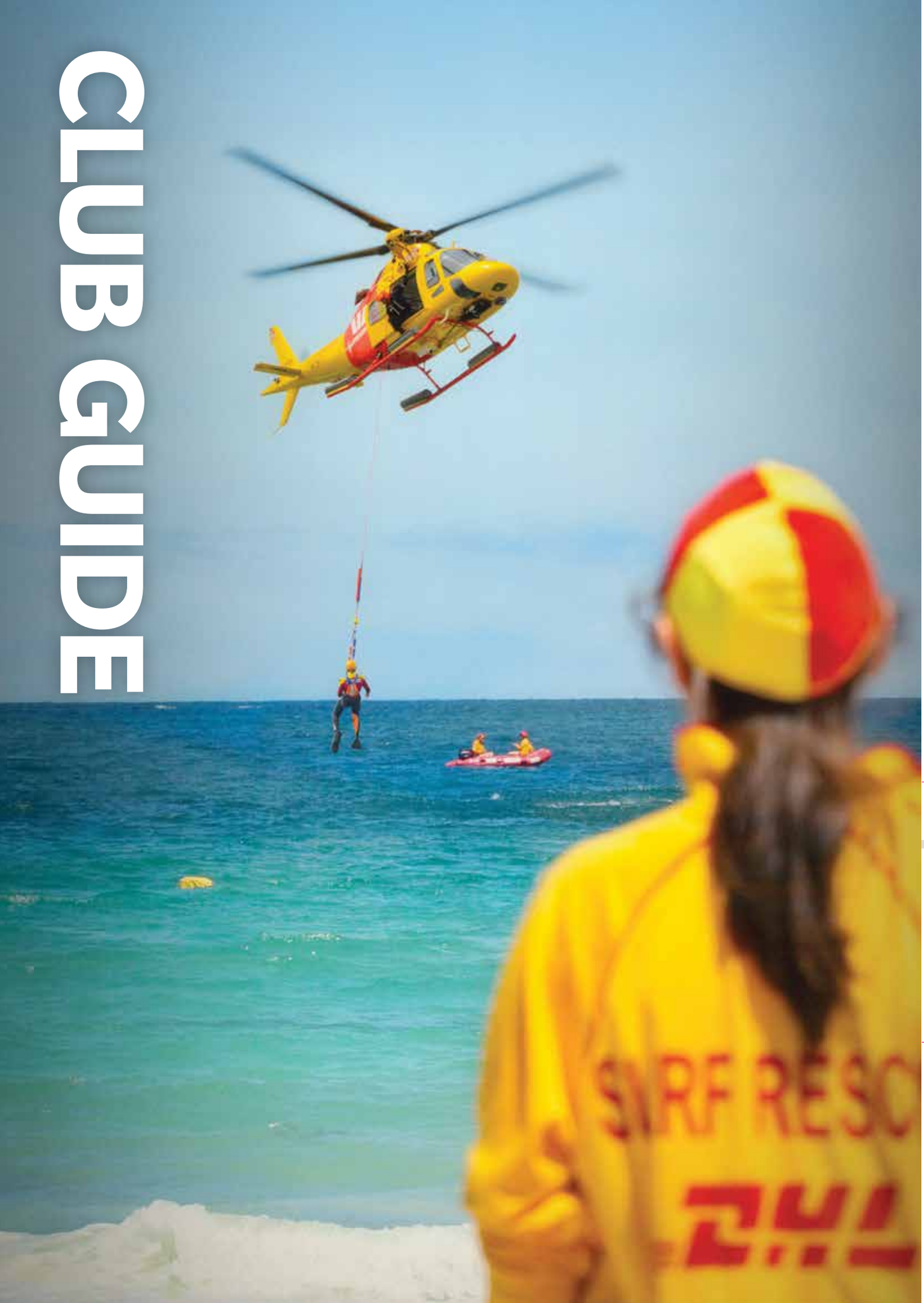
CLUB GUIDE



4.1 EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Communication is a vital part of running a successful surf club. Whether the communication comes from the administration or the membership it all contributes to ensuring everyone involved in the club is informed about what is happening.

Those clubs that are able to create a culture of strong communication will reap the benefits of happier members and increased retention and recruitment. In today's society where people are being bombarded with an abundance of messages and information from all angles the need to provide clear and concise communication that is directly related to them is vital.

Tips For Communicating Effectively

Broadly speaking

- Be clear and concise with your communications, ensuring your message is understood by the recipient. Long and unclear messages can be frustrating for the recipient and result in poor communication.
- Follow up your messages to ascertain whether they have been understood, particularly when you have had no face-to-face contact with the recipients.
- Make sure your form of communication is reflective of the message you are trying to convey. For instance, communicating with a handful of people on the phone for one message is more appropriate than an email to the whole club which is not relevant to most people. Similarly, if it is a club issue which affects all members, emails and notice boards are much better than face-to-face or phone conversations both in efficiency and effectiveness.
- Regular communication is vital to ensure members know everything they need to in a timely manner. It makes them feel a valued member of the organisation.
- The start of a document, letter, email or speech is the most important part in the communication cycle. If the communication is dull or seems unimportant to the reader or audience it is unlikely to be read or noticed. A powerful opening or catchy headline can help to improve your chances of gaining interest in your message.
- Continually refer to your previous messages. This will educate members as to how important it is to keep track of all communications from the club. When possible keep records of the key notes of your communications to ensure that your message is consistent with what you have previously communicated and that your next communication can follow on from the previous.

Utilise technology

- Where appropriate use online technology (eg. email, internet, social media, SMS) to get your messages out to a wider audience more quickly. Also, use good design software to make your printed or electronic material stand out.
- Keep your communications interesting by adding visual aids or pictures when possible. If your communications are boring, be it when personally addressing people or in the design of communications materials, the message will not get through.
- Use your communication tools to develop relationships with members, staff, volunteers, sponsors, stakeholders and government. The better your relationships are with these parties the more likely they are going to want to deal with you.

Style

- Clubs should provide a mix of formal and informal communication. Informal communication could include simple instructions and feedback on the day's operations and results, whilst formal communication might include meetings and newsletters.
- Clubs should seek to keep members involved in decisions not only affecting their position but those that affect the club in general. This could include providing updates on decisions made or seeking advice or opinions from the members on a course of action to be taken.
- A major component of communication with members should be in recognising a member's performance or contribution to the club.
- People will often respond best to communication, particularly feedback on performance (be it good or bad) if it's done consistently. Clubs that are inconsistent in their communication may quickly lose the passion and drive of the member.

4.2 INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

One of the most important functions of a club is to ensure its members are well informed. Well informed members are more likely to fulfil their role to the best of their ability and to offer the best service possible. The following methods of communicating information are also great methods of promoting your club to potential sponsors and members.

Circulars
Circulars are issued at National and State level to notify members of information and actions required. It is the Club's responsibility to distribute to the appropriate officers and members within a Club, and a copy made available to all members of the Club, eg. on club notice board.

Clubs need to ensure that Club email address is current at all times with SLSWA, to ensure receipt of all Circulars.

SLSWA and SLSA Circulars are also kept on their respective websites.

Bulletins
Bulletins are usually a directive and generally of a practical nature, for example, regulations or specifications. Bulletins are issued by the Chief Executive Officer of SLSWA, addressing specific people with copies made available to other interested people.

The circulation list should be indicated at the beginning of the circular for information of who should receive it.

Memorandums
Memos are sent to a specific person to provide a communication backup. A Memo may be addressed to one particular office bearer, such as the Secretary, and then copies to be distributed to other individuals, eg. Club Captains.

The original person the memo is marked attention to may then chose to forward the memo to other people who they feel may benefit from.

Note: that www.slsa.asn.au should be checked by a Club representative on at least a weekly basis for relevant club mail. Particularly, Club and Member Resources where Club mail can be found.

Newsletters
Various types of newsletters are distributed at National, State and Club level.

- SLSWA E-News is a weekly newsletter (fortnightly in winter) released via email each Thursday. The newsletter is designed to promote the organisation's activities, initiatives and achievements, and as such is distributed to clubs in Western Australia, members, sponsors, Governments and related organisations. Clubs are provided the opportunity to contribute to this newsletter (contact SLSWA Communications and Partnerships team for further details).
- The My Beach newspaper is published three times a year by SLSWA and contains stories about SLSWA and club activities, initiatives and achievements as well as social news and photographs.
- Club Newsletters are produced by most clubs and are an excellent tool in updating members, making members feel part of a club and providing an introduction to new members. The Club newsletter may be distributed in many forms – hard copies to be sent to members, electronic copies placed on the club website, emailed to members, or placed on the club notice board.

Photography and Images
SLSWA and SLSA have a library of images which depict lifesavers in correct patrol uniform and with up to date sponsor logos. These can be obtained through SLSWA and SLSA media centres. If sending images to sponsors, media or creating internal posters please be mindful of the SLSA Intellectual Property policy. Also be mindful of depicting SLS in a positive light. When including photos in newsletters, remember to credit the photographer. Also ensure you have permission from the member or their guardian, to publish their image in a public document or online.

Notice Boards
When maintained, club notice boards can be an effective method in distributing information. Calendars, upcoming events, amendments to policies and procedures, request for member participations and notification of meetings are but a few of the forms of information that can be communicated via Notice boards

Email
Creating a database of club members email addresses is a simple process with SurfGuard and can be an effective method of communicating with your members. Not only can you promote club-based events through the email distribution list, it is also an effective way for your sponsors to communicate with the membership.

Website
A club website is vital not only for your members, but also potential members and sponsors who would like to know more about the club. Information on your website should always be up to date with news, images, sponsors, etc, otherwise there is no use having it.

Make sure that your sponsors, neighbouring clubs and SLSWA have your website linked from their website, to ensure reaching the highest number of people.

Social Media
Many clubs and their members have a Facebook page, Twitter feed and/or Instagram account to provide up to date information about the club. Social media allows members to communicate with each other and provides an informal forum for notification and discussion. It is an easy way to provide members with access to things like photo galleries and can be used to conduct fundraising campaigns and competitions. Privacy issues are increasingly a concern with social media networks and clubs should have a clear and comprehensive social media policy which is communicated to members. Social media administrators at clubs should also actively monitor their pages for derogatory, defamatory or inappropriate posts, possibly deleting or blocking the post if it breaches the club's policy. SLSA's Social Media Policy can be found on its website. In the meantime assistance in developing a social media policy is available by contacting the SLSWA Communications and Partnerships team.

For more see Club Guide Section 4.4 – Social Media.

4.3 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT)

The use of technology presents one of the greatest opportunities for Clubs to improve the way they operate. The effective use of technology offers more efficient means of communication and administration at a reduced cost.

Access to the internet, email and social media has increased the ability to communicate and disseminate information on larger scales and to access online systems such as SurfGuard and Lifesaving Online.

These allow Clubs to;
- Communicate with entire membership and identified groups via email, SMS and social media
- Publish news, activities and information on websites and via social media
- Log information into online systems such as SurfGuard and Incident Report Database
- Access information and produce reports from online systems such as SurfGuard and Incident Report Database
- Access information posted on Branch, SLSWA and SLSA websites and social media platforms

SLSA and Information Technology (IT)
SLSA continues to invest in various forms of information technology projects at all levels of the organisation to improve the availability of information to support operational surf lifesaving, training programs and public education. Core projects include:

Member's Portal – Launched in 2012, the Member's Portal is your one stop shop for all Surf Life Saving information that relates specifically to you as a member. Circulars, news, events, jobs and announcements for your club, your branch, your state and national are available to you in one place.

Lifesaving Online – allows you to maintain your personal information that is stored in the SLSA member database, as well as your patrol rosters and history, your awards and more.

SurfGuard – the online system used by Clubs, Branches, States and Surf Life Saving Australia to record membership, awards, patrols, rescues, gear and equipment register, transfers and organisation details.

Beachsafe – SLSA's public education website that provides access to detailed information including current weather and hazards, patrol information and more about all 11,724 beaches in Australia.

IRD – the Incident Report Database that captures data relating to drownings, near drownings, rescues, member injuries etc. This is now incorporated into SurfGuard.

ABSAMP – the Australian Beach Safety and Management Program with a geographical database of every beach in Australia.

Carnival Manager System – SLSA's Carnival Manager System is owned by SLSA and can be used for any National, State or Branch carnival / championship. SLSA's goal is to be able to maintain a central IT system or set of integrated systems that meet the following objectives:
- Is available online to approved parties when required
- Provides as near as possible real time information
- Is consistent across all levels
- Is easy to use and helps the user to meet their needs
- Is independent of the user's hardware and software set-up
- Provides a secure environment for users
- Incurs minimal licensing or maintenance fees

Further information and documents relating to SLSA's IT Strategic Plan, Business Requirements and Standards and Architecture can be found on the SLSA website.

4.4 SOCIAL MEDIA

What is Social Media?
Social media is a type of media which enables social interaction between an author and active readers, incorporating the publishing of those interactions and conversations online. This is in contrast to more traditional forms of media where the audience has a strictly passive role. Social media includes, but is not limited to:

- Maintaining a profile page on social or business networking sites, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter or MySpace
- Content sharing sites such as FlickR or YouTube
- Commenting on blogs for personal or business purposes
- Leaving product or service reviews on retailer sites or customer review sites
- Taking part in online votes and polls
- Taking part in conversations on public and private web forums (message boards)
- Editing a Wikipedia page

If your club is utilising social media it is important that it is used appropriately to ensure the organisation's reputation is maintained and is not brought into disrepute. In order to do this it is suggested that each club develops a social media policy or guidelines to assist members in making good judgments about content posted and accessed online.

For assistance with developing a social media policy, contact the SLSWA Communications and Partnerships team.

Using Social Media for your Surf Club

Before you create a new website, social networking page or forum for your surf club it is important to get permission from the Club President and Committee. Furthermore you must ensure that only appropriate content is put onto these platforms.

Understanding how different social media channels work and tailoring content to those channels will ensure the message gets across effectively to your audience. Communicating to your audience in a particular style of written language will also help represent your club's and the organisation's brand and image. The most effective social media sites adopt a definite 'voice' to communicate to audiences by writing content in a personality that possesses attributes that are friendly, real, honest, helpful, encouraging, trustworthy, motivating, educational, welcoming, energetic and positive.

As a best practice guide, clubs are encouraged to engage Facebook as their primary use of social media, followed by the use of Twitter and photo sharing networks like Flickr or Instagram. Utilising social media tools can be a very time consuming task so it is important clubs focus their energies on one or two channels rather than taking on the entire social media sphere.

Create interest among your followers and the audience as a whole. Post relevant articles, promotions and information about your products and services using relevant keywords. Furthermore, social media is a great way to give your members a voice.

Use pictures, promotions and videos to let the members drive the traffic for you. For example, you could run a campaign where the most number of likes for a promotional poster of your surf club wins a prize. This will ensure that you are not the only one doing all the hard work; suddenly your members have joined in the conversation.

Don't be repetitive. If you overload the user with information and even worse, if the information is repetitive then the audience could opt out and stop following your page.

Never self-promote too much. Always link your posts and tweets to some interesting current information that will add value to your audience.

Social media is a two way channel for communication. It's a great medium for delivering your message but it is also a medium that can be used to listen. Always listen to what your audience and follower base are telling you. Pretty soon you will start to anticipate the feedback.

Trust is the key element in building relationships online. Build trust by keeping a respectful tone, even when disagreeing with others and by responding to comments in a timely manner. If a member or club realises that they have made a mistake, they should try to correct it promptly.

Remember that online conversations and interactions are not conducted in the same way as telephone or face to face communication and increases the risk of misinterpretation and comments being taken out of context.

It is important to consider the audience and keep in mind that this may include current and potential members, government agencies, corporate sponsors and suppliers and the media. Before posting, the content should be considered to ensure it is appropriate for the audience and does not exclude or offend any particular group.

Clubs and members should be aware that the tone used in online interactions can be interpreted in different ways by audiences, due to a lack of non-verbal communication or cultural differences. Some participants may not be familiar with abbreviations, emotions and other common codes used in online communication.

Clubs and members have the ability to engage with other groups in Surf Life Saving by using social media. Through Facebook, clubs can engage and promote activities and opportunities available to members by posting onto Branch or SLWA pages. This could include sharing photos from a recent Branch camp to your club's page or re-posting a link to an SLSWA opportunity ie. applications open for a coaching course in your area.

Things to remember when using Social Media

Members of Surf Life Saving are obliged to adhere to the SLSA Policy Statement – Use of Social Media – Policy number 6.20, which is available on the SLSA website. Club social media sites must not contain, or link to, defamatory, harassing, pornographic or otherwise inappropriate content, including photos, illustrations or nicknames.

Clubs and their members are not to comment on, or publish, information that is confidential or in any way sensitive to SLSWA, its affiliates, partners or sponsors.

Clubs and members should consider social media and online interaction as a permanent record of their online action, conversations and opinions. They should be aware that the internet is not anonymous and should assume that everything that they may write or comment on could be traced back to them. Clubs are required to take responsibility for any information they post.

Clubs and members are expected to refrain from engaging in activities that may damage the reputation of the organisation and are to foster a positive organisational image at all times.

Social media administrators at clubs should also actively monitor their pages for derogatory, defamatory or inappropriate posts, possibly deleting or blocking the post if it breaches the club's policy. Assistance in developing a social media policy is available by contacting the SLSWA Communications and Partnerships team.

Reference

SLSA Policy 6.20 – Use of Social Media