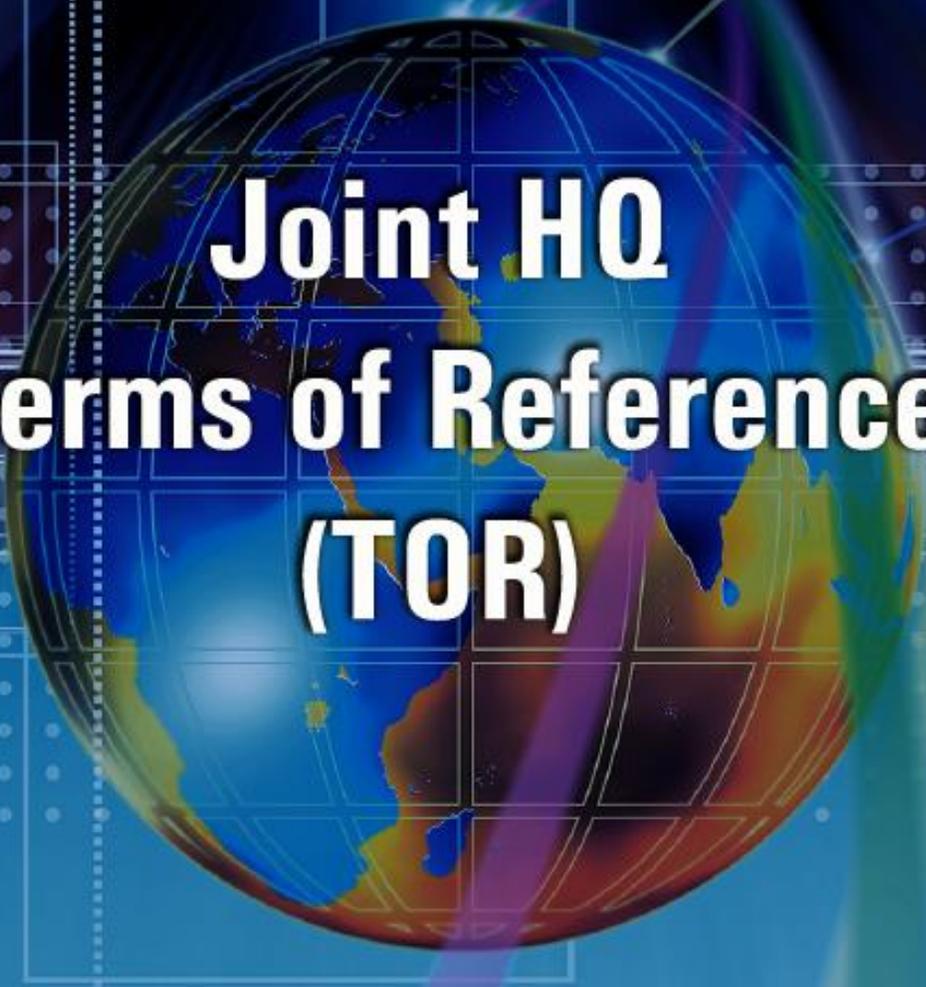


# **Insights and Best Practices Focus Paper**



## **Joint HQ Terms of Reference (TOR)**

**Deployable Training Division  
Joint Staff J7**

**February 2019**

**Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited**



This is the *First Edition of the Insights and Best Practices Focus Paper on Joint Headquarters Terms of Reference (TOR)*. It is written by the Deployable Training Division (DTD) of the Joint Staff J7 and released by the J7 Deputy Director for Joint Training.

First Edition: February 2019

**Scope:**

- Addresses terms of reference that codify roles, authorities, and responsibilities of senior leaders in a joint HQ.
- Provides techniques by which to develop terms of reference.
- Provides potential formats for visualizing terms of reference.

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**Terminology and Acronyms:** Numerous military acronyms and organizational names are used in this paper. They are defined in the glossary to speed readability in the body of the paper for the intended readership.

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**Releasability:** Approved for public release.



## PREFACE

This paper shares insights and best practices related to developing and leveraging headquarters' Terms of Reference (TOR) that codify roles, authorities, and responsibilities of senior leaders in the HQ. A well defined TOR enhances mission command and assists in mission accomplishment. Clear roles and responsibilities within a HQs increase trust and understanding, speeds decision making, and facilitates empowerment and intent.

### **This paper focuses on three primary audiences:**

- Commanders and Deputies at Combatant Command HQs, sub-unified commands, joint functional components, and JTF HQs as they develop, implement, or refine TORs.
- Chiefs of Staff (COS) as they take the lead in recommending a TOR structure.
- Staff directors as they support decision-making, mission execution, and interact with leadership.

### **Four overarching considerations:**

- Develop TORs based on operational design, the commander's decision-making style, and key leaders' personalities and competencies. This increases synergy and effectiveness.
- Codify roles, authorities, and responsibilities of senior leaders in a directive TOR document (e.g., order or directive). This empowers, increases agility and speed of decision making, and promotes efficiency.
- Align battle rhythm and staff interaction with senior leaders in accordance with TORs to enrich guidance, decisions, and oversight. This enhances unity of effort and reduces confusion.
- Anticipate the evolving role of the HQ and necessary portfolios of senior leaders to identify and request appropriate DCDRs, COS, and principal staff by service, nationality, and experience. This sets conditions for future success.

This and other focus papers share observations and insights on joint force HQs observed by the Joint Staff J7 Deployable Training Division. DTD shares these papers with the joint force and the joint lessons learned, joint doctrine, and future concepts communities. Five related focus papers to this document are "*Joint Headquarters Organization, Staff Integration, and Battle Rhythm, Forming a JTF HQ, JTF C2 and Organization, Knowledge and Information Management, and Chief of Staff Roles and Functions.*" These papers are found on the site noted on the inside front cover.

Please send your thoughts, solutions, and best practices to the DTD's POC, Mr. Mike Findlay, as you think, plan, and work your way through these challenges.



ERIC E. AUSTIN  
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**1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.** Terms of reference (TOR) are authoritative documents developed to codify authorities and responsibilities of key personnel in supporting commanders' decision-making and command responsibilities. TORs are different from SOPs. They are tailored to the commander's decision making style, dynamic, and focused on roles, authorities, and responsibilities versus procedures. They are one of the first documents reviewed and modified after a change of command or mission. TORs are used in almost every HQ we visit.

**Challenges:**

- Understanding how commanders want to make decisions, what they will focus on, what and to whom they desire to delegate / empower, and developing a supporting battle rhythm.
- Determining the portfolio framework by which to distribute key leader authorities and responsibilities, e.g., by LOE, function, or time horizon.
- Reducing staff engagement fratricide with senior leaders and resultant delays in the speed of decision making due to unclear senior leader portfolios / responsibilities.
- Continually assessing key leader personalities and competencies, and modifying portfolios.
- Anticipating future mission tasks of the HQ and determining necessary portfolios of key leaders in order to identify and request individuals by service, nationality, and experience.

**Insights:**

- Develop TORs based on operational design, the commander's decision-making style, and key leaders' personalities and competencies. Design frames the problem and an operational approach. The TOR aligns senior leader portfolios to the operational approach. *This promotes effectiveness.*
- Leverage TOR as a structure to support decision-making and oversight at the speed of relevance. Today's joint HQ operate in a complex environment working up, down, and across with joint, interagency, international, and multinational partners against opportunistic and adaptive adversaries. Delineation of senior leader roles helps maintain requisite focus, anticipation, and oversight. *This enriches decisions, and enhances agility and speed.*
- Codify roles, authorities, and external engagement responsibilities of key leaders in an authoritative TOR document (e.g., order or directive). This provides "lanes" in which to work and a structure by which to crosstalk and communicate with the commander. Clear spheres of interest for engagement reduce likelihood of fratricide and keeps themes and messages consistent with external partners. *This empowers and promotes efficiency.*
- Refine battle rhythm and staff interaction with senior leaders IAW TORs to enrich guidance, decisions, and oversight. Ensure staff awareness of senior leaders' roles and their executive role for specified battle rhythm events. *This promotes unity of effort and reduces confusion.*
- Consider expanding the TOR structure to include roles and responsibilities of the primary, special, and personal staff. Different services and countries view staff positions and functions differently (such as the Chief of Staff and Commander's Action Group), and who has responsibility for assessment, communication synchronization, and knowledge management functions. *This ensures common understanding of staff roles.*
- Share TOR with external organizations to increase their understanding on how to best interact with the joint HQ leadership. *This increases trust and enhances relationships.*
- Anticipate the evolving role of the HQ and necessary portfolios of senior leaders to better identify and request the suitable DCDRs, COS, and principal staff by service and nationality. The mission set and required tasks will likely change as the situation evolves; likewise assess and revise the HQ focus and senior leader portfolios. *This maintains agility.*

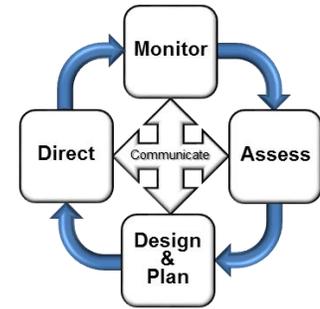
## 2.0 COMMANDER PERSPECTIVES.

Observations: Terms of reference help enable mission command and mission accomplishment.

- Commanders exercise command and control within a complex dynamic environment with a diverse set of joint, coalition, international, and interagency partners and stakeholders.
- They are tasked with mission sets that continue to evolve. This mission evolution may require their HQ to change focus and in some cases reorganize.
- Their joint and combined staff vary in experience and capability.
- Command responsibility cannot be delegated. TORs provide an effective source document for how a particular commander delegates authorities and assigns tasks, as well as what authorities and functions he/she retains.

Perspectives:

- Commander's follow some form of decision cycle like that in the figure to assess, plan, direct execution, and monitor operations.
- Operational problem framing and design results in an approach that addresses risk and incorporates lines of effort and objectives to achieve end states.
- Armed with an operational approach framework, the commander and leaders can develop a TOR that empowers command authority, staff oversight, and internal and external coordination to their deputies, COS, CSEL, and key members of the staff. The TOR operationalizes the framework and codifies responsibilities across the decision cycle.
- TORs take into account the art of war and the human dimension of personalities and competencies. Commanders focus on talent management up front to identify and get the suitable leaders who are comfortable operating within the commander's leadership style, can take initiative in their portfolio, and communicate up, down, across, and within the HQ.
- TORs enable speed, agility and decisiveness of HQ operations while providing decision space to the commander for the up and out engagement to anticipate and set conditions.
- TORs do not obviate the need for senior leaders to continuously collaborate and communicate. Shared understanding among senior leaders on actions and intentions is essential to ensure coherent direction to the staff and speaking with one voice to partners.
- TORs are not static; commanders adjust them to reflect realities of a changing environment and mission, transitions, personalities, staff requirements, subordinate capabilities, and engagement requirements. Operational approaches often shift priority within and between LOEs and across phases. These adjustments to the framework require the commander and senior leaders to anticipate changes to TOR. Commanders must anticipate change and prepare/select senior leaders for TOR positions, and lead the unit to operate effectively with a new or different division of TOR responsibilities.
- TORs can change between steady state and crisis, especially at the CCMD level with the DCCDR. This change is often overlooked and can be confusing during the initial crisis stage.
- Most commanders task their COS to manage the TOR, taking into account commander, deputies, the COS, CSEL, and senior staff competencies and personalities. TORs are normally reviewed prior to a new phase of the operation or after rotation of a key leader.
- TORs must be constantly communicated in word and action to the staff, subordinates, partners, and higher HQ to fully exploit the rationale behind the portfolio decisions. Otherwise the staff and external organizations will waste time engaging with the wrong senior leader; this will decrease agility of decisions and can result in confusion.



### 3.0 TOR DEVELOPMENT.

“There is no right answer to organizing TORs; but the wrong answer is to allow confusion.” Senior officer

Organization. Most TORs address five areas:

- Commanders (CCMD and JTF): authorities, responsibilities, and focus areas.
- DCDRs: Military and civilian deputies can be concurrently assigned at the CCMD level. Multiple deputies are frequently found at a JTF or MNF. All DCDRs, regardless of the level of command, assist the commander in the exercise of command functions, while the COS focuses inward on the staff.. Roles of DCDRs and COS are the primary focus of most TORs.
- CSEL: often in terms of their authorities and responsibilities relative to the staff and subordinates. (See the CSEL focus paper for more information).
- COS: primarily as the staff synchronizer. They may be tasked with other key oversight and direction portfolios, such as sustainment, targeting, or assessment. (See the COS Roles and Functions focus paper for more information).
- Special staff / key positions / unique functions: Included within this broader group are POLADs, Commander’s Action Group (CAG), principal LNOs and Exchange Officers, and key functions such as communication synchronization, knowledge management (KM), and assessment. (See the KM and Joint HQ Organization focus papers for more information).

CCMD Deputy CCDRs. Designate key focus areas in steady state, and how it may change in crisis. We see the DCCDR assisting the CCCR with the exercise of command by working both the external environment and selected oversight of staff functions. TORs should be consistent with the following principles:

- Military Deputies must be prepared to exercise the full range of Title 10 command authority in the absence of the commander, and otherwise assist the commander in the full exercise of command functions.
- Civilian Deputies do not have Title 10 command authority; however, they normally bring extensive experience and government rank (e.g., Ambassador, senior Foreign Service Officer) that should be leveraged both to interface with external partners and to oversee selected staff activity (e.g., interorganizational coordination).

JTF Deputy Commanders. We have seen several ways to organize JTF Deputy Commander portfolios. Some common ways are:

- Lines of Effort developed during design and planning.
- Battlespace framework: Close, Deep, Rear...
- Geography: e.g., by different countries or areas within a CJTF’s CJOA.
- Event horizon: current operations, future operations, future plans.
- Joint functions: e.g., a DCDR focused on sustainment, another on operations.

We find the matrix on the next page can be used to lay out DCDR and COS options for subsequent analysis and decision. Some potential decision criteria are:

- ✓ Are DCDR roles overly redundant to staff functions?
- ✓ What is the TOR’s durability / long term suitability
- ✓ Does the TOR specify clear spheres of engagement responsibility with external organizations?
- ✓ Does the TOR enable the HQ to see itself (allow understanding of roles and responsibilities)?
- ✓ Does the TOR inform subordinates and external partners of their key senior leader entry (e.g., DCDR) in the HQ?

- ✓ Is the COS task-saturated beyond the traditional staff synchronizer role or have an excessive span of control?

Chief of Staff (COS). The COS is normally tasked as the staff synchronizer responsible for effectively integrating the staff and processes to support the commander’s decision-making requirements. The COS focuses on the

Basis of TOR	DCOM 1	DCOM 2	COS	Analysis & Recommendation
Option 1 (LOE oriented)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>LOE 2 &amp; 3:</b> Focused on ...</li> <li>• Related aspects of assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>LOE 1:</b> Focused on ...</li> <li>• Info environment</li> <li>• Protection</li> <li>• Related aspects of assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff Synchronization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ....</li> <li>• Recommend x of 5</li> </ul>
Option 2 (Framework oriented)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Deep fight</b></li> <li>• Strategy, narrative, messaging, authorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Close fight</b></li> <li>• Enemy focus (defeat mechanism and protection)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consolidation fight</b></li> <li>• Staff Synchronization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ....</li> <li>• Recommend y of 5</li> </ul>
Option 3 (Geographic orientation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Country A</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Country B</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff Synchronization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ....</li> <li>• Recommend z of 5</li> </ul>
Option 4 (Event Horizon oriented)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>FUPLANS</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>FUOPS &amp; CUOPS</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff Synchronization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ....</li> <li>• Recommend a of 5</li> </ul>
Option 5 (Functional oriented)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategy</li> <li>• Sustainment</li> <li>• STRATCOM</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OPS, INTEL, Targeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff Synchronization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ....</li> <li>• Recommend b of 5</li> </ul>

organizational structure, terms of reference, and a battle rhythm and supporting processes (e.g., assessing, planning, fires) to support the commander.

Other TOR Considerations: The areas below are often tailored unique to a commander. While they may be in an SOP, we find that their inclusion in a TOR provides more clear awareness of commander’s expectations.

- Commander’s Action Group (CAG). Many commanders use their CAG to support them in enhancing commander-centric communications with HHQ and key mission partners. Most CAGs focus on the CAG’s “action” function, assisting with commander correspondence and “messaging”, performing scribe activities, personalizing campaign assessments, and taking a lead role in engagements and key visitor updates. We have seen commanders limiting the “initiatives” aspect of the CAG (i.e., not employing them as a Commander’s Initiative Group - CIG), opting to retain this “initiatives” function in the J5.
- Assessment: Many TORs codify the staff lead responsibility for assessment. We find it normally resides in the J8 at CCMDs, and in the J5 at JTFs. However, during crisis and major operations, operational and campaign assessment in the CCMDs can shift to the J5 while J8 continues programmatic, longer term assessments.
- Communication Strategy and Synchronization: Developing and employing a narrative is a foundational function which requires codification of lead and supporting responsibilities. At CCMD, there is often a small special staff who orchestrates this function, supported by the J39 and PAO. At the JTF we find that the J39 often synchronizes this effort, closely aligned with the PAO. The J5 has an essential role in directing communication strategy. A DCDR is often tasked with key leader oversight of this function.
- Knowledge Management / Battle Rhythm: The COS is the staff synchronizer and responsible for this function. However in practice we often find either a designated KM officer or an operationally-focused individual in the J35 performing day to day planning and running a KM and BR working group, overseen by the J3, with key decision authority retained by the COS.
- Interagency and Multinational Engagement: Due to the inherent cross-functional nature of interagency and multinational engagement, commands are opting to distribute responsibilities across the staff aligned to various functional responsibilities (rather than in just the J9). This requires codification in a TOR or staff SOP to avoid fratricide or neglect of partners.

**Insights:**

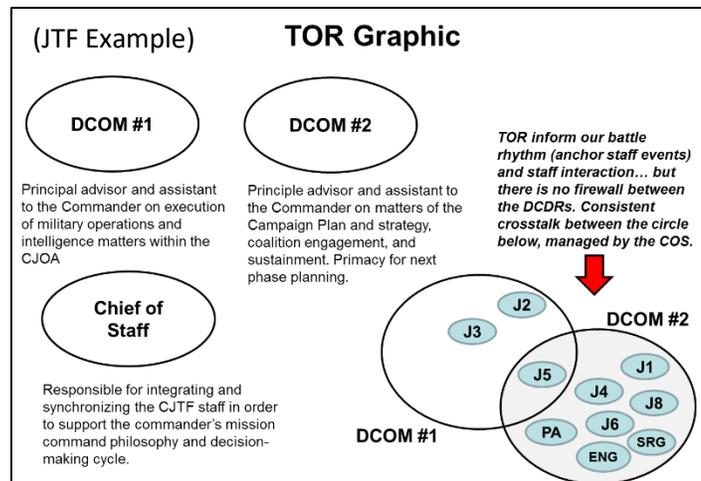
- Empower the COS to develop, maintain, and identify TOR change requirements.
- Develop the TOR with key stakeholders. Gain their understanding and buy in.
- Consider advantages and disadvantages during development. Potential analysis criteria are: redundancy with staff functions, durability / long term suitability, clear spheres of engagement responsibility with external organizations, allows the CCMD to see itself, clarity in key senior leader entry into the HQ, COS task-saturation.
- Define unique functional, special staff, and advisor roles to ensure staff-wide understanding.
- Refine battle rhythm and staff interaction with senior leaders to enrich guidance, decisions, and overwatch. Share senior leaders' roles and their executive role for specified battle rhythm events. Over-communicate the TOR internally and externally with partners.
- Consider separate development of lower-level, subordinate TORs within specific directorates, e.g., within the J2, J3, and J4 directorates if necessary to codify responsibilities.

## 4.0 TOR PRODUCTS.

The TOR product must permit easy visualization up, down, across, and within the HQ. Some options are below:

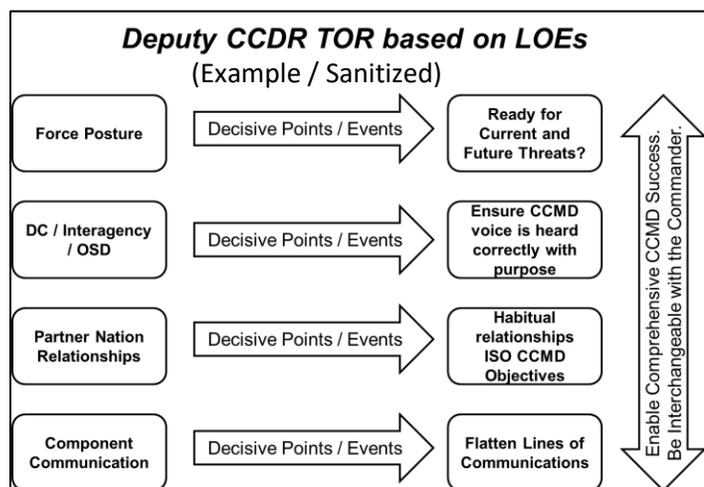
- *A table product* (like that depicted in the figure). We often see this type of product during TOR development to discern authorities and responsibilities across a collection of functions / topics. This same table can be directive when included within an EXORD or FRAGORD.
- *A word document.* Many HQs codify the TOR into a HQ Instruction or order, laying out similar information to that depicted in the matrix. We often find a HQ Instruction at CCMD level.
- *A graphic.* Some commanders opt for a more visual depiction of the TOR such as the two examples depicted to the right. In this example, they summarize key responsibilities and use either a Venn diagram or LOE chart to depict key actions and/or interaction with the staff.

CJTF Senior Leader TOR - Sample Template -				
Leadership Position	CJTF Commander	Deputy CJTF Commander	CSEL	COS
HQ Locn, Key Functions and Oversight	•	•	•	•
Engagement Responsibilities - Up and Out	•	•	•	•
Authorities & BR event responsibilities	•	•	•	•
Oversight of Supporting & Subordinate Orgs	•	•	•	•



### Insights:

- Document key functions, authorities, and staff interaction lanes in some form of TOR.
- Codify the TOR in an authoritative document. This provides the necessary authorities for senior leaders to make decisions and communicate with higher HQ, adjacent partners, and subordinates.
- Share TOR with external organizations to increase their understanding on how to best interact with the HQ leadership.
- Maintain the TOR in a user-friendly form that allows for modification in a dynamic, changing environment.
- Use the TOR as a tool to see how the commander is using his/her time. Is the commander's time being spent on those functions that only he/she can do.



## **Glossary**

### **Abbreviations and Acronyms**

CAG – Commander’s Action Group  
CCDR – Combatant Commander  
CCMD – Combatant Command  
CJOA – Combined/Coalition Joint  
Operations Area  
CJTF – Combined Joint Task Force  
COS – Chief of Staff  
CSA – Combat Support Agency  
CSEL – Commander Senior Enlisted Leader  
DCCDR – Deputy Combatant Commander  
DCDR – Deputy Commander  
DCOM – Deputy Commander  
EXORD – Execution Order  
FRAGORD – Fragmentary Order  
HHQ – Higher Headquarters  
HQ – Headquarters  
IAW – In Accordance With  
JTF – Joint Task Force  
KM – Knowledge Management  
LOE – Line of Effort  
PAO – Public Affairs Officer  
POLAD – Political Advisor  
SOP – Standing Operating Procedures  
STRATCOM – Strategic Communications  
TOR – Terms of Reference