



COMMUNICATION IN COOPERATIVE RESEARCH CENTRES

Australia's best capability
working together

This Guide is part of a series of Guides aimed at industry, including small and medium enterprises, and others who are new to the CRC Program.

INTRODUCTION

Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs) are engines of innovation for Australia.

An initiative of the Australian Government, CRCs bring together the best minds from research and industry to work as a team.

Together, and driven by the needs of private, public or community end-users, CRCs turn research results into products, services and technologies and address national priorities within a local and global context.

This Guide has been developed by the CRC Association to help interested parties, both current and potential CRC partners, plan and implement their internal and external communication. It is part of a series of CRC Association Guides focused on providing useful information about the CRC Program to industry and other end-users, including small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and organisations unfamiliar with the CRC Program.

RATIONALE AND REQUIREMENTS

Effective communication has been an essential tool for CRC success since the first CRCs were established in 1991. CRCs have diverse, geographically dispersed stakeholders including university and industry participants from across Australia and, in many cases, around the world. Effective internal and external communication facilitates research collaboration and the achievement of end-user, broader industry and public acceptance of CRC outputs.

The importance of communication with end-users is emphasised in the current CRC Program Guidelines which state that CRCs must 'deploy research outputs and encourage uptake by end-users'.

A primary aim of effective CRC communication is therefore to inform participants and other potential end-users about the work of the CRC in order to build innovation capacity around Australia. Each CRC will also have specific communication objectives and activities, which can be set out in a communication strategy.



BENEFITS OF CRC COMMUNICATION

FOR END-USERS

- increases understanding of the challenges the CRC is seeking to address
- builds demand for new products, services and technologies developed by the CRC
- publicises the positive contributions being made by end-users to important research and development efforts
- attracts talented students for postgraduate education directly relevant to end-user needs

FOR RESEARCHERS AND STUDENTS

- ensures research objectives and milestones are clearly and widely understood
- conveys research outcomes to end-users and other stakeholders
- enhances opportunities for new research funding and other support, by building the reputation of the CRC and the university participants
- assists researchers to achieve the publication requirements of their profession

FOR THE BROADER COMMUNITY AND AUSTRALIA

- promotes the adoption of innovative research and development, bringing environmental, social and economic benefits to the broader community
- builds Australia's international reputation and contributes to the development of bilateral and multilateral relationships and alliances in key areas
- encourages participation in higher education



SCOPE OF CRC COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

A CRC communication strategy applies a range of communication tools that broadly focus on:

- external communication – with external parties in related industries and the general community, and to the media
- internal communication – with participants, including researchers, industry and other users of research

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

External communication is about building a profile of the CRC as a foundation for achieving its outcomes.

It extends to a two-way process that allows the CRC to engage in dialogue with all stakeholders to help the CRC synchronise its research efforts with its full community context. In the absence of this approach, for instance, a CRC might seek to promote its work in a particular area only to find commercial, social, ethical or environmental challenges to community acceptance.

Communication tools that can help a CRC achieve its external communication aims include:

- the annual report
- technical research papers for industry and peer-reviewed journals
- an external newsletter – electronic or hard copy
- brochures
- informal and formal meetings with stakeholders

- the CRC's annual conference
- email updates if a need for weekly communication is identified
- media releases
- CRC website
- the DIISR CRC newsletter, Success Through Innovation (email: crc.program@innovation.gov.au)
- the CRC Association annual conference
- the CRC Association website (<http://www.crca.asn.au>)

In relation to external communication, the CRC can consider establishing communication protocols that cover issues such as:

- the use of the CRC logo - go to www.crc.gov.au then go to For CRCs link on the left: and scroll down that page to the CRC Logo section
- the use of the CRC's logo and participant logos
- the communication of commercial-in-confidence information
- the approval regimes for joint participant and CRC releases of information such as announcements, media releases and articles
- the protection of Intellectual Property (IP); IP includes, but is not limited to, designs, trade secrets, patents, copyrights, plant breeder's rights and trade marks

Some organisations develop a style guide for writing and editing, but equally useful is the *Style Manual: for authors, editors and printers*. The manual provides comprehensive guidance on clear and concise writing, punctuation and grammar.

A style guide for the use of the Australian branding, useful for CRCs with Australian Government participants, is available at:

http://www.dpmc.gov.au/guidelines/docs/design_guidelines_PMC.pdf



INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Internal communication helps the CRC to function. As a solid foundation for collaboration, CRCs need to build effective multidirectional communication that bridges cultural differences on multiple levels, between participants (particularly researchers and end-users), disciplines, organisations and individuals.

CRC staff may work at many different locations, making effective communication within the organisation an even higher priority. Some internal communication tools include:

- a staff intranet that provides researchers access to online discussion fora, shared files and documents
- an email-based newsletter (this is quick and easy to produce, saves limited communication resources and avoids costly graphic design and printing costs)
- weekly teleconferences
- all informal communication including email, telephones, online collaboration tools and e-science tools



SPECIALIST COMMUNICATION MANAGER

Many CRCs have found it useful to create a specialist Communication Manager position. They have sought input from a suitably qualified specialist who has contributed to the strategic planning team and may become a member of the CRC. Others have engaged the consultancy support of specialist Communication Managers, especially at the time of forming a CRC consortium and applying for funding. This specialist will have broad and high level communication skills and can facilitate external communication as well as internal communication between those involved in the CRC, including the all important linking of groups with disparate organisational cultures. Conflict resolution skills are also critical.

EVALUATING COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

In order to ensure that communication strategies are appropriate for their intended audiences, they should be evaluated. The communication manager can undertake an informal evaluation by using tools that include:

- monitoring the media and website hits
- feedback from participants and internal audiences about the effectiveness of communication tools such as the website or the intranet
- feedback from brief questionnaires to external stakeholders about the effectiveness of brochures and fact sheets; some CRCs, universities and government agencies use free, online survey tools to undertake this type of work

COMMUNICATING WITH GOVERNMENT

The Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research manages the CRC Program. The Department undertakes a range of communication activities to promote the achievements of CRCs, including the quarterly CRC Program magazine *Success through Innovation*. The CRC Program website contains information about the Program, current and previous selection rounds, the CRC Directory, CRC profiles and links to CRC websites and STAR Award winners. The Department conducts workshops in the States and Territories early in each selection round and CRC liaison officers are available via email and phone to answer queries and help CRCs meet Commonwealth Agreement requirements.

It is also useful to establish communication networks with State and Territory governments. Many States and Territories have innovation and economic development agencies that conduct workshops for CRCs, offer grants to assist in preparation of applications, and conduct expert reviews of applications and other services. They may also facilitate participant matching and inter-state collaborations.

CRC ASSOCIATION

The CRC Association represents CRC members and promotes the CRC Program. It has a 100% membership rate amongst CRCs and takes a broad approach to promoting CRCs within the context of the Program's importance to the nation.

The CRC Association's annual conference is an important networking and communication event. It attracts leading national and international researchers, State and Federal politicians and journalists. The CRC Association also presents Awards for Excellence in Innovation at the annual conference. These awards publicly recognise CRCs for their research and other achievements. The CRC Association provides valuable information to CRCs, stakeholders and the broader community through its website www.crca.asn.au



POINTERS FOR NEW APPLICANTS

- as part of the overall strategy of the CRC, new CRCs are well advised to plan and implement a communication strategy early in the life of the CRC
- the Commonwealth Agreement underpins all of the critical activities of the CRC; it is therefore a starting point for considerations relating to the development and implementation of a communication strategy
- ensure the implementation of the communication strategy is informed by regular updates from all programs within the CRC
- establish procedures to ensure that public communication of new knowledge does **not** occur before a suitable intellectual property protection approach is in place
- use every relevant opportunity and communication method to inform audiences about the CRC's research achievements
- ensure that participant recognition is given a high priority
- be aware that good research will not necessarily 'sell itself' in the public arena – those responsible for communicating outcomes need to understand the project and accordingly target the publicity – which media outlets show an interest in your area?
- attend the CRC Association annual conference and the workshops for communication managers to build relationships and learn from the experiences of others

FURTHER ASSISTANCE

CRC Association

02 6270 6524

www.crca.asn.au

CRC Program

02 6213 7177

www.crc.gov.au



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