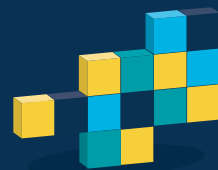[DRAFT]

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
Strategy

Strathbogie *shire*

A Message from our Mayor

The Community Engagement Strategy (2019–2022) outlines Strathbogie Shire Council's commitment to providing meaningful engagement opportunities for our community to ensure they feel informed, connected and engaged with Council's operations and decision–making.

Council exists to serve its community. We are here to manage and develop our natural and built environment, enhance community health and wellbeing and support and drive economic development in our shire.

As the level of government closest to the community, Council also has an important role to play in advocating for, and responding to, the needs of our community. This means understanding the people we represent and making decisions in the interest of our municipality now and into the future.

Our commitment to engagement, as outlined in our Council Plan 2017–2021, is to be a more inclusive Council, by engaging and communicating in an open and transparent manner with our local community and key stakeholders.

This strategy works to establish a consistent approach to community engagement across the organisation by utilising a range of tools, templates and measures.

Amanda McClaren | Mayor
Strathbogie Shire Council

Strathbogie Shire Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live, learn and work and humbly pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

Our Community Engagement Strategy

The development of the Community Engagement Strategy provides a consistent approach to engagement across all aspects of Council.

By implementing the strategy, Council aims to better involve the community in matters that affect them and ensure their views are considered as part of Council's decision-making process.

This strategy provides a framework to steer Council's engagement activities, which will result in the more effective coordination of communications and engagement across the organisation.

The Community Engagement Strategy addresses the following:

Why is Community Engagement important?

When will we engage the community?

Who will we engage?

How will we engage?

Our Community Engagement Priorities

Terms not defined in this document will be included in program specific guidelines.

Communications
A process of reaching mutual understanding, in which participants not only exchange information, news, ideas and feelings but also create and shared meaning.

Community
A real or online group of people united by at least one common characteristic such as geography, shared interests, experiences, values or attitudes.

Engagement
The many ways in which a council connects with community, and the community connects with a council to exchange views, ideas and information in the development and implementation of strategy, policies, programs and services.

Public Participation
The involvement of those affected by a decision in the decision-making process.

Stakeholder
A person, group or organisation who may be affected by, have a specific interest in, or influence over, a council decision or issue under consideration.

Why is Community Engagement important?

Effective community engagement with meaningful public participation is an essential foundation of a strong community and promotes active citizenry and a healthy democracy. Community engagement enables a closer relationship between Council and the community through an active exchange of information and ideas; promoting shared understanding, innovation and decisions that better represent the interests of the community.

Council recognises the value the community brings to understanding problems and risks to develop solutions that are more likely to be effective. In addition to the real life experience that community stakeholders can contribute to decision-making, the credibility of a decision is enhanced when it is the product of an open and deliberative process. Conversely, inadequate community engagement can alienate sections of the community, undermine trust and is more likely to result in poorly informed decisions.

Council sees that engagement with the community is important as it results in the following:

- Increased opportunities for Council to collaborate with its stakeholders;
- Increased capacity and participation by all sections of the community in engagement activities;
- Improved knowledge about the role of Council and the democratic decision-making process;
- Improved decision making by Council that reflects the best interest of all sections of our community;
- Improved community confidence in Council and the decisions that it makes; and
- Increased awareness about Council services and functions through an increase in the provision of consistent, timely and reliable information to the community and key stakeholders

When will we engage the community?

Strathbogie Shire Council recognises there is enormous value in engaging with its community in a timely and mutually constructive manner. Effective engagement allows Council to identify and understand the motivations, passions, pressure points, needs and aspirations of its communities.

Some of the key activities for which public consultation is required are strategic and financial management plans, changing the basis of rating, policy and strategy development, major projects, and facility development, changes in Council services, and community land classification and management.

As the level of government closest to the community, it is the role of elected representatives and appointed staff to strike a balance between community sentiment, which is captured through the utilisation of communication and engagement functions, with detailed evidence compiled and put forward by staff as part of its business operations and strategic decision-making.

Council will identify the most appropriate engagement methods in order to uphold our values and improve outcomes:

- On projects or issues of community interest
- When an outcome has the potential to have a considerable impact on the community or a stakeholder group
- When there is an opportunity to involve the community in decisions relating to the nature, scope, design or delivery of a project or initiative
- When an outcome involves a change in services or infrastructure provided by Council
- When Council has a statutory, legislative or regulatory requirement to do so

Who will we engage with?

To achieve effective engagement, it is import to ensure identifiable avenues are in place to connect with and engage a broad cross section of the community. Consideration will be given to providing equal opportunity for engagement with those who are hard to reach, such as marginalised groups including minority groups, the disadvantaged and geographically isolated pockets of the community.

In some cases, targeted engagement is required to reach a particular segment of the community that may be directly impacted by a project, initiative or decision of Council.

Targeted engagement can also be an effective way to garner particular skills, experience and expertise that exist out in the community. Targeted engagement can include activities such as focus groups and workshops.

Undertaking a stakeholder analysis using the Engagement Plan will help staff identify and classify stakeholders that are important to a project.

How will we engage?

It is essential that Council seek to hear from and reach key stakeholders in the initiation phase of a project to achieve effective engagement. As a project or issue progresses, Council will remain active in engaging the community.

Our Engagement practices include:

- Planning our engagements to be timely, open and easily understood
- Making sure communications and engagement activities are inclusive, accessible and seek a diverse range of perspectives
- Being upfront about how much opportunity there is to influence a decision
- Defining the community's role in any community engagement process using the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum
- Providing information to support meaningful community participation
- Using a variety of communications and engagement techniques that meet the needs and interests of the community
- Letting the community know how their input has influenced our decision
- Learning from each experience to review and improve our practice

Community Engagement: A Staff Guide has been developed to assist staff to plan and implement Community Engagement actions.

IAP2 Spectrum

IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum describes different levels of public participation that may be appropriate in a community engagement program. Differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, timeframes, resources and levels of community interest in the decision to be made.

Strathbogie Shire Council makes a commitment to working within the spectrum of public participation defined by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), which identifies the five levels of engagement below. The public participation spectrum stretches from providing information, through to empowering the public to make the final decision.

Figure 1: IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum[1]

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION →

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
EXAMPLES	• Newsletters • Websites • Open Houses • Media release • Paid advertisement	• Public Comment • Focus Groups • Surveys • Public Meetings • Social media	• Workshops • Deliberative Polling • Online forum	• Stakeholder advisory committees • Consensus–building • Participatory decision– making	• Stakeholder juries • Ballots • Delegated decisions
DESCRIPTION	**Consultation** The first two levels – Inform & Consult – typically occur when a decision has already been made, and government wants to either communicate that decision to the public, or seek opinions on the decision.		**Engagement** The third and fourth levels – Involve & Collaborate – have two way information flows, and include sharing information within and across stakeholder communities during the decision making process. When undertaking Engagement, decision makers commit to using stakeholder feedback to inform the decision and shape the outcome. Activity that occurs at the Collaboration level is also sometimes referred to as partnering.		**Empowerment** The fifth level – Empower – is where decisions are made jointly between government and the community. This is typically when the decision–making authority has been delegated to another group.

Community Engagement **Tools**

Depending on the circumstances, Council may consider the following methods to communicate and engage:

EMAIL

WEBSITE UPDATES

WEBSITE FORM

SOCIAL MEDIA

SUGGESTION BOX

ONLINE FORUM OR SURVEY

MEDIA RELEASE

POSTER/ BANNER/SIGN

LETTER

PAPER BASED SURVEY

DISCUSSION FORUM AT COUNCIL MEETING

FOCUS/WORKING GROUP/ADVISORY COMMITTEE
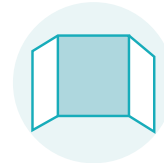
MEETING ONE-ON-ONE

PHONE ONE-ON-ONE

PUBLIC EXHIBITION

DOOR KNOCK

PUBLIC MEETING

DISPLAY/ STALL

NEWSLETTER/ FLYER/LEAFLET /PAMPHLET

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

PHONE POLL

Our Community Engagement **Priorities**

The success of the Community Engagement Strategy is determined by the organisation's ability to deliver on the three priorities of engagement:

Priority 1: We will establish a whole of organisation alignment with communications and engagement practices
Priority 2: We will provide meaningful engagement opportunities for our community
Priority 3: We will ensure our community feel connected and engaged with Council decision-making

These priorities are further outlined in the following sections.

Priority 1 — We will establish a whole of organisation alignment with communications and engagement practices.

Objective:
To create the internal capacity to ensure communications and engagement is culturally embedded as an inherent part of everyone's role

Key Functions:
- Build the capacity of council staff to ensure engagement is culturally and structurally embedded in day-to-day operations
- Leverage internal communications to support and drive a culture committed to effective communications and engagement

Key Initiatives:
- Establish a cross-departmental Communications and Engagement Working Group that oversees the implementation of the Community Engagement Strategy
- Develop clearly defined Communications and Engagement tools and practices that are embedded in our organisational culture and applied consistently across departments and projects
- Train staff to use communications and engagement tools and techniques.
- Evaluate the effectiveness and use of tools to manage public input and collect insights
- CEO and Executive champion the principles of engagement and demonstrate the expected behaviours and attitudes

Key success measures:
- Staff are trained in community engagement techniques and embrace it as part of their role;
- Integration of community engagement into progress and performance of staff;
- Each project implements an Engagement Plan informed by guidelines and templates.

Priority 2
We will provide meaningful engagement opportunities for our community

Objective:
To deliver planned and consistent engagement with our community in an open, transparent and inclusive way

Key Functions:
- To interact with the community and stakeholders using a broad range of communications and engagement tools and techniques, which maximise reach and diversity of those engaged.
- To provide participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way;

Key Initiatives:
- Plan, review and evaluate projects using an Engagement Plan Framework
- Reference the use of IAP2 spectrum in all engagement practices and application of all five levels of IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

- Evaluate performance of engagement methods in attracting relevant breadth and depth of community and stakeholder participation
- Monitor and review quantitative and qualitative inputs such as number of attendees, social media statistics and online activity
- Review communications and engagement methods annually to ensure they are delivering meaningful outcomes for council, community and stakeholders

Key success measures:
- Increased opportunities for Council to collaborate with its stakeholders
- Increased capacity and participation by all sections of the community in engagement activities
- Increased level of support and endorsement for community engagement
- Improved results in the consultation and engagement, informing the community and community decisions sections of the annual Community Satisfaction Survey

Priority 3

We will ensure our community feel connected and engaged with Council decision making

Objective:
To ensure that the contributions of the community are considered in the decision making process

Key Functions:
- To provide those who are affected by a decision with the opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process
- To report on the outcomes of engagement and communicate to community how their input affected the decision making process

Key Initiatives:
- Deliver ongoing analysis and reporting on the effectiveness of the communication and engagement methods
- Develop an approach to measurement and reporting participant engagement
- Develop an approach to best report back outcomes of engagement to community and stakeholders and "close the loop"
- Collect and collate satisfaction rating and comment after public engagement sessions
- Review satisfaction results each quarter to identify improvements

Key success measures:
- Improved knowledge about the role of Council and the democratic decision-making process
- Improved decision making by Council that reflects the best interest of all sections of our community
- Improved community confidence in Council and the decisions that it makes

Evaluating **Success**

Effective evaluation of communications and engagement plans and practices across the organisation is critical to Council's successful application of the objectives set out in this strategy.

Establishing key success measures and evaluating communications and engagement efforts will be crucial to ensuring accountability of staff and the cultural adoption of the whole of organisation alignment.

Whole of organisation responsibility

Communications and Engagement are a whole-of-organisation responsibility and should be a key consideration at the initiation phase of every project, program and initiative.
Communications and engagement efforts across projects and departments will be reviewed and the performance of engagement plans and evaluations will be monitored and improved with recommendations for future efforts.

Key success measures

Key success measures have been identified under each priority.
Other indicators will be monitored and reviewed including quantitative and qualitative inputs such as number of attendees at workshops, meetings and events, social media statistics, and online activity associated with Council's website and the OurSay online engagement platform. Council will also monitor general media activity, direct customer contact with council staff, and annual community satisfaction survey outcomes.

Communications and Engagement Working Group

Quarterly Working Group Meetings will be scheduled to monitor and evaluate level of progress towards the objectives.
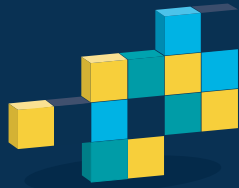
The working group will be responsible for the management, implementation and evaluation of the Community Engagement Strategy. This Working Group will comprise of a cross-departmental group of staff, including, but not limited to:

1. Director of Innovation and Performance, who is responsible for overseeing the Communications and Engagement Policy and review of communications and engagement evaluations
2. Communications Coordinator, who is responsible for overseeing the overall delivery of the strategy
3. Group Manager Community Assets is responsible for advising the group about major projects which require communications and engagement

The findings and outcomes of the quarterly meetings will inform future practice and will be communicated across the organisation.

Annual review

An annual review of the Community Engagement Strategy and progress of the associated objectives will be undertaken by the Communications Department and necessary alterations and revisions will be made for endorsement.

Strathbogie
shire