Advertising, marketing and communications spending controls

Policy summary

1. Control of advertising, marketing and communications (AMC) expenditure ensures that, where taxpayer money is being spent on government communications, it is cost-effective, coordinated and reflects functional standards and professional best practices.

2. The AMC spending control does not replace or negate any other government or departmental procurement or governance policies and processes.

What is in scope of this control?

3. The AMC control applies to the following types of expenditure:

    - advertising including: costs of media; fees and commission for media buying; media and channel planning (applies to all channels, including but not limited to TV, radio, cinema, video and video-on-demand (VOD), audio, in-app, mobile, digital display, paid search and pay-per-click (PPC), social media, out-of-home (including ambient), print, press and advertorials);
    - marketing activities including: creative development and production; design and branding; direct and relationship marketing; email marketing; customer relationship management programmes; telemarketing; campaign help lines; mobile and SMS marketing; partnership marketing; recruitment marketing; sponsorship marketing; field or experiential marketing; content marketing; influencer and affiliate marketing; merchandising; advertiser funded programming; audio-visual activity; storage, printing and distribution of marketing materials;
    - communication strategy, planning, concept and proposition testing and development;
    - social, economic and market research that informs communications, marketing and advertising activity, including polling;
    - analysis and evaluation of communications, marketing and advertising activity;
    - printing and publication of advertising, marketing and campaign materials, excluding any required by parliamentary Standing Orders;
    - External campaign and communications events (e.g. launch events), excluding training;
    - public relations (PR) activity, including publicity associated with consultations, stakeholder and public events and agency fees; and
    - digital activity including: campaign website and application development.

Threshold

4. The control applies to any campaign, programme or project which involves advertising, marketing or communications expenditure of £100,000 or more within a financial year (excluding VAT) - even where an individual element is less than the approval limit.

Process

5. The process to request approval for advertising, marketing and communications activity is outlined on the GCS website.

6. In order to ensure a timely decision, organisations are encouraged to engage early with GCS, including sharing draft business cases ahead of formal submission.

7. GCS will:

- endeavour to return a decision to departments within a 21 calendar day Service Level Agreement (SLA) from the date that an application is formally submitted and to give notice of any changes to this SLA (e.g. where Parliamentary recess or ministerial changes may extend it); and
- have regular communications with organisations once a submission has been received to ensure a 'no surprise approach'.

8. For all approved expenditure, organisations should submit an end-of-year evaluation report to GCS that sets out the success of the activity against its objectives, and provides recommendations for future activity. Reports should be submitted to communications.controls@cabinetoffice.gov.uk.

9. Spending approval may be contingent upon meeting specific conditions. These will be set out in the decision letter sent to the organisation's Director of Communications, who will be asked to acknowledge these conditions. Acceptance of any application for spending in a subsequent financial year will be dependent on meeting any conditions set on previous approvals.

Creating a spend request

10. To request approval of advertising, marketing and communications spend, please use the form provided on the 'Get Approval to Spend' (GATS) service.

Contacts

11. All queries relating to this control should be directed to communications.controls@cabinetoffice.gov.uk.