary College, the newspaper is a joint initiative between all schools in the cluster.

The newspaper has helped to form links with other secondary schools, feeder primary schools, local businesses and industry experts.

The *College and Community News* gives students and schools exposure to the wider community. It is distributed to feeder primary schools and promotes secondary school activities and programs.

All of the feeder primary schools are invited to participate in the publication. They are provided with a minimum of a quarter page space for articles and photographs of their choice.

The newspaper has also led to industry links with a commercial printer, PMP Print, and the *Geelong Advertiser*, which produces the negatives for printing and offers advice and training.

All of the publication costs are offset by paid advertisements from Western Heights Secondary College suppliers and local businesses. Students have been able to get involved by designing and publishing advertisements for some of these businesses, leading to greater contact between the school community and industry.

Other production elements are integrated into VCE Media Studies/ VCE Visual Communication classes. This offers a platform for students to use and display their skills in a real-life project.

Articles from the Department of Education & Training are included in the newspaper in a simple and clear format.

Understanding your community

You can define your community as broadly or narrowly as you wish. At the broadest level, your community is everyone who has a shared interest in educating the young people of Victoria. At a more local level, it is the organisations, agencies, businesses and individuals with whom your school interacts.

Your school is best positioned to connect with your community if you have a solid understanding of it. This may include demographic information and knowledge of communication channels, the main community groups and influential leaders.

Demographic information to consider includes:

- level of education
- age
- main occupations and industries operating in the area
- ethnicity
- religion
- socioeconomic background (i.e. income levels).

You can access some of this information using the census data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. This is free and provides data on suburbs and regional areas. You can access these reports online at www.abs.gov.au. You may also find information from reports or studies on the local area from your local council or library.

Common ways to keep the community informed

Individuals and groups in your local community will find out about your school in a range of ways. The most common ways include:

- word-of-mouth
- face-to-face interactions (e.g. via a community leader or head of an organisation)
- newsletters
- *Annual Report to the School Community*
- local media outlets
- event listings (e.g. local newspapers or weekly magazine)
- posters
- community and public noticeboards (e.g. in shopping centres, libraries).

TIP

If your school features in publications, such as *The Good Schools Guide* or the *Choosing a School (Secondary) Guide*, ensure that you contact the publisher to provide accurate contact details and information.

Case study

Tapping into a wealth of knowledge: Brimbank Secondary College

Brimbank Secondary College partners with local schools and parent committees to share information and ideas on programs and policies. This regional working party also helps the school develop a clearer picture of what goes on in the community and how this impacts on the school and its students.

Established three years ago, the group meets twice a year. It has collaborated on many projects including the development of a parents' code of conduct, which schools then adapted to meet their individual needs. The group is currently looking at how different schools in the cluster work with refugees.

This forum is also used to identify deficiencies in the local community that impact on students. For instance, the group plans to work on addressing the low levels of internet access at home in their region.

The group's overriding outcome is a stronger community network where schools work together. There is a strong relationship between the secondary schools that has led to some major projects taking place. For instance, a Secondary Quality Education Board for Brimbank City Council has been established and four of the local schools worked together on a Leading Schools Fund application.

The school's communication with its community and parents has improved by having a real, effective forum to share and understand different views and information. It has also helped improve its fundraising opportunities and put more projects into action. These connections also provide the added benefit of helping a school manage any rumours that may be damaging to its reputation.

Brimbank Secondary College principal, Allen McAuliffe, believes the working party has taught him 'plenty about smaller community groups'. Building relationships with these smaller groups has also improved the use of resources and facilities all-round. For example, the school helps smaller sporting clubs by providing photocopying facilities, event sponsorship and the use of facilities. It also has an arrangement with the local scout group to share their trailer. These relatively small initiatives have lead to significant long-term benefits.

Community groups to consider

Your school community can include:

Educational institutions	Local/state government	Local emergency services
• other schools in close proximity • schools with a similar special interest • local kindergartens or secondary colleges (for primary level) • local primary schools (for secondary or kindergarten level) • universities and TAFE institutes • registered training organisations (private)	• Department of Education & Training • local mayor • local councillors	• Ambulance Service • State Emergency Service • Police • Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Country Fire Authority
Community organisations	**Volunteer organisations**	**Individuals**
• sporting groups • libraries • Chamber of Commerce • church groups	• Rotary, Lions and Apex Clubs • Red Cross	• alumni (past and present students) • local business owners • local residents
Media	**Employment agencies**	**Health agencies**
• local newspapers • community radio stations • weekly magazines	• Centrelink • Salvation Army Employment Plus • recruitment agencies	• health providers • hospitals • child/youth service providers

Ideas for working with your community

Some ideas to consider:

- Hold school open days.
- Present school work and projects in a public place (e.g. art shows in library or cafes).
- Showcase school performances at a local public space (e.g. a Rock Eisteddfod performance at the local shopping centre).
- Conduct combined school activities (e.g. sports days with local schools).
- Participate in Duke of Edinburgh's Award (international 'leadership in action' program www.dukeofed.org.au).
- Participate in community service initiative project (e.g. visiting nursing homes, tree-planting scheme, community mural contribution).
- Conduct local talks/seminars:
  - professional experts such as nutritionists, mental health practitioners and social workers
  - education-related sessions such as 'good study habits' or 'reading with your child'
  - general information such as 'party safely' or 'car maintenance'
  - VCE tip nights (e.g. the local medical centre can offer information on staying healthy throughout the year or during exam time)
  - vocational pathways discussions to open students and parents up to the range of opportunities available.

- Offer short courses (e.g. setting up a budget, understanding the Internet).
- Host debates involving students and local groups or individuals.
- Open your school assembly to the community.
- Invite a community leader to speak at your assembly.
- Organise school excursions to community attractions.
- Use the school grounds to host markets, fetes or car-boot sales.
- Undertake work-study programs (e.g. work experience).
- Invite your local secondary school's band to play at your primary school.
- Hold reunions.
- Run a 'learning to drive' workshop and team up with local driving instructors.
- Set up a careers fair or trade show.

Case study

Living and Learning Centre: Monbulk Primary School

Understanding local needs and forging strong community ties helped Monbulk Primary School's Library and Internet project grow into a $5 million Living and Learning Centre development that continues to draw local interest, ideas, and support.

The centre will house a number of projects, activities, and groups involving music, university projects, adult education, seniors, welfare, and health.

The project started small. The school realised Monbulk students and citizens needed the Living and Learning Centre and a local library. Access to good internet facilities was also a priority as only 45 per cent of the community is connected to the Internet at home. So the school applied for, and received, a State Government Community Facilities Grant to do just that.

Through word-of-mouth and various school community networks, local involvement in the project ballooned. It is now a two-year project run by a planning committee that includes school representatives. Swinburne University, University of the 3rd Age (U3A), sports groups, maternal health service providers, kindergartens and senior groups are some of the other groups involved. Support also comes from local businesses and politicians at the local, state and federal levels.

Research was pivotal in getting the local council on board. The school argued its case for improved facilities using statistics. For instance, despite only having access to a mobile library, book-borrowing was 50 per cent higher for Monbulk residents than in settlement areas with a permanent library. The council undertook a $30,000 study on the project and the school looked at case studies in other centres in Victoria.

Funding has been central in getting the project to where it is today. The grant was initially matched dollar-for-dollar by floating a co-op that involved a 15-year loan of $200,000. The bulk of the money comes from local groups and organisations, philanthropic trusts and government bodies, including the local council.

The project's success is reflected in its growth – from the number of groups involved through to the many facilities and services the centre will now offer beyond a library facility. Different pockets of the community continually learn about the project and actively seek involvement. Monbulk Primary School principal, Ray Yates, notes that each month their horizons expand as more networks bring more resources to the table.

The school community will benefit in the long term as the centre reinforces Monbulk Primary School's place in the community. Importantly, it gives students better access to their community and has led to improved links with the local secondary school.

Mr Yates also believes the project is fast becoming a 'trend-setter' with enquiries and interest shown from other Victorian and interstate communities. It has even been approached by the city council in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Developing your *Annual Report to the School Community*

Your *Annual Report to the School Community* is a key school accountability document and a trusted source of information about your school. Although it is written mainly with parents in mind, annual reports are often read by other family members, teachers, students, members of the local community, local businesses and the local media. Annual reports may also be sent to local Members of Parliament to keep them informed.

The *Annual Report to the School Community* is an important tool for effective school governance and is a legislative requirement of all schools.

In 2006, a new annual reporting process has been introduced for reporting on the 2005 school year. The new *Annual Report to the School Community* replaces the old annual report format, and is best described as a concise 6–8-page brochure-style report, written in plain English that is designed to enhance communication with your school community. The annual report outlines your school's achievements and progress towards improving student learning, engagement, well-being, transitions and pathways.

What makes a good *Annual Report to the School Community?*

Schools will have different approaches to producing an annual report. There is, of course, no 'right' way but there are things that can help provide clearer and more relevant information to readers.

Structure and layout

Layout can have a big impact on how well your annual report reads. Some points to consider include:

- effective use of white space, including the use of columns, as it encourages readers to focus on the text and guides their attention
- using meaningful titles or headlines and captions to convey your main messages
- breaking up large amounts of text with related images or graphics
- using a readable-size font, keeping in mind some of your audience may be sight-impaired.

Section length

Each section in your annual report should be as brief and direct as possible, stating the key messages early in the piece.

The annual report designer templates (see page 6.10) suggest appropriate word lengths for each section.

Graphics and images

Incorporating images and graphics in your school's annual report should give the readers a visual sense of school life and actively encourage the school community to read the report. Graphics and images may include:

- photos representing typical school life
- simple graphs and charts depicting school performance outcomes
- text headings that draw attention to the different sections contained in the annual report.

Making your *Annual Report to the School Community* easy to read

The annual report is designed to enhance communication with the school community and should be written in language that is clear, simple and easy to understand.

Tone and language

It is important to keep the language simple and free of jargon. School documents containing education specific language are often difficult for parents and the community to understand, particularly in communities where there are a high proportion of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

It is useful to maintain a friendly conversational tone using inclusive words such as 'us', 'we' and 'our'. This helps to create a sense of belonging to the school community. It is particularly important that you use concise and clear language when analysing and discussing the school's performance data.

Producing your *Annual Report to the School Community*

To help you prepare the *Annual Report to the School Community* in the new format a series of designer templates have been developed. The templates are intended as an additional resource to assist with design and layout. Schools may find it easier to finalise the content of their annual report before placing it into the appropriate template.

The templates for preparing the *Annual Report to the School Community* have been developed for the following school types in two formats (with columns and without columns):

- P–12 school
- secondary school
- primary school
- specialist school.

These templates can be accessed via the Accountability and Improvement website at www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/standards/account/annual.htm.

Obtaining feedback on your *Annual Report to the School Community*

The *Annual Report to the School Community* is a key communication document between the school and its community. Once you have developed your annual report and distributed it to your school community, you may find it useful to obtain feedback to ensure the annual report remains an engaging and informative document.

One way of doing this involves conducting a brief survey that is distributed with the annual report. An example has been provided below:

	Strongly disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5
The annual report provided me with an understanding of what the school achieved					
The annual report was clear and easy to understand					
The annual report provided a fair and balanced view of our school (it discussed both positive and negative aspects of our school's performance)					
The annual report was a suitable length					
The annual report discussed the main things I want to know about our school's performance					
The annual report used too many technical terms and jargon that was hard to understand					
I look forward to receiving an annual report each year to better understand what is happening at my school					

Other comments

School leaders and representatives

Making contact and liaising with the community outside your school is an important responsibility. To make the most of these opportunities, relationships need to be managed well. Try to nominate someone who is a good communicator. The person selected for this position should be approachable and reliable, speak clearly, network effectively, manage difficult situations and delegate responsibilities.

Principal as leader

Principals are a good starting point. As the head of the school, they are in a prime position to act as spokesperson for your school and play a main role in the local community. They are often the main connection between your school and other local leaders.

The principal also has the opportunity to communicate messages through the school newsletter (e.g. principal's report). Consider that the newsletter is read by members of the wider community and it can be used to build relationships and encourage community participation.

A report from the principal that provides a summary of the key decisions, events and achievements of your school to the wider school community may also be included in the *Annual Report to the School Community*.

Remember that your principal's endorsement of a school or community event can attract a wider audience. Similarly, their signature on written communications can help open doors in your community.

Making use of the potential in others

There may be a number of key people in your school that are willing to share the responsibility of being a school/community leader. This way, your school can cover more 'community ground' and build a broader network of contacts more quickly. Some people you may consider include the assistant principal, a parent club president, or a teacher. Make sure whoever you choose is given the authority to act in the role as this helps build their credibility with the community.

You may like to think about opportunities for senior school representatives to speak at local community meetings (e.g. a Rotary event, local council committees).

Evaluating your community involvement

It is important to review and evaluate your community project after the event. Below are some ways you can start evaluating the success of your efforts to connect with the local community:

- Get a group of people together over coffee to talk about their experiences and how they feel the project went.
- Conduct one-on-one interviews.
- Carry out surveys with students or participants.
- Conduct random phone surveys in the local community to gauge awareness of school-community activities.

You can go one step further and invite community feedback. Having an option on your website for people to provide anonymous feedback is one way you can do this. Another way is to set up a comments box in the local library or community hall.

Be proud of your achievements. You might look at ways of gaining public recognition for your collaboration efforts. This may be in the form of:

- awards
- competitions
- media coverage
- sponsorship.

7

Using this tool:

1. **Bring together staff, parents or students to help you work on a School Communications Plan.**

2. **Discuss why you need a School Communications Plan /Action Planner (whether or not you require an overarching school communications plan or an event/issue-specific plan), how often you will review it, and how it fits in with your overall School Strategic Plan. Refer to the hints and ideas provided to stimulate discussion.**

3. **Use the School Communications Plan /Action Planner to help you develop a considered plan. It will help you formulate effective communications tactics to get your key messages across to your school community.**

Writing a Communications Plan

Writing a communications plan for your school will assist you in devising a thorough and appropriate strategy to achieve your communication goals. A communications plan is useful when you need to:

- change or improve how you communicate with your school community
- plan longer-term communications strategies (3 years) for your school
- link all of your school's communications for consistency and effectiveness.

It's a good idea to have an overarching plan for all school communications. This could be a one- or two-year plan, or possibly even longer. This plan will enable you to analyse your school communications on a broad 'big picture' level. This plan can be supported by 'mini' communications plans for individual projects, such as developing a school website, changing the layout of the newsletter, or holding a major event, such as a school fete.

Template 1 is a School Communications Plan/Action Planner to get you on your way.

Template 2 is a plan that is populated with hints and ideas for your School Communication Plan/Action Planner. It will start you thinking about the types of information you would like in your communications plan.

Template 1

School Communications Plan/Action Planner

Name of school:

Project team:

Date:

Background:

School goals:

Objectives (Communications):

Target audience:

Key messages:

Evaluation plan:

Budget:

Issues/risks:

Template 1 (continued)

School Communications Plan/Action Planner

Communication tactics	Target audience	Timing	Responsibility

7.4

Template 2

Hints and Ideas for School Communications Plan/ Action Planner

Name of school:

Project team:
This could include teachers, the principal, school council members, Parent Association members, interested parents, students etc.

Date:

Background and scope:
Start by thinking about how you currently communicate. Are you projecting the right message to the right audience? Take some time to research your current approach to communications. It will help you undertake the next step – setting objectives.

In this field, give a brief background of your communications:

- Describe what you do now and what you want to change.

- If you have undertaken an audit of your communications needs, list a summary of your findings here.

- Is this plan a six-month plan, 12-months, two-years?

School goals:
What goals has your school set itself in your School Strategic Plan?

Your school's communications will be more relevant if they link to your school's goals and targets.

Objectives (Communications)
Why do you want to communicate to your audience? Is it to: raise the profile of the school in the local community; develop relationships with local businesses; enhance students career prospects; or encourage parents to read the newsletter more often?

Naturally, it is difficult to do everything at once, so keep your objectives realistic. The best communications plans have no more than four objectives.

These might include:

- increase your school enrolments

- change public perceptions of your school

- change the media's perceptions of your school

- establish a network of advocates for your school

- strengthen parent/caregiver participation at your school

- establish a new identity for your school

- improve student attendance

- improve your teacher retention rate.

Target audience
List all of the audiences – local, national, or even international – that you want to reach.

These might include:

- new and potential parents

- existing parents

- local community

- local media

- past or present students

- local businesses

- your colleagues.

Template 2 (continued)
Hints and Ideas for School Communications Plan/ Action Planner

Key messages:

Key messages are the messages you want your audiences to remember. The best messages are short and simple. Each of your objectives will have at least one target audience (i.e. parents, local businesses, students). What and how you communicate may need to vary accordingly to each audience. It is important to identify the audience and understand their perspective and current level of awareness. Knowing your audience will help you to select appropriate messages and determine how to deliver them.

Some examples of key messages include:

Student welfare

- effective welfare and discipline programs
- programs that foster leadership and social responsibility
- safe, secure and disciplined learning environment
- peer support strategies to build friendships and social skills
- programs that build confidence and self-esteem
- opportunities for student decision making and independent learning
- to promote mentor programs

Parent and community involvement

- a welcoming and friendly school
- a community school with strong parent support
- strong links with parents, local business, sporting clubs and the wider community
- valued partnerships with parents and the wider community

Facilities

- attractive well-resourced school in beautiful grounds
- purpose-built play equipment
- well-equipped, modern facilities for practical training in areas such as hospitality, building and information technology
- state-of-the-art technology with computers in each classroom
- fully integrated, up-to-date information and communications technology
- modern library, drama facilities and well-equipped gym
- well-maintained playing fields and an excellent gymnasium
- comfortable classrooms and flexible learning spaces
- modern, professionally equipped vocational training facilities
- performing arts centre with excellent music, dance and drama facilities
- well-resourced technology facilities to promote independent learning

System support

- trained professional support staff in key areas
- links to TAFE and tertiary organisations
- shared expertise through networks of schools

Template 2 (continued)

Hints and Ideas for School Communications Plan/ Action Planner

Quality staff

- smaller classes taught by highly qualified and enthusiastic teachers
- experienced, dedicated and caring staff
- traditional and innovative teaching in well-managed classrooms
- specialist tuition for individual enrichment programs

Primary

- a strong academic focus with programs that provide challenges and high achievement
- diverse and flexible teaching programs that set clear standards and expectations
- successful early numeracy and literacy programs
- broad range of subjects that meet student interests and aspirations
- all students encouraged to reach their full potential
- focus on developing confident, articulate students
- excellent support programs for students with special needs
- specialised support for students with difficulties in learning
- enrichment programs for gifted and talented students
- diverse educational programs that challenge and inspire students
- a quality and balanced curriculum
- a well-recognised music program

Secondary

- strong academic focus on core subjects of English, Maths and Science
- strong all-round academic excellence and outstanding results
- interesting range of elective subjects
- largest variety of subject choice for students based on innovative and traditional educational values
- academically competitive VCE results
- excellent *On Track* data
- broad range of subjects offered at all levels of study
- extensive choice in popular vocational education subjects
- pathways programs
- linked programs with local TAFE and universities
- acceleration programs for academic high achievers

Innovative programs and partnerships

- innovative careers program guiding students from school to further study, training or work
- supportive partnerships with local business, industry and tertiary institutions
- award-winning environmental programs
- hands-on environmental programs including bush regeneration and recycling
- innovative programs in dance, drama, art and music
- school choir, band and dance ensemble
- focus on fun, physical activity and healthy lifestyles
- successful sporting teams with professional coaching
- enrichment and extension programs for gifted and talented students
- opportunities for all students to succeed in their areas of interest including dance, sport, drama, art and music
- debating, public speaking, Maths and Science competitions

Template 2 (continued)
Hints and Ideas for School Communications Plan/ Action Planner

Evaluation plan:

How will you know whether you've accomplished your objectives? In most instances, you will need to measure your success to make sure your plan has been successful.

Depending on your objectives, some evaluation ideas might include:

- counting the number of new enrolments
- surveying the school community with a questionnaire
- counting the increase in parent and community attendance at meetings
- measuring the increase in sponsorship support
- tracking visits to your intranet or internet site
- running a focus group of parents from feeder primary schools
- interviewing parents at parent-teacher nights
- counting the number of positive stories in local media
- measuring the increase in participation in community events
- conducting a straw poll of visitors to the school regarding customer service.

Budget:

It is important to estimate how much money you can dedicate to communications as a whole, as well as to each activity. What you can do depends on how many people can help with communications and how much money you have to spend. The communications plan will help you figure out the most important messages and the best ways to communicate them.

Depending upon your goals and methods, some of your communication tactics may be of little or no cost (i.e. change in format to the newsletter), while others, such as developing a new school website or producing a new school banner, may incur a charge.

Template 2 (continued)

Hints and Ideas for School Communications Plan/Action Planner

Issues/Risks:

One of the most effective ways to look at the issues and risks from a communications perspective is to perform a simple SWOT analysis. It will help you identify your strengths and weaknesses, and uncover the opportunities and threats you may face. This will help you to focus on your strengths, minimise threats, and take the greatest possible advantage of opportunities available to you.

Some *strengths* of your school might be:

- we have highly qualified and experienced staff

- we have a successful Walking School Bus program

- we adopt a healthy eating program across the school

- we are sensitive to the needs of children with allergies

- we achieve outstanding results in statewide tests

- we have links to TAFE and tertiary institutions

- we have an effective peer support program

- we are a welcoming community school

- we have excellent performing arts facilities

- we have a strong welfare and student management program

- we offer a wide range of extra-curricular activities

- we have successful sporting teams coached by experienced staff

- we are a caring and nurturing learning environment

- we have state-of-the art technology facilities

- we have established a successful whole-school reading program

- we offer our students a broad subject choice

- we offer opportunities for every student to achieve

- we have attractive classrooms and landscaped grounds

- we have developed challenging programs for gifted and talented students

- we have a strong uniform policy supported by students and parents

- we have effective support programs for students with learning difficulties

- we have modern and professional vocational training facilities

- we have developed effective support programs to boost literacy and numeracy

- we have networked computers in each classroom

- we are a happy, safe and orderly school

- we have been recognised for excellence in particular areas

- we support and celebrate community differences

- we have a strong learning culture

- we have high expectations of our students

- we use learning data analysis to inform our teaching programs

- we set measurable targets for student learning

- we insist on high standards in learning and behaviour

- we take pride in our school reports and receive positive feedback from parents

- we have a strong professional development program for teachers

Template 2 (continued)

Hints and Ideas for School Communications Plan/ Action Planner

Some *weaknesses* might be:
- we could improve signage to enable it to better reflect the school and its community
- we could enhance our relationships between parents and teachers
- we could improve our relations with local media
- we could improve our communication with parents
- some of our school buildings and facilities could be better maintained
- we could improve our customer service focus across the school
- we could develop more effective printed promotional material
- issues with transport to and from school could be addressed
- some students and parents could be more supportive of the school uniform policy

Some *opportunities* might be:
- we could build upon our supportive local school network
- we could promote the achievements of our former students
- we could take advantage of support available from regions and specialist staff
- we could strengthen communication with feeder primary schools
- we could maximise the enthusiasm of new staff with fresh ideas
- we could expand our links with TAFE and universities
- we could strengthen the alumni and advocacy support from former students
- we could better promote our school's new or refurbished facilities to the community
- we could attract new students by targeting newly arrived families in our area
- we could attract potential sponsors in the local area
- we could access new system-wide support programs or funding
- we could gain positive media coverage through our effective relationship with local media

Some *threats* might be:
- some of our specialist programs require additional resources
- some of the media coverage of our school has been negative
- strong marketing by nearby non-government schools
- our teachers are successful in gaining promotions and transfers and are leaving our school
- the local population is changing and there are fewer households with school-aged children
- some of our students are not staying on to complete their schooling
- the local transport infrastructure is not flexible enough to meet our needs
- we could encourage greater parent involvement at school.

Template 2 (continued)

Hints and Ideas for School Communications Plan/ Action Planner

Everything you've done so far is preparation for this part of the plan, where you set out how you're going to achieve your objectives. Under 'Tactics', list each action your school will complete within a certain timeframe in order to successfully support the plan itself.

Don't forget to keep your messages and audiences in mind.

Tactics	Target audience	Timing	Responsibility
Examples of tactics might be:			
• give new parents a 'welcome kit' to your school	New parents	First day of Term 1	• Early years coordinator • Prep teaching staff • Principal
• publish a small school brochure (DL size) • develop a 'look' for school publications and apply consistently • publish a well-designed, interesting newsletter • distribute newsletter more widely (e.g. local primary schools, businesses, supermarket, sporting facilities) • develop multi-purpose A4 templates (e.g. for school prospectus) • seek sponsorship for school publications • produce a school calendar and distribute to community • redesign school stationery • maintain a lively, informative school website • use fax headers to carry updates on school news • brand promotional items with school message or school values • distribute promotional materials to the general community • purchase large banners for events and outside the school • purchase display boards for school and community events • host a 'meet the principal' morning each week for parents • hold a 'grandparents and godparents' day • host special events such as a writer's festival or conference • review and improve school directional signs • install a friendly informative telephone message service • encourage community use of school facilities out-of-hours • appoint an interested staff member as school publicist • combine with local schools for joint promotions • advertise in local paper at least three times a year • promote special expertise or hobbies of staff in local media • write a regular column in the local newspaper • host an interview program on local radio • principal to speak at community functions (e.g. Rotary, Lions, Apex Clubs, local kinder parent association) • measure increase in participation in community events • conduct straw poll of visitors to school regarding customer service • hold a working bee to make the school's entrance more friendly and inviting			