

Community Engagement Policy



COUNCIL POLICY	
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Adopted by Council:	16 February 2021
Next Review Date:	Annually
Responsible Officer/s:	Executive Manager Communications and Engagement

1. PURPOSE

The Community Engagement Policy provides the scope and commitments of Strathbogie Shire Council's community engagement practices and responsibilities.

We want to encourage participation. To support open, honest and meaningful conversations with our community. This will ensure community members' priorities and expectations are reflected in Council activities and decision making.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all community engagement processes led by Council.

3. OBJECTIVES

Our Community Engagement Policy is underpinned by the following engagement objectives:

- Create a consistent best practice approach to Strathbogie Shire Council's engagement;
- Ensure Council has a clear purpose and objectives for its community engagement activities;
- Deliver deliberative engagement that meets our community's needs;
- Increase community participation in Council's decision making processes, ensuring better decisions that reflect community input;
- Improve knowledge about the role of Council and the democratic decision-making process;

- Improve community confidence in Council and the decisions it makes;
- Clearly communicate how feedback is used to guide Council outcomes or decision making, and;
- Meet our legislative requirements under the Local Government Act 2020.

4. POLICY STATEMENT

At Strathbogie Shire Council we are committed to working with our community. To ensure their thoughts, feedback, advice and expectations are reflected in the decisions we make.

We know that working together will ensure better decisions for our community.

We are committed to significant change when it comes to engaging with our community. Gone are the days of decisions being made behind closed doors and consultation being a 'tick the box' exercise.

Wherever possible we will be seeking community input into our decision-making process. We will be brave in doing this. Not shying away from telling the truth and having difficult conversations.

We want our community to trust we're making decisions with them. To ensure we are delivering the projects and services that remind our community every day that we are lucky to live in Strathbogie Shire.

4.1 Policy intent

The Communication and Engagement Policy ensures that:

- Communication and engagement plans are developed to support proposed, new or existing projects, programs or initiatives within Council;
- All communication and engagement activities undertaken within Council are appropriately researched and planned by the Communications and Engagement Team to effectively target the right audience and achieve the desired outcome for Council;
- Community engagement is a core process that underpins the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan;
- Community needs and aspirations are considered in developing and implementing Council's strategic directions and priorities, and;
- Messages are consistent with the short term and long-term goals of Council across all communications.

Through the adoption of this policy, the Council Communications and Engagement Team will ensure that all:

- Communications and engagement activities are effective and of high quality.
- Activities are a derivative of an approved communications and or engagement plan;
- All aspects of Council are considered when preparing communication and engagement activities;
- Activities planned are considered, and where possible cost efficiencies are identified through streamlining or consolidation to avoid duplication or to maximise impact or the opportunity;

- Directors, Executive Managers, or their delegated nominee, approves any communication activities prior to implementation;
- We conduct all community engagement within legislative requirements;
- Our community engagement practices are in line with Council's values, and;
- We undertake evaluation processes to continually improve our approach to community engagement.

5. PRINCIPLES

We have developed a set of minimal requirements and objectives that our community engagement must adhere to. These are our engagement principles.

Genuine and transparent: We will be open and honest in our engagement approach. Our scope will be outlined, the purpose clear and we won't shy away from telling the truth – even when it is hard.

Inclusive and accessible: We will be approachable. We will create an environment where diversity of opinion is welcomed and everyone is heard.

Responsive and flexible: Our engagement approach will be adaptable to ensure it meets its purpose and generates participation. There is no one-size-fits-all approach so we will be watchful and ready to change.

Listen and learn: We will evaluate and monitor our engagement and consultation to ensure we continually improve.

5.1 Depth of Engagement

Council delivers community engagement under the International Association Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum. IAP2 is an international organisation that focuses on the advancement of practice of public participation.

IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any community engagement program.

The Spectrum shows that differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made. However, and most importantly, the Spectrum sets out the promise being made to the public at each participation level.

The table below provides the five levels of engagement that our outlined by the IAP2 framework.

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,	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.

opportunities and/or solutions.				
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				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletters • Updates on Council websites • Fact sheets • Media release • Paid advertisement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Comment • Focus Groups • Surveys • Social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Deliberative Polling • Public Meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory committees • Deliberative forums • Community panels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens juries • Delegated decision making

6. RESPONSIBILITIES

For Council to maximise its investment into a Communications and Engagement Team and to ensure planned engagement, the following roles and responsibilities have been defined in detail, these include:

6.1 Role of Council Communications and Engagement Team

- To promote and implement the core principles of this policy and its associated procedures.
- Will determine if a plan is required, or if it fits into the day to day operational services the Team provides to the organisation and can just be 'executed'.
- Can include but may not be limited to researching, developing, implementing, evaluating plans and/or engagement activities. The degree of involvement may depend upon the project and need.
- Will always seek approval for a plan, or activity from the Director, Executive Manager, Manager or delegated nominee prior to implementation.
- The Executive Manager Communication and Engagement will approve all Communication/ Marketing/ Stakeholder Engagement Plans prior to implementation.
- Will maintain a central repository of all graphic design, internal communications, media releases, images and other intellectual property created for the organisation as required by the *Public Records Act 1973*.

6.2 Role of the Council Business Units

- Will engage the Communication and Engagement Team in the early stages of project or initiative planning where possible.

- Prior to engagement of the Communication and Engagement Team, Council Officers will need to ensure they have support and approval for their initiative from their Director, Executive Manager or delegate.
- To commence planning, Council staff will request a meeting to brief the Executive Manager Communication and Engagement to discuss the project and outcomes sought from communication or engagement activities.
- Upon the completion of an agreed plan as a part of a collaborative process, Directors, Executive Managers, Managers, or their delegated nominee will be required to approve the final plan.
- Approval of a plan means the Director, Executive Manager or their delegated nominee approves and agrees with all strategies to be undertaken, agrees the messages are accurate, and the budget is appropriate and will be funded by the relevant organisational area.
- All activities within the plan will be implemented together, and the Communication and Engagement Team will provide an ongoing project manager role through to the completion of the project or plan.

6.3 Role of the Chief Executive Officer and Councillors

Where a Communications Plan is in line with the Chief Executive Officer or Mayor priorities of the day, the Communications and Engagement Team will seek feedback and final approval of the plan prior to implementation from the Chief Executive Officer or Mayor. These will be determined on a case by case basis.

Who	Responsibility
Council	Final approval of this Policy
Executive Leadership Team	To fulfill the roles outlined in the policy to support the Policy objective.
Executive Manager Communications and Engagement	To communicate the requirements of this Policy to all Council employees and to ensure the Communications and Engagement team fulfil the role and responsibilities within this Policy.
Council Staff and contractors	To adhere to the Policy

7. DEFINITIONS

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

COUNCIL

Means Strathbogie Shire Council, and includes all employees, consultants and contractors engaged on behalf of the organisation, Committees and Councillors.

COMMUNICATIONS

The professional practice of creating a visual, written or spoken message for a specific target audience and delivering it through a pre-determined communication channel.

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT TEAM

An internal communication and engagement service team.

COMMUNITY

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

DELIBERATIVE ENGAGEMENT

Describes a series of engagement practices that demonstrate the following features:

- Influence - Promise of influence over policy and decision-making (Involve/Collaborate/Empower using the IAP2 Levels of Engagement)
- Inclusion - Participation that is representative of the community and inclusive of diverse viewpoints and values
- Deliberation - open dialogue and discussion, access to information and movement towards consensus.

ENGAGEMENT

The professional practice of staging a two-way interaction with a specific, target audience, in order to learn about people's values, beliefs, opinions or ideas, in support of building relationships and involving them in a decision of *Council*, that affects them.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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

STAKEHOLDER

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

8. POLICY REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed annually and may change at any time, subject to a Council resolution.

9. RELATED LEGISLATION AND DOCUMENTS

[Local Government Act 2020](#)

[Strathbogie Shire Council Plan](#)

[Strathbogie Shire Council Liveability Plan](#) (Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan)

[Community Engagement Strategy 2019-2022](#)

Media Policy and Protocols 2019

Social Media Policy (under development)

[Customer Service Charter 2019](#)

10. CHARTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES ACT 2006 AND THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ACT 2010

The Council acknowledges the legal responsibility to comply with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* and the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*. The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 is designed to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens. The Charter gives legal protection to 20 fundamental human rights under four key values that include freedom, respect, equality and dignity.

11. FEEDBACK

Council staff and community may provide feedback about this document by emailing info@strathbogie.vic.gov.au.