

INDUSTRY-WIDE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

FOR THE WASTE MANAGEMENT SECTOR

A practical resource developed in response to South Africa's
Draft National Waste Management Strategy (NWMS) 2026

About this resource.

South Africa's waste management sector is at a turning point. The Draft National Waste Management Strategy 2026 (NWMS 2026), gazetted in December 2025, sets out the country's most ambitious waste policy framework to date. Its headline target: **diverting 40% of waste from landfill within five years**, demands not only operational transformation, but a fundamental shift in how waste management organisations communicate their value, their compliance, and their contribution to the circular economy.

This **Industry-Wide Communication Strategy** has been developed as a practical, sector-specific resource for any organisation working in or alongside South Africa's waste value chain. Whether you are a Producer Responsibility Organisation managing EPR compliance, a waste management company operating at municipal or national scale, a recycler or buy-back centre, an informal sector organisation, or a corporate with producer obligations, this document is designed to help you build, manage and protect your reputation in a sector that is under increasing public and regulatory scrutiny.

The strategy is structured around the same methodology SUSCO uses when developing bespoke communication strategies for clients: stakeholder mapping, positioning statements, key messages, communication channels, crisis communication protocols, and implementation guidance. It has been adapted here as an industry-wide framework that any organisation can use as a starting point for developing their own communication plan.

How to use this document

This resource is designed to be used in three ways:

1. As a standalone communication framework that organisations without a dedicated communications function can adapt and implement directly.
2. As a foundation document for developing a bespoke communication strategy specific to your organisation's mandate, stakeholder landscape, and operational context.
3. As a sector-wide reference for understanding how communication sits within the broader policy and regulatory environment created by the NWMS 2026.

A note on implementation:

This document provides the strategic framework. Implementation, from developing your public relations strategy, to setting up social media channels and managing crisis situations, requires dedicated communications expertise. SUSCO specialises in exactly this.

Contact us at info@susco.co.za to discuss how we can support your organisation.

1. The South African waste sector: context and landscape.

South Africa generates vast quantities of waste annually, yet the majority still finds its way to landfill. Current landfill capacity is under significant pressure nationally, with many sites at or near capacity, and fewer than half of licensed landfill facilities meeting minimum environmental management requirements. This is not a reflection of the sector's failure, it is the inherited result of decades of under-investment in infrastructure, fragmented municipal service delivery, and the absence of a comprehensive diversion framework. The NWMS 2026 directly addresses this by creating the policy architecture for a fundamental shift away from landfill dependence toward resource recovery and circular economy practices.

The opportunity this creates for every organisation in the waste value chain is significant. As landfill pressure grows, so does the demand for alternative treatment, resource recovery, recycling infrastructure, and the formal integration of reclaimer networks. South Africa commands approximately 40% of Africa's total waste management market, with the continent's market valued at USD 46.77 billion in 2026 and projected to reach USD 62.73 billion by 2031. The recycling and resource recovery segment is growing at an annual rate of 8.66%, driven by EPR regulation, ESG reporting requirements, and growing private sector demand for circular economy credentials.

The informal waste sector is an indispensable part of this landscape. Waste reclaimers are estimated to account for 80% to 90% of recycling collection activity in South Africa, contributing hundreds of millions of rands in avoided landfill costs to municipalities annually. Yet this sector remains largely invisible in mainstream communications and underrepresented in formal policy implementation structures.

1.1 The Draft NWMS 2026: what it means for communication

The DFFE gazetted the Draft National Waste Management Strategy 2026 in Government Gazette No. 53894 on 19 December 2025. Following a public comment window that closed in February 2026, the strategy is expected to be finalised and adopted later in 2026. Once adopted, it will replace the NWMS 2020 and redefine the operating environment for every organisation in the waste value chain.

For communications, the NWMS 2026 creates both obligations and opportunities. The table below maps the strategy's key pillars to their practical communication implications. For each pillar, the communication implication answers a specific question: given this policy direction,

what does your organisation need to be saying publicly, to whom, and why? These are not generic statements; they are the specific communication gaps and opportunities that the NWMS 2026 creates for waste sector organisations.

Use this table to identify which pillars are most relevant to your organisation's mandate and carry those communication implications forward into your own positioning and messaging.

NWMS 2026 strategic pillar	Communication implication	What this means in practice	Priority audiences
Circular economy and waste minimisation	Organisations must demonstrate active contribution to circularity, not merely compliance. Greenwashing risk is high without evidence-based storytelling.	Shift your public narrative from 'we manage waste' to 'we recover resources'. Publish your diversion and recovery data. Let the evidence do the talking.	Producers, corporates, regulators, media
EPR and Deposit Return Schemes (DRS)	The introduction of DRS for underperforming EPR streams raises accountability stakes. PROs and producers need proactive public communication on performance before regulators do it for them.	If your EPR targets are being met, communicate that proactively and with data. If they are not, have a credible public narrative about what you are doing to close the gap.	Industry, DFFE, SAWIS, public
Effective and financially stable waste services	Municipalities and private operators need to demonstrate service delivery credibility. Community trust is a prerequisite for operational continuity.	Invest in community-facing communication before a crisis forces you to. Regular, honest engagement with communities where you operate is more valuable than any advertising spend.	Communities, local government, investors
69,000 new jobs target	Job creation is the sector's single most powerful social narrative. Every organisation in the chain should be tracking and communicating its employment contribution.	Count your jobs. Count your contractor jobs. Count the waste reclaimers formally integrated into your value chain. These numbers belong in your media releases and your stakeholder reports.	Government, communities, media, funders

Separation-at-source across all metros	Behaviour change campaigns require trusted public messengers. Organisations must earn the right to educate communities, and that trust is built long before any campaign launches.	Community education campaigns only work when the community trusts the organisation behind them. Build that relationship first through service delivery and engagement, then launch the campaign.	General public, communities, municipalities
Right-to-repair legislative frameworks	E-waste and electronics producers face new narrative requirements around product lifecycle responsibility, not just end-of-life disposal.	Communicate your product stewardship story. Show how your organisation supports the entire lifecycle of the products and packaging you manage, from design decisions to recovery.	E-waste sector, consumers, retailers
Capacity building and compliance monitoring	Enforcement is intensifying. Non-compliant organisations face reputational exposure. Communicating compliance proactively is protective. Organisations that are transparent about their performance create less space for regulators or media to define it for them.	Do not wait for an audit finding to communicate about your compliance status. Publish your SAWIS data. Reference your permits. Demonstrate that you operate to the highest standards.	Regulators, PROs, producers, media



1.2 The waste value chain and where communication fits

Effective sector communication begins with understanding where your organisation sits in the waste value chain, and who the stakeholders are at each point above and below you. South Africa's waste value chain can be broadly mapped as follows:

Value chain position	Examples of organisations
Producers and importers	FMCG companies, electronics manufacturers, importers, converters
Producer Responsibility Organisations (PROs)	CGCSA PRO, Polyco, Fibre Circle, eWASA, GreenTyre, RECLITE
Formal waste collection	Municipal waste services, private waste management companies, fleet operators
Informal waste sector	Waste reclaimers, cooperatives, buy-back centres, reclaimer associations
Material recovery and recycling	Recyclers, sortation facilities, MRFs, waste processors
Hazardous waste management	Licensed hazardous waste treatment and disposal companies
Alternative treatment and recovery	Composting facilities, biodigesters, cement kiln fuel producers, waste-to-energy operators
End-of-life disposal	Licensed landfill operators, transfer station operators
Supporting sector	Environmental consultants, waste data systems, compliance auditors, communications agencies

The reputational performance of the sector as a whole is determined by the cumulative public perception of all these actors. A single high-profile compliance failure at one point in the chain undermines public confidence across all of them.

This is why industry-wide communication standards matter, and why individual organisations have a collective stake in how the sector communicates.

2. Waste streams: challenges, opportunities and communication priorities.

Each waste stream in South Africa carries its own stakeholder landscape, regulatory context, communication opportunities, and reputational risks. Organisations operating across multiple waste streams need messaging that is differentiated by stream while remaining coherent at the brand level. The following profiles provide the communication intelligence needed for each major waste stream.

2.1 Paper and packaging waste.

Current status	Challenges	Opportunities
✓ Most established EPR stream in South Africa with PROs including Fibre Circle, Polycy, and CGCSA PRO operating at scale. ✓ Recycling rates for glass, metal, paper, and PET plastic are among the highest by developing-country standards. ✓ The informal reclaimer sector drives the majority of collection activity in this stream.	✓ DRS introduction for underperforming packaging streams creates reputational exposure for PROs and producers not meeting targets. ✓ Public confusion between different PROs creates trust fragmentation. ✓ Consumer-facing communication remains inconsistent, undermining behaviour change at household level.	✓ EPR fee structures create commercial storytelling opportunities around circularity. ✓ The NWMS 2026's strengthened EPR framework increases visibility of PRO performance data — organisations with above-target recovery rates have a strong credibility narrative. ✓ Formal integration of waste reclaimers creates a powerful social impact story alongside environmental outcomes.

Communication priority:

Demonstrate measurable tonnage recovery with human stories from the waste reclaimers who collected it. Connect producer compliance to visible community outcomes.

2.2 Electronic and e-waste (WEEE)

Current status	Challenges	Opportunities
✓ One of the fastest-growing waste streams globally and in South Africa. ✓ eWASA and the PRO Alliance South Africa (PASA) are active at sector level. ✓ Estimated 12% formal recycling rate with significant infrastructure gaps persisting. ✓ NWMS 2026 introduces right-to-repair frameworks targeting WEEE volumes.	✓ Approximately 60 registered PROs nationally creates a fragmented and confusing landscape for producers and consumers. ✓ Consumer behaviour change is slow. Most e-waste is kept in storage or informally disposed of. ✓ Illegal export of WEEE fractions creates compliance and reputational risk for the sector as a whole.	✓ Right-to-repair legislation opens a new public narrative around product lifecycle responsibility. ✓ Precious metal recovery creates a compelling urban mining story with strong media appeal. ✓ Growing private sector investment in EPR-driven collection infrastructure provides tangible proof points for communication. ✓ Certified data destruction services offer an additional trust-building narrative for business clients.

Communication priority:

Demystify the value of e-waste recovery. Lead with the economic value of materials recovered, the jobs created, and the data security assurance provided by certified destruction services.

2.3 Organic and food waste

Current status	Challenges	Opportunities
✓ Significant fraction of municipal solid waste with disproportionate contribution to landfill methane emissions. ✓ Organic waste bans in certain jurisdictions are driving growth in composting and biodigestion.	✓ Low public awareness of organic waste separation at source. Most households and businesses do not separate organics from general waste. ✓ Municipal buy-in for separation-at-source programmes is inconsistent across metros.	✓ The NWMS 2026's circular economy emphasis creates demand for organics valorisation stories. ✓ Compost production links directly to agricultural supply chain sustainability, a growing area of corporate ESG interest. ✓ Biogas and energy recovery narratives connect directly to

✓ Processing facilities for compost, animal feed, and biogas are operational across Cape Town, Durban, and Gauteng.	✓ Contamination of organic streams by non-organic materials undermines processing economics and output quality.	South Africa's energy security conversations. ✓ Food-to-farm recovery stories are among the most compelling and underutilised in the sector.
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Communication priority:

Connect food waste recovery to food security and agricultural productivity. The food-to-farm-back story is one of the sector's most underutilised narratives.

2.4 Hazardous waste

Current status	Challenges	Opportunities
✓ Among the most heavily regulated segments of the sector under stringent NEMWA permit conditions. ✓ Licensed TSDFs manage treatment, storage, and final disposal with documented chain-of-custody. ✓ Alternative treatment options including cement kiln co-processing are growing, reducing reliance on disposal.	✓ Community opposition to hazardous waste facilities is a persistent reputational challenge, even where operations are fully compliant. ✓ Media coverage of contamination incidents is disproportionately negative and rarely contextualised by the rigour of the regulatory framework. ✓ The gap between regulatory compliance and public trust is wide - compliance alone does not build community confidence.	✓ Growing corporate ESG reporting requirements create demand for certified hazardous waste disposal with auditable trails. ✓ Cement kiln alternative fuel production is a strong waste-to-resource narrative with measurable carbon benefit. ✓ Carbon tax policy creates additional value in demonstrating avoided landfill emissions, a quantifiable communication asset. ✓ Transparent environmental monitoring data, published proactively, builds community trust over time.

Communication priority:

Lead with compliance credentials and third-party verification. Community engagement must precede media engagement in any area with a new or expanded hazardous waste operation.

2.5 Construction and demolition waste

Current status	Challenges	Opportunities
✓ One of the priority new streams targeted in the NWMS 2026 for EPR inclusion. ✓ Classified as a 'negative fraction' - limited intrinsic commercial value makes diversion economics challenging. ✓ No established EPR framework yet, but regulatory direction is clear.	✓ No formal EPR framework yet means limited compliance incentive for most construction companies. ✓ Limited local processing infrastructure for C&D materials. ✓ Industry awareness of C&D waste as a managed resource, rather than a disposal problem, remains low. ✓ Fee design is complex: the higher the contamination level, the higher the cost, making clean separation difficult to incentivise.	✓ Mandatory site waste management plans will require construction companies to document and report waste diversion. ✓ Global examples of aggregate recycling for roads and infrastructure demonstrate the economic case that can be built locally. ✓ Infrastructure investment under the 2026 Budget Facility creates a strong policy hook for communications. ✓ Organisations that position as proactive compliance leaders now will have significant reputational advantage when C&D EPR is formalised.

Communication priority:

Get ahead of the EPR legislation. Communicate your C&D diversion practices now, before they become a regulatory requirement, to establish credibility as a sector leader.

2.6 Industrial and mining waste

Current status	Challenges	Opportunities
✓ Large industrial waste streams including fly ash, gypsum, slag, and mining tailings represent significant volumes with growing secondary market potential.	✓ Environmental liabilities from historical industrial waste disposal are a reputational overhang for many companies. ✓ Communicating industrial recovery without triggering greenwashing scrutiny	✓ JSE ESG disclosure requirements and mining house sustainability reporting creates strong demand for circular economy credentials. ✓ Carbon tax policy incentivises avoiding industrial waste

✓ Some streams are well-established in resource recovery - fly ash in construction materials, for example. ✓ Others remain largely landfilled, representing both a liability and an opportunity.	requires careful, evidence-based messaging. ✓ Unverified environmental benefit claims in this category carry significant reputational and legal risk.	disposal - a quantifiable benefit for communication. ✓ Partnerships with municipalities for beneficial reuse of industrial materials create compelling social value stories. ✓ Secondary material markets for industrial waste streams are growing globally and offer a commercial angle alongside the environmental narrative.
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Communication priority:

Anchor all claims in verified data. Industrial waste communication must be evidence-first. Partner with accredited auditors and reference their findings in all public-facing content.

2.7 Healthcare and biomedical waste

Current status	Challenges	Opportunities
✓ Tightly regulated category requiring licensed disposal through incineration or autoclave treatment. ✓ High compliance sensitivity and strict chain-of-custody requirements apply throughout the service chain. ✓ Public awareness of the risks of incorrect healthcare waste disposal is elevated following COVID-19.	✓ Any incident involving visible healthcare waste in public spaces creates immediate reputational crisis for the entire chain, regardless of which party is responsible. ✓ Media scrutiny is intense and the public standard of accountability is higher than most other waste categories.	✓ Growing private healthcare sector drives consistent, reliable demand for licensed healthcare waste services. ✓ Chain-of-custody documentation creates strong compliance storytelling opportunities for service providers targeting healthcare procurement audiences. ✓ Thought leadership positioning in trade and professional media builds credibility long before any crisis event occurs.

Communication priority:

Proactive visibility in healthcare trade media. Organisations that are known as credible compliance leaders before an incident occurs recover from one far more quickly.

3. Sector-wide stakeholder map

A stakeholder map is one of the most practical tools a waste sector organisation can have. It identifies who you need to communicate with, what they expect from you, and where the reputational risks lie if those expectations are not managed. In the waste sector, the stakeholder landscape is unusually broad: unlike most industries, waste management organisations interact directly with every other sector of the economy, every level of government, the informal economy, and communities across South Africa.

Before reading the map below, it is worth understanding how to use each column:

- ✓ **Stakeholder group and sub-groupings:** These identify who your stakeholders are and the specific entities or structures within each group. Not every sub-grouping will be relevant to every organisation. Use the map to identify which stakeholders are active in your specific operational context.
- ✓ **Key expectations:** These are what each stakeholder group wants from you. They are the minimum expectations your communication needs to address in order to maintain a functional relationship with that group. If these expectations are not being met, or not being communicated as being met, you are carrying reputational risk.
- ✓ **Communication risk areas:** These are the scenarios in which a stakeholder group is most likely to become a source of reputational damage. They are not predictions, they are known pressure points that your communication strategy should anticipate and prepare for. The crisis communication section of this document provides protocols for managing these risk areas when they become active.

This map should be used as a starting point. Every organisation operating in the waste sector will have a different stakeholder mix depending on its size, geography, and services. Adapt this map to reflect your specific context, and revisit it at least annually as your operating environment changes.

Stakeholder group	Sub-groupings	Key expectations	Communication risk areas
National government	DFFE, DTIC, DALRRD, Department of	Compliance data, sector performance against NWMS	Non-compliance exposure, policy

Local government	Employment and Labour, Treasury	targets, job creation reporting, SAWIS submissions	misalignment, insufficient enforcement cooperation
	Metro and district municipalities, waste services departments, LED offices, SALGA	Service delivery partnerships, EPR funding pathways, co-operation on separation-at-source	Unmet service delivery expectations, community backlash over municipal contracts, budget disputes
PROs and industry bodies	Polyco, Fibre Circle, eWASA, CGCSA PRO, GreenTyre, PASA, IWMSA	Shared sector positioning, accurate tonnage data, co-branding in public campaigns	Attribution disputes, fragmented messaging, competing PRO claims
Formal waste sector	Licensed waste management companies, recyclers, MRF operators, hazardous waste TSDFs, composters	Partnership opportunities, regulatory clarity, market access for secondary materials	Compliance incidents, community opposition, permit breaches
Informal waste sector	Waste reclaimers, cooperatives, buy-back centres, reclaimer associations	Formal recognition, fair payment, inclusion in EPR funding flows, safety and dignity	Exclusion from formal value chains, exploitation narratives, policy promises unmet
Producers and importers	FMCG companies, electronics manufacturers, importers, brand owners	Clear EPR compliance pathway, co-branding in circularity campaigns, regulatory certainty	EPR non-compliance public exposure, greenwashing allegations, DRS penalty communications
Corporates with ESG obligations	JSE-listed companies, multinationals, large retailers	Auditable waste diversion data, sustainability report content, supplier accreditation	Insufficient evidence for ESG reporting claims, audit failures, supply chain reputation risk
Communities	Urban, peri-urban, township, rural, informal settlements	Clean environments, local job creation, responsive service delivery, safe infrastructure	NIMBYism on new facilities, community protests, environmental justice allegations
Media	Business media, environmental media, community newspapers, broadcast, digital platforms	Accurate and timely information, access to spokespeople, data for reporting	Negative incident coverage, lack of prepared spokesperson, delayed crisis response

Academia and research	Universities, CSIR, research institutions, sector NGOs	Data access, partnership opportunities, honest reporting of challenges alongside achievements	Research findings that contradict sector claims, IP disputes
Civil society and NGOs	Environmental justice organisations, anti-pollution activists, community organisations	Transparency, accountability, community benefit sharing, informal sector rights	Community mobilisation, media amplification of grievances, legal challenges to facilities
International funders and investors	World Bank, GEF, DBSA, Green Climate Fund, DFIs, private equity	Demonstrable impact, M&E compliance, alignment with SDGs and climate commitments	Insufficient reporting rigour, project delays, governance failures

3.1 Prioritising your stakeholder engagement

Not all stakeholders require the same intensity or frequency of communication. Understanding this gives you the opportunity to focus your communication efforts. The stakeholder map above tells you who your stakeholders are. This section helps you decide where to invest your communication effort first.

Use the following prioritisation framework, which plots stakeholders across two dimensions: their influence over your operating environment (the degree to which they can affect your ability to operate, your regulatory standing, or your commercial pipeline) and their interest in your activities (the degree to which they actively seek information about what you do). The four categories below determine your engagement approach:

Prioritisation category	Who this includes and how to engage
High influence / High interest: Manage closely	DFFE, SAWIS, relevant PROs, municipal partners, and corporate clients with ESG obligations. These stakeholders shape your regulatory environment and commercial pipeline. They require regular, structured, evidence-based communication. For a recycling company, this might mean quarterly face-to-face meetings with municipal partners and monthly SAWIS reporting with accompanying summaries. They should never learn something significant about your performance from a third party before they hear it from you.

High influence / Lower interest: Keep informed	National Treasury, sector media, national government departments beyond DFFE, and broader industry bodies. These stakeholders do not actively monitor your operations but can significantly affect you when policy changes occur or when a story about the sector draws them in. Periodic thought leadership, annual reporting, and proactive engagement when regulatory changes affect your operations is sufficient. The goal is to ensure they have a positive or neutral baseline impression of your organisation before they ever need to investigate further.
Lower influence / High interest: Keep engaged	Communities adjacent to your operations, waste reclaimer partners, and academic institutions. These stakeholders may appear to have limited power over your operations, but this changes rapidly in a crisis. A community that feels excluded or ignored has a very short path to becoming a high-influence stakeholder through protest, media amplification, or legal action. Regular proactive engagement: community liaison meetings, open days, direct communication about operational changes, is your most effective form of crisis prevention. Do not wait until something goes wrong.
Lower influence / Lower interest: Monitor	General public, consumer advocacy groups, and international observers. These audiences do not require active engagement under normal circumstances. Monitor for shifts in public sentiment, particularly on social media, and activate targeted communication only in response to significant incidents, public campaigns, or regulatory developments that elevate their interest in your sector.

Practical example — applying the stakeholder map to a campaign:

Imagine a composting facility in a peri-urban area planning a community awareness campaign around separation-at-source for organic waste.

Using the stakeholder map, they identify four priority groups for the campaign:

1. *Communities (High interest / Lower influence — primary audience for the awareness message),*
2. *Local government (High influence / High interest — need to co-own the campaign to give it legitimacy),*

3. *Waste reclaimers (High interest — their collection routes and income are directly affected by what households separate), and*
4. *Media (High influence / Lower interest — local community and environmental media can amplify the campaign message significantly).*

The campaign is designed differently for each group: door-to-door engagement in isiXhosa and Afrikaans for the community, a formal co-branding and approval process with the municipality, a direct engagement session with local reclaimer cooperatives to explain how the campaign will affect their routes, and a media launch event with a local spokesperson.

Without the stakeholder map, this campaign would likely have targeted one audience and missed three others.



4. Positioning: how organisations can align with national waste management priorities

Positioning is the foundation of all communication. It defines how your organisation wants to be perceived, by government, communities, corporate clients, funders, and the media; and it anchors every media release, interview, social media post, and stakeholder engagement in a consistent, credible narrative. Without a clear positioning statement, you risk creating more confusion through your communication activities rather than clarity.

The NWMS 2026 is not just a regulatory framework. It is a specific plan for where the waste sector needs to go, and it provides waste management organisations with a powerful opportunity to align their positioning with that national direction. Organisations that do this well will earn preferential stakeholder relationships, greater regulatory goodwill, and stronger commercial positioning. Those that continue to communicate reactively from a compliance posture, in response to incidents rather than in anticipation of them, will find themselves on the back foot as scrutiny of the sector increases.

The seven positioning themes below are drawn directly from the NWMS 2026's priorities. They are the specific areas where the strategy signals that change is expected, and where organisations that communicate progress will be recognised as sector leaders.

For each theme, the table identifies the recommended positioning direction, what it should communicate, and the types of organisations for which it is most relevant.

4.1 Positioning themes aligned to the NWMS 2026

Positioning theme	How to align your organisation's narrative
Landfill diversion	Frame your operations around the diversion of materials away from landfill, recognising that landfill capacity is finite and that the NWMS 2026's 40% diversion target creates a clear national direction. Whether you operate composting facilities, recycling infrastructure, alternative treatment, or resource recovery programmes, quantify and communicate the tonnages you divert. Position your organisation as part of the solution to a national infrastructure challenge, not simply as a service provider filling an existing gap. Most relevant to: waste management companies, recyclers, composters, treatment facilities, PROs.

Resource recovery	Shift your public narrative from waste disposal to resource recovery. Every tonne of material that re-enters the economy as a secondary resource is a tonne that demonstrates the value of your operations beyond waste removal. Communicate the secondary markets for the materials you recover. Name the businesses that buy them. Show where recovered materials end up. This narrative builds credibility with corporate ESG audiences, funders, and media in a way that compliance-focused messaging cannot. Most relevant to: recyclers, MRF operators, PROs, waste management companies with recovery programmes.
Compliance and accountability	Communicate your regulatory compliance status proactively, clearly, and with evidence. Reference your NEMWA permits, your SAWIS registration, your EPR target performance, and your audit outcomes. In a sector where non-compliance is a known risk, organisations that demonstrate transparent, accountable governance stand out. Do not treat compliance as a minimum standard to be quietly met. Treat it as a communication asset to be actively promoted. Most relevant to: all organisations in the waste value chain.
Separation at source	Position your organisation as a partner in South Africa's separation-at-source transition. The NWMS 2026 mandates separation-at-source across all metros, which means that any organisation involved in collection, processing, or community education has a role to play and a story to tell. Communicate how your operations depend on, and actively support, better separation practices. Co-brand with municipal partners where possible to strengthen the credibility of your public education messaging. Most relevant to: waste management companies, PROs, municipalities, composters, recyclers.
Waste material innovation	Demonstrate investment in new approaches to waste treatment, material recovery, material and packaging design, and circular economy integration.

	This includes co-processing in cement kilns, biodigestion, bioprospecting, waste-to-energy, and alternative raw material development. Innovation communication positions your organisation as forward-looking, reduces regulatory risk by showing proactive alignment with future policy direction, and attracts investor and partner interest. Be specific: name the technology, the partner, the output, and the volume. Most relevant to: alternative treatment operators, producers, industrial waste managers, e-waste processors, R&D-active organisations.
Consumer awareness	If your operations depend on public behaviour, separation at source, correct disposal of e-waste, returning packaging for DRS schemes - then consumer awareness is not a nice-to-have. It is a core function of your communication strategy. Invest in plain-language, multilingual public education. Use social media, community radio, and in-store communication to reach consumers where they are. Measure the awareness impact of your campaigns and report it alongside your tonnage data. Most relevant to: PROs, retailers, fast-moving consumer goods producers, municipalities, e-waste organisations.
Responsible and safe disposal	Not everything can be recycled or recovered, and responsible final disposal remains an essential service in South Africa's waste management landscape. Organisations providing licensed landfill, incineration, hazardous waste treatment, or other end-of-life disposal services should communicate the value of what they do: protecting public health, preventing illegal dumping, managing materials that have no viable recovery market. Responsible disposal should be communicated with transparency, including environmental monitoring data, community engagement records, and operational standards. Most relevant to: landfill operators, hazardous waste TSDFs, incineration facilities, transfer station operators.

4.2 Positioning statement framework by NWMS 2026 strategic outcome

The table below provides positioning statement frameworks mapped directly to the NWMS 2026's six strategic outcomes. These are designed to complement the seven themes above: where the positioning themes describe the direction, these statements provide the specific narrative language that focuses on an end goal: what is the overarching purpose of these national priorities.

Select the outcomes most relevant to your operations and use these as the foundation for your own positioning statement.

Strategic outcome (NWMS 2026)	Positioning statement framework
Circular economy and waste minimisation	Position your organisation as an active enabler of South Africa's circular economy transition , one that treats waste not as a problem to be disposed of, but as a resource to be recovered for its economic value.
EPR compliance and producer responsibility (for PROs)	Position your organisation as the trusted partner for producers navigating South Africa's evolving EPR landscape , providing compliance certainty, transparent reporting, and co-branding opportunities that strengthen your members' sustainability credentials.
Effective waste services	Position your organisation as a credible, accountable service provider that communities and government can rely on , one that delivers measurable service quality, responds to community concerns, and invests in infrastructure that makes waste management work for everyone.
Job creation and social transformation	Position your organisation as a driver of green economy employment , one that creates dignified, sustainable jobs in waste collection, recycling, processing, and management, and that actively integrates waste reclaimers into the formal value chain.
Community wellbeing and environmental justice	Position your organisation as a responsible neighbour , one that engages genuinely with communities before building infrastructure, shares benefits equitably, and treats environmental impact as a community right, not merely a regulatory obligation.
Compliance and accountability	Position your organisation as a sector leader in transparency and governance , one that reports accurately, communicates its performance openly, and uses data to drive continuous improvement rather than to manage appearances.

5. Key messages by audience.

Key messages are the specific, audience-tailored statements that carry your positioning into every communication channel. They answer the question your stakeholders are most likely to ask: why should I care about what this organisation does?

Effective key messages are **evidence-anchored**, **jargon-free**, and **consistently reinforced** across all platforms. The following message frameworks are designed to guide content development, media engagements, and stakeholder briefings.

5.1 Messages for government and regulators

Government and regulatory audiences require evidence-based, policy-aligned communication. They need to know that your organisation understands its obligations, operates transparently, and contributes to national waste management goals. Messages for this audience should reference specific NWMS 2026 targets, SAWIS data, and EPR compliance metrics.

Communication objective	Key message
Demonstrate regulatory alignment	<i>"Our operations are fully aligned with the NWMS 2026 targets, and we report our tonnage data to SAWIS on a quarterly basis. We welcome the strategy's emphasis on compliance monitoring and enforcement because it levels the playing field for organisations operating to the highest standards."</i>
Demonstrate social contribution	<i>"Our operations directly contribute to the NWMS 2026 employment target. We have created [X] jobs in the waste management sector, [X] of which are in previously disadvantaged communities and [X] of which are in the informal reclaimer sector."</i>
Demonstrate circularity contribution	<i>"We diverted [X] tonnes of material from landfill in the last financial year, representing [X]% of our total waste intake. This is our contribution to South Africa's 40% diversion target."</i>

5.2 Messages for corporate clients and producers

Corporate clients and producers are motivated by compliance certainty, ESG reporting content, and commercial risk management. They need to trust that your organisation will protect their reputation as well as their waste.

Communication objective	Key message
Establish compliance confidence	<i>"We provide full chain-of-custody documentation for all waste streams we manage on your behalf. Our data is SAWIS-compliant and formatted for direct integration into your sustainability and ESG reporting requirements."</i>
Address EPR obligations	<i>"Our EPR services cover all [X] material categories under NEMWA EPR regulations. We guide your compliance obligations so your team can focus on your core business, with a single reliable data showing your performance against all targets."</i>
Offer reputational value	<i>"Partnering with us is not just compliance management. It is a public commitment to the circular economy that you can communicate to your customers, investors, and stakeholders. We provide co-branding opportunities for clients who meet or exceed their EPR targets."</i>

5.3 Messages for communities

Community messaging must be grounded in local relevance, cultural sensitivity, and genuine benefit. Communities are the most powerful influencers of your licence to operate. Generic corporate messaging fails here. Local language, local faces, and local impact data are essential.

Communication objective	Key message
Build local trust	<i>"Our operations have created [X] permanent jobs in this community. We prioritise local hiring and work with community structures to identify candidates for every available position."</i>
Address environmental concerns	<i>"We understand that our facility is a neighbour to this community. We hold quarterly community liaison meetings, publish our environmental monitoring data publicly, and have a direct complaints line that is monitored."</i>
Connect to clean environment goals	<i>"Every tonne of material we recover from this community is material that does not end up in an illegal dumpsite or a stormwater drain. Our work here keeps [X] tonnes of waste out of the local environment every month."</i>

5.4 Messages for media

Media audiences need strong angles, credible spokespeople, and data. The waste management sector is under-reported in positive terms and over-reported in negative terms. The organisations that build the best media relationships are those that provide journalists with consistent access to good stories, accurate data, and available spokespeople.

Story type	Key message framework
Circular economy story	Lead with the volume of material recovered and its secondary use. Connect to a named business or product that uses the recovered material. Provide a spokesperson from the SMME or community that benefited.
Job creation story	Lead with specific case studies (i.e. waste entrepreneurs or SMMEs), not aggregate numbers. The most powerful story is a single waste reclaimer who transitioned into formal employment through your organisation's integration programme.
Compliance achievement story	Frame compliance as a contribution to a national target, not just an internal milestone. Reference the NWMS 2026 40% diversion goal and your organisation's contribution to reaching it.
Incident response	Lead with what you have done to address the issue, not with a denial. Follow the crisis communication protocols in Section 7 of this document. Never allow a media vacuum to fill with speculation.

5.5 Messages for the informal sector and waste reclaimers

Communication with and about the informal waste sector requires particular care and respect. Waste reclaimers are not passive recipients of corporate social responsibility programmes. They are active economic participants whose contributions are quantifiable and whose rights are recognised in the NWMS 2026. Communication should reflect this.

Communication objective	Key message
Acknowledge contribution	<i>"Waste reclaimers in South Africa collect an estimated 80% to 90% of all recycled materials and save municipalities hundreds of millions of rands in avoided landfill costs annually. Our organisation recognises this contribution and structures our partnerships accordingly."</i>

Communicate formal integration	<i>"We are actively working to bring waste reclaimers into our formal value chain with fair payment, access to equipment and protective clothing, and pathways to registered employment for those who want it."</i>
Demonstrate rights-based approach	<i>"Our community liaison processes with waste reclaimer organisations follow a free, prior, and informed consent approach. Reclaimers in our operating areas are consulted on any changes to collection routes, buying rates, or facility access."</i>

6. Communication channels: what to use and when

Channel selection is not about being everywhere at once. It is about being where your most important stakeholders are, with content that serves their specific information needs.

The waste management sector spans audiences from national regulators to township communities, which means your channel mix must be both professionally credible and locally accessible.

The following guidance provides best-practice recommendations for each major channel, covering purpose, content approach, best practices, and measurable outcomes.

6.1 Public relations and media

Element	Guidance
Purpose	Public relations is the most cost-effective way to build third-party credibility and public visibility. A media placement in a credible publication carries more reputational weight than a paid advertisement, because it implies editorial endorsement. For waste management sector organisations, PR serves two equally important functions: 1. Building a positive public profile during normal operations, and 2. Managing your narrative during crisis situations. The organisations that manage crises best are those with established media relationships and a track record of proactive, credible communication before the crisis occurred.

Content approach	Lead with impact data and human stories rather than operational announcements. A media release that says 'We diverted 12,000 tonnes from landfill this quarter, creating 47 jobs in Khayelitsha' will outperform one that says 'Company achieves quarterly recycling milestone'. Name the people, the places, the volumes, and the secondary markets for recovered materials. Position your CEO or technical lead as a thought leader through opinion pieces on sector developments, regulatory changes, and the NWMS 2026's implications for the industry. Do not wait for incidents to create your media profile. A proactive media presence means you have a reservoir of goodwill to draw from when difficult situations arise.
Building media relationships	Build personal relationships with environmental, business, and community journalists before you need them. Know which journalists cover waste, EPR, circular economy, and municipal services in your key markets. If you need help with this SUSCO has an existing up-to-date media database of journalists that cover waste management news. Offer them exclusives for major stories - a first interview with your MD on a significant operational milestone, for example. Provide background briefings when major sector developments occur, even when you do not have a direct story to place. Being a reliable, informed source makes you a journalist's first call, not their last resort.
Target media	Business media including Business Day, Daily Maverick Business, and Financial Mail for corporate and investor audiences. Environmental and industry media including Engineering News, Infrastructure News, and Packaging SA for sector peers and policy audiences. Community newspapers and radio stations for location-specific stories in areas where you operate. Broadcast media including SABC and community television for public awareness campaigns.

Spokesperson readiness	Online platforms like Bizcommunity and Moneyweb for ESG and circular economy narratives. Always have a prepared, media-trained spokesperson available. This person should know the key messages for each stakeholder audience, be briefed on current operational performance data, and be comfortable with broadcast interview conditions. Organisations without a prepared spokesperson are at significant reputational risk in a crisis. The absence of a credible voice creates a vacuum that speculation fills immediately.
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6.2 Social media

Platform	Purpose, content approach, and best practice
LinkedIn	LinkedIn is your primary channel for reaching B2B audiences: corporate clients, government partners, investors, ESG practitioners, and sector peers. Content should be professional, evidence-based, and positioning-focused. Post thought leadership articles (500 to 800 words) that connect your operations to sector-level policy conversations, the NWMS 2026, EPR developments, circular economy case studies. Complement these with shorter updates on operational milestones, new partnerships, and regulatory alignment. Tag corporate partners, government departments, and industry bodies to extend reach beyond your existing following. Engagement on LinkedIn is driven by insight, not entertainment; posts that contain specific data, an informed opinion, or a useful framework consistently outperform announcements. Aim for three to four posts per week, with at least one longer-form article each month.
Facebook	Facebook reaches broader public audiences and is particularly effective for community-facing content in areas where you operate. Use it to share locally relevant stories: community clean-up partnerships, local job creation profiles, separation-at-source education content, and event announcements. Write in accessible language and, where your community has a dominant home language other than English, consider bilingual posts. Active comment management

Instagram	is essential. Unanswered community concerns or questions on a public Facebook page create reputational risk. Assign a specific team member to monitor and respond to Facebook comments within 24 hours. Facebook Live streaming of community events or open days is a low-cost way to build transparency and trust with local audiences. Instagram is a visual storytelling platform best used for behind-the-scenes content that humanises your operations: waste reclaimer profile series, facility operations photography, before-and-after transformation imagery, and infographic content on recycling rates and environmental impact. Short-form video Reels (60 to 90 seconds) consistently reach audiences beyond your existing following through the platform's algorithm. Use them for quick explanations of waste processes, waste reclaimer spotlights, or responses to common public questions about recycling. Instagram is not a channel for regulatory announcements or compliance data. Keep the tone human, visual, and story-driven.
X (Twitter/X)	X is most useful for two specific functions: rapid-response public communication during a crisis or sector development, and engagement with policy conversations and government announcements. If your organisation operates in the public eye and is likely to face media or public scrutiny in real time, X is where your crisis statement needs to appear first. Monitor continuously for mentions of your organisation name, your facility locations, and relevant sector keywords (EPR, NWMS, waste management, recycling). Not every waste management organisation needs to be active on X. If you do not have dedicated monitoring capacity and a crisis response plan attached to this channel, the risk of delayed or absent responses outweighs the benefits.
YouTube	YouTube is the right channel for long-form storytelling that builds institutional memory and supports funder or partner reporting. Use it for facility documentary content, waste reclaimer profile videos (five to fifteen minutes), community governance testimonials, and annual impact summaries. YouTube content does not need to be produced at broadcast quality, but it does need to be clearly lit, audible, and purposefully structured. A ten-minute video profile of a waste reclaimer who has transitioned to formal employment through your

programme is more credible and more durable than any press release describing the same outcome.

Upload captions and a full transcript for accessibility and search engine discoverability.

6.3 Website

Element	Guidance
Purpose and positioning	Your website is your most credible owned communication channel. Every stakeholder you engage with, from a regulator reviewing your application to a journalist researching a story, to a community member checking who operates a nearby facility, will visit your website at some point. It is the destination you direct every audience to, and it must reflect the quality and credibility of your actual operations. A website that is outdated, poorly organised, or thin on evidence actively undermines the communication work you do everywhere else. A website should be consistently updated to reflect the company's current position otherwise it is a reputational risk.
Services and waste stream pages	Dedicate a clear, specific page to each service or waste stream you manage. These pages should be written for non-technical audiences; explain what you do, why it matters, and what evidence exists that it works. Do not require visitors to contact you to find out basic information about your services. You should remove barriers to access basic information.
Transparency and compliance section	Create a dedicated page listing your NEMWA licences, EPR registrations, ISO certifications, SAWIS registration status, and any relevant environmental authorisations. Update this page whenever these are renewed or changed. Transparent, proactively published compliance information is one of the most effective trust-building tools available to waste management organisations, particularly those with community-facing operations.
Data and impact reporting	Publish your most recent quarterly or annual performance data, tonnages diverted, materials recovered, jobs created, diversion rates, on a publicly accessible page.

	This does not need to be a full sustainability report. A simple, clearly formatted data summary that is updated regularly signals that your organisation is transparent, evidence-oriented, and accountable. This also provides journalists and ESG researchers with the data they need without them having to request it.
News and media section	Maintain an archive of all media releases, opinion pieces, and significant media coverage. This provides journalists with background material, signals an active and communicating organisation, and creates search engine-discoverable content that builds your sector profile over time.
Community engagement section	Explain your community consultation process, the structure of your community liaison forums, how to submit a complaint, and what response time a complainant can expect. This page reassures communities that you have a process, and it demonstrates to regulators and media that your community engagement is structured and accountable, not ad hoc.

6.4 Newsletters

Element	Guidance
Purpose	A newsletter is a direct, controlled communication channel to your stakeholder network, including your clients, partners, government contacts, PRO members, and sector peers. Unlike social media, a newsletter is not subject to platform algorithm changes, and unlike your website, it arrives in the reader's inbox. It is best used to maintain ongoing relationships with audiences who have opted in to hear from you, and to demonstrate that your organisation is active, informed, and progressing.
Quarterly is the recommended cadence for most waste sector organisations	Monthly newsletters require significant content production capacity and risk becoming repetitive or thin. Annual newsletters arrive too infrequently to maintain a relationship. A quarterly newsletter, timed to follow your quarterly operational reporting, creates a natural rhythm that connects communication activity to performance data.

Recommended content structure	1. Open with a strategic update from your CEO or MD. This is a paragraph or two on the sector landscape and your organisation's response to current developments. 2. Follow with operational highlights: tonnage data, key milestones, new partnerships or certifications. 3. Include a human-interest profile - a waste reclaimer story, a community beneficiary, an employee milestone. 4. Summarise media coverage received in the quarter with links. 5. Close with upcoming events, reporting deadlines, and any calls to action relevant to your audience.
Distribution and measurement	Use a dedicated newsletter platform such as Mailchimp to manage your distribution list, schedule sends and track open rates and click-through rates. These metrics tell you which content types are most valued by your audience and how your engagement is changing over time. A healthy open rate for a professional waste sector newsletter is between 25% and 40%. Below this suggests the list needs refreshing or the content is not meeting audience needs.

6.5 Stakeholder engagement and events

Element	Guidance
Why events matter	No digital channel replaces in-person engagement for building trust with communities, government partners, and industry peers. Events create content, strengthen relationships, and demonstrate accountability in ways that no media release can replicate. For waste management sector organisations, events are also a proactive form of crisis prevention: communities that have visited your facility, met your team, and seen your operations with their own eyes are far less likely to be mobilised against you by external actors.
Community open days and site visits	An annual open day at your facility where community members, local government representatives, and media are invited to see operations first-hand. This is one of the highest-value communication activities available to waste management organisations with significant local footprints.

Government liaison meetings	Plan these proactively, not reactively. Provide tours, Q&A sessions with operational leads, and printed information in local languages. Document the event with photography and video for use across your other communication channels. Maintain a regular, structured touchpoint with your key government partners, at minimum quarterly, either formal or informal. These meetings should include operational performance updates, discussion of upcoming regulatory developments, and collaborative problem-solving where service delivery or compliance challenges are emerging. Do not let government stakeholders hear about your performance challenges for the first time in a SAWIS report, they should be informed and engaged before formal reporting cycles.
Industry forum participation	Participate actively in IWMSA events, PRO forums, and sector working groups. Presence in these forums positions your organisation as a peer among sector leaders, creates opportunities for co-positioning on industry challenges, and provides early intelligence on regulatory and policy developments. Speaking engagements at industry events are a particularly valuable form of thought leadership for technical and executive audiences.



7. Crisis communication protocols

No sector in South Africa faces more frequent or more severe reputational crises than waste management. Environmental incidents, community protests, compliance failures, illegal dumping allegations, worker safety incidents, and media investigations are all part of the operational reality. Organisations that manage these crises well share one characteristic: they prepared before the crisis arrived. The protocols below provide a structured framework for crisis prevention, identification, and response.

Defining a reputational crisis:

A crisis is any event, incident, or situation, whether sudden or developing, that has the potential to significantly harm your organisation's reputation, damage public trust, disrupt operations, challenge stakeholder confidence, or undermine your organisation's mandate and values. A crisis does not need to threaten human life to qualify. If it negatively influences stakeholder perceptions, media narratives, or public sentiment, it is a reputational crisis.

Every crisis is different, and therefore requires a different response. The reputational matrix below can be used as a guide to classify the nature / severity of the crisis. This will ultimately guide the type of response.

Reputational Risk Matrix:

LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
Low-risk issues with limited operational or reputational impact. May attract localised complaints, minor media interest, or negative social media comments.	Significant incidents attracting regional/national media interest, community tensions, or reputational scrutiny. Potential for stakeholder or partner concern.	Major, high-profile crises with serious reputational, political, operational, or safety consequences. May impact the company's mandate, credibility, or public trust.

7.1 Core principles

Effective crisis communication in the waste management sector is guided by seven principles. These are non-negotiable:

- 1. Responsiveness.** Time is as important as the message. Delayed responses allow misinformation and speculation to fill the space your statement should occupy.
- 2. Transparency.** Open, fact-based communication is the only path to stakeholder trust. Do not withhold information, downplay risks, or appear evasive.
- 3. Accountability.** Take responsibility for your organisation's role in the situation. Acknowledge errors when they occur. Accountability protects credibility; denial destroys it.
- 4. Collaboration.** Engage government bodies, community leaders, and relevant partners. No crisis is managed in isolation, and collaborative responses carry more credibility than solo ones.
- 5. Sensitivity.** Crisis communication must be culturally and socially aware. Dismissive or technically framed communication in response to community concerns escalates rather than resolves reputational damage.
- 6. Empathy.** Where people, communities, or environments have been harmed, your communication must reflect genuine concern. Lead with empathy before data.
- 7. Mitigation.** Communication must describe not only what happened, but what you are doing to prevent recurrence. Forward-looking, solutions-oriented communication rebuilds trust faster than any apology.

7.2 Crisis risk register for the waste management sector

The following risk register identifies the most common crisis scenarios facing waste management sector organisations in South Africa, with recommended response teams and initial key messages. This table should be adapted to reflect your specific operational context.

Crisis scenario	Classification	First response team	Key message framework
Environmental incident (spill, leachate, fire at facility)	HIGH	CEO, Operations Director, Communications, DFFE	We are aware of the incident and are working urgently to contain it. Environmental monitoring is underway. We are cooperating fully with DFFE and relevant authorities and will provide regular updates.

Community protest over facility or operations	HIGH	CEO, Community Relations, Communications, Legal	We take this community's concerns seriously. We are requesting an urgent meeting with community representatives through proper channels. We are committed to addressing the concerns raised.
Regulatory non-compliance finding or notice	HIGH	CEO, Legal, Compliance, Communications	We have received a notice and are engaging directly with the relevant authority to address the findings. We are committed to full compliance and will implement corrective measures within the prescribed timeframe.
Media investigation into illegal dumping or waste crime	HIGH	CEO, Legal, Communications	We have strict controls in place to prevent illegal disposal. We are investigating these allegations urgently and will cooperate fully with any official inquiry. We will not comment on unverified claims.
Worker safety incident or fatality	HIGH	CEO, HR Director, Legal, Communications, Department of Labour	Our deepest concern is for the wellbeing of those affected and their families. We have suspended operations at the relevant site pending a full investigation. We are cooperating fully with the Department of Employment and Labour.
Greenwashing allegation	MEDIUM	Communications, CEO, Legal	Our environmental impact claims are based on verified data submitted to SAWIS and independently audited. We are happy to share the evidence behind any specific claim.
Waste reclaimer conflict or labour dispute	MEDIUM	Community Relations, Communications, Legal, relevant association	We are committed to fair and transparent engagement with all waste reclaimers in our operating area. We are seeking direct dialogue to resolve the specific concerns raised.

Media coverage of poor service delivery	MEDIUM	Communications, Operations, Municipal liaison	We are aware of this coverage and are investigating the specific service delivery concerns raised. We have a team on site and will provide an update within 24 hours.
Social media misinformation campaign	MEDIUM	Communications, Legal	We are aware of this content and can confirm that it is factually inaccurate. The correct information is [X]. We are requesting that the content be corrected or removed.
EPR target non-achievement made public	MEDIUM	CEO, Communications, relevant PRO	We fell short of our [X] target in this reporting period. We are committed to transparency about our performance. Here is what we are doing to close the gap in the next reporting period.

7.3 Crisis response protocol

When a crisis is identified, activate the following six-step protocol. Do not skip steps.

Do not begin external communication before completing Steps 1 to 3.

Step	Actions required
Step 1: Classify and assess (upon identification)	Determine the crisis category from the Risk Register. Assess severity using the Reputational Risk Matrix: 1. Minor (limited operational or reputational impact), 2. Medium (regional/national media interest, community tension), or 3. High (major reputational, political, operational, or safety consequences).
Step 2: Activate crisis response team (within 3 hours)	1. Notify relevant team members as per the Risk Register. 2. Convene an emergency virtual or in-person assessment meeting. 3. Appoint a single official spokesperson. 4. Brief all staff on what to say if approached by media: confirm that the matter is being managed and direct all enquiries to the spokesperson.
Step 3: Develop and approve key messages (within 12 hours)	1. Draft factual, empathetic, and action-oriented key messages based on the seven principles above. Include what happened, what immediate actions have been taken, what will happen next, and how stakeholders can get more information.

	2. Include these key messages in official communique, including and internal staff memo, external media statement, and direct stakeholder communication. 3. Obtain sign-off from CEO and communications lead before any external release.
Step 4: Disseminate controlled communication (within 24 hours)	1. Distribute the internal memo to all staff if the situation is within the Medium to High crisis categories 2. Keep a holding statement on file for media if the situation has not yet reached public attention. 3. Distribute an official media statement for situations already in the public domain. 4. Distribute direct communications to key stakeholders including regulators, partners, and community leaders as relevant. 5. Activate your media spokesperson and make them available for enquiries.
Step 5: Monitor and adjust (within 48 hours)	1. Set up media monitoring on relevant keyword 2. Track social media. 3. Provide regular updates to internal leadership. 4. Adjust messaging as new information becomes available. 5. Do not go silent.
Step 6: Ongoing monitoring and close-out (within 7 days)	1. Continue monitoring. Compile a media outputs summary. 2. Issue a closure or update statement once the situation stabilises. 3. Conduct an internal debrief to identify lessons learnt. 4. Update the Crisis Register accordingly.

8. Strategy implementation: communication function levels

A communication strategy has no value on a shelf. Its value is in consistent, purposeful implementation. Every waste management sector organisation has different communication capacity in terms of budget, team size, and stakeholder complexity.

Rather than prescribe a single standard, this section sets out three communication function levels:

1. Awareness-based,
2. Positioning-focused, and
3. Full reputation management.

These reflect the communication investment appropriate to different types and scales of organisations operating in the sector.

Use the descriptions below to identify which function level best reflects your current capacity and strategic ambitions. You may find that your organisation currently operates at one level but has objectives that require a step up. The function levels are designed to be incremental. You can move from awareness-based to positioning-focused as your capacity grows, without needing to overhaul your approach entirely.

8.1 Communication function levels

	Level 1: Awareness-based	Level 2: Positioning and thought leadership	Level 3: Full reputation management
Best suited to	Small recyclers, buy-back centres, community waste projects, organisations new to formal communications, single-site operators with limited public exposure.	Mid-sized waste management companies, PROs, recyclers with multiple sites or significant EPR obligations, organisations actively building commercial relationships with corporate ESG buyers.	Large waste management companies, national-scale PROs, organisations with multi-community operational footprints, listed companies or those with significant regulatory or investor scrutiny.
Primary goal	Be known. Ensure key stakeholders are aware of who you are, what you do, and that you operate legitimately.	Build credibility as a sector leader, attract corporate clients and funders, and establish a proactive public narrative.	Be trusted. Manage your reputation across all stakeholder groups continuously, in good times and in difficult ones.
Core activities	- Updated, factually accurate website with services, licences, and contact information. - Basic social media presence on Facebook and LinkedIn posting operational updates and milestones. - Media releases for significant events or	- Active, content-rich LinkedIn presence with thought leadership articles and sector commentary. - Regular media release programme and proactive media relationship building. - CEO or MD positioned as a sector spokesperson with	- Full stakeholder mapping and tailored communication planning for each stakeholder group. - Dedicated communications manager or retained communications agency. - Monthly media release programme with

	achievements (two to four per year). - Community notice of operations and a basic complaints or enquiry process. - Crisis holding statement template prepared in advance.	regular opinion piece placements. - Quarterly newsletter to client and partner stakeholder list. - Annual media analysis report tracking coverage volume, reach, and sentiment. - Crisis communication register and protocols documented and reviewed annually. - Community engagement events in areas of significant operational footprint.	proactive story development. - Active PR, social media, newsletter, and digital content across all relevant channels. - Ongoing media monitoring with quarterly sentiment and share-of-voice analysis. - Annual sustainability or impact report aligned to NWMS 2026 targets and ESG frameworks. - Proactive government liaison communication programme. - Media training for senior spokespeople and crisis simulation exercises. - Community liaison programme with structured feedback mechanisms.
Key outputs	- Functional website and social media presence. - Two to four media releases per year. - A documented crisis response process.	- Regular earned media coverage in sector and business publications. - Measurable growth in LinkedIn audience and engagement. - A recognised spokesperson with published opinion pieces. - Quarterly newsletter with tracked open rates.	- A documented, sector-leading reputation with measurable media sentiment improvement over time. - Stakeholder trust indicators across government, community, and corporate audiences. - A public sustainability and impact report published annually.

			▪ Crisis preparedness demonstrated through regular simulation exercises.
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8.2 Measuring the impact of your communication

Communication measurement answers a practical question: is what we are doing working? For waste management sector organisations, measurement should track three things:

1. Whether your communication is reaching the right audiences,
2. Whether it is building the right perceptions, and
3. Whether it is influencing the relationships and decisions that matter to your organisation.

The following framework organises measurement into three practical categories, each with clear, achievable indicators.

Measurement category	What it tracks and how
Reach: who you are getting in front of	Reach measures the size and nature of the audience your communication is actually reaching. Track: ▪ The total circulation or viewership of publications and broadcasts where your media releases are placed. ▪ The number of followers and post impressions on your social media channels. ▪ The number of newsletter subscribers and your delivery rate (total list size minus undelivered emails). ▪ Website traffic to your key service and news pages. Available tracking tools: 1. Media monitoring services 2. Channel specific social media analytics 3. Newsletter platform analytics 4. Google Analytics Reach tells you whether your communication is landing in the right places. A media release placed in Engineering News reaches a very different

Engagement: how your audience is responding	audience than one placed in a community newspaper. Both matter, but for different stakeholder groups. Engagement measures whether your audience is actively responding to your content, not just passively receiving it. Track: ▪ Social media engagement rates (likes, comments, shares, and saves as a percentage of total impressions); ▪ Newsletter open rates and link click-through rates; ▪ The number of enquiries or meeting requests generated by specific content; and ▪ The level of participation in community events or stakeholder forums. Engagement is the bridge between reach and influence. A large audience that does not engage with your content is providing no reputational benefit. An engaged, responsive audience is one that is building a relationship with your organisation.
Reputation — what your communication is building over time	Reputation measurement tracks the qualitative shift in how key stakeholder groups perceive your organisation. This is harder to measure than reach or engagement, but it is the outcome that matters most. Track: ▪ Media sentiment: whether coverage of your organisation is classified as positive, neutral, or negative, using a media monitoring service; ▪ Share of voice within sector media, comparing your coverage volume and tone to that of comparable organisations; ▪ The quality and responsiveness of your government stakeholder relationships, assessed qualitatively at six-month intervals; ▪ Community sentiment, tracked through structured feedback mechanisms at community liaison events or through periodic community surveys. Reputation measurement tells you whether your communication investment is changing minds, not just occupying screens. It is advisable to partner with a reputable communications agency to conduct this assessment.

A practical note on measurement:

You do not need sophisticated tools to start measuring. A simple spreadsheet tracking monthly media placements, reach, and sentiment; a newsletter platform with open rate reporting; and an annual qualitative review of your key stakeholder relationships will give you the data you need to demonstrate communication impact and improve your approach over time. Add media monitoring software when your communication function grows to Level 2 or 3.

9. About SUSCO: your communication partner in the waste management sector

This communication strategy was developed by Sustainability Communication Company (SUSCO), a specialist PR and communications consultancy based in Cape Town that operates across South Africa and the African continent.

SUSCO works at the intersection of environmental sustainability, ESG, waste management, conservation, and social development. Our clients include producer responsibility organisations, waste management companies, government bodies, conservation organisations, and social development programmes. We understand the waste management sector's regulatory complexity, its stakeholder dynamics, and the specific communication challenges that come with operating in communities, managing environmental risk, and building credibility in a public trust deficit.

What we do

Service	Description
Communication strategy development	We develop bespoke communication strategies for waste management sector organisations, grounded in stakeholder mapping sessions, positioning workshops, and detailed audience analysis. The methodology used in this industry-wide document is the same methodology we apply to every client engagement.
Public relations and media management	We build and manage your media relationships, develop your spokesperson's media confidence, produce media releases and opinion pieces, and secure placements in the publications that matter to your stakeholder audiences.
Stakeholder engagement and community communication	We facilitate stakeholder mapping sessions, develop community engagement frameworks, produce community-facing communication

	materials, and support organisations in building the trust they need to operate effectively in the communities where they work.
Crisis communication support	We provide retained crisis communication support — from developing your crisis register and protocols in advance, to managing media and stakeholder communication in real-time when an incident occurs.
ESG and sustainability reporting communication	We help waste management sector organisations translate their environmental and social performance data into compelling, credible sustainability communication — for annual reports, ESG disclosures, funder reporting, and public stakeholder audiences.
Digital content and social media management	We develop and manage your digital content strategy across LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and your website — ensuring that your online presence reflects the quality and credibility of your operations.
Training and capacity building	We provide media training for spokespeople, communications skills development for communications staff, and crisis communication simulation exercises for senior management teams.

Our approach

We do not produce generic communications. Everything we develop is grounded in a detailed understanding of your organisation's operating environment, stakeholder landscape, and strategic objectives. We work as an embedded partner, which means we learn your business, challenge your assumptions when necessary, and hold ourselves accountable to the same communication standards we set for you.

We are also honest advisors. If your organisation has a reputational gap between what you claim and what you deliver, we will tell you. Communication cannot substitute for performance, and we will not help you build a narrative that your evidence does not support. We help organisations earn their reputation, not manufacture it.

Get in touch

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Location	Cape Town, South Africa

Service area	South Africa and the African continent
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Ready to implement this strategy?

Whether you need a bespoke communication strategy developed for your organisation, ongoing PR support, a crisis communication review, or a stakeholder mapping workshop, SUSCO is available to support you. Contact us at info@susco.co.za to set up an initial consultation.

10. Glossary of key terms

Term	Definition
AVE (Advertising Value Equivalency)	The monetary value assigned to earned media coverage by comparing it to the equivalent cost of purchasing the same advertising space or airtime.
Circular economy	An economic model that aims to eliminate waste and keep materials in productive use for as long as possible, through design, reuse, repair, and recycling.
DFFE	Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment — the national government department responsible for environmental and waste management policy in South Africa.
DRS (Deposit Return Scheme)	A system in which a deposit is charged on products at point of sale, refundable when the consumer returns the item for recycling. The NWMS 2026 proposes DRS for EPR streams not meeting their recycling targets.
EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility)	Regulations under NEMWA that require producers, importers, and retailers to take responsibility for the end-of-life management of the products and packaging they place onto the South African market, either through their own EPR scheme or through a registered PRO.
IWMSA	Institute of Waste Management of Southern Africa — the primary professional body representing waste management professionals in South Africa.

MRF (Material Recovery Facility)	A facility where mixed recyclable materials are sorted, processed, and prepared for sale to secondary material markets.
NEMWA	National Environmental Management: Waste Act 59 of 2008 — the primary legislation governing waste management in South Africa.
NWMS 2026	Draft National Waste Management Strategy 2026, gazetted by the DFFE in December 2025. Sets the national waste policy framework for the next five years.
NIMBYism	Not In My Back Yard — the community resistance phenomenon in which residents oppose new waste infrastructure developments in their area, regardless of how well-designed or managed they may be.
PASA (PRO Alliance South Africa)	A cross-sector alliance of Producer Responsibility Organisations established to address fragmentation in the South African PRO landscape.
PRO (Producer Responsibility Organisation)	An organisation registered under NEMWA EPR regulations to manage the collective EPR obligations of its member producers, importers, and retailers.
SAWIS	South African Waste Information System — the national waste data repository managed by the DFFE, to which all registered EPR participants are required to report tonnage data.
Separation at source	The practice of separating different categories of waste (recyclables, organics, general waste) at the point of generation — in households, offices, or industrial premises — before collection.
TSDF (Treatment, Storage, and Disposal Facility)	A licensed facility for managing hazardous waste, including storage, treatment, and final disposal.
Waste hierarchy	The NEMWA-mandated order of preference for waste management: prevention, reuse, recycling, recovery, treatment, and disposal as a last resort.
Waste reclaimer	An individual who collects recyclable materials from waste streams (streets, transfer stations, or municipal collection points) and sells them to buy-back centres or recyclers. Waste reclaimers collectively account for an estimated 80% to 90% of South Africa's recycling collection activity.