

# COUNCIL POLICY

**Policy Name**

Community Engagement

**Abstract**

This policy provides a framework for how Council engages with the community.

|                            |  |             |
|----------------------------|--|-------------|
| <b>Dates</b>               | Policy or amendment approved   | 16 Dec 2020 |
|                            | Policy or amendment takes effect   | 01 Jan 2021 |
|                            | Policy is due for review (up to 4 years)   | 16 Dec 2024 |
| <b>Endorsed by</b>         | Executive Leadership Team  |             |
| <b>Approved by</b>         | Gunnedah Shire Council at its Ordinary Meeting held on 16 Dec 2020<br>Resolution number: 8.12/20   |             |
| <b>Policy Custodian</b>    | Manager Communications and Cultural Services   |             |
| <b>Relevant to</b>         | All Gunnedah Shire Council staff<br>Contractors<br>Councillors   |             |
| <b>Superseded Policies</b> | Policy – Communications Strategy – The Art of Communicating – July 2014<br>Policy – Community Engagement Policy – July 2014<br>Policy – Community Engagement Policy – Matrix July 2014<br>Policy – Community Engagement Policy – Toolkit July 2014 |             |
| <b>Related documents</b>   | Media Policy   |             |
| <b>Related legislation</b> | NSW Local Government Act 1993  |             |

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## 1. Purpose

The purpose of the Community Engagement Policy is to provide guidance for Gunnedah Shire Council's (GSC) commitment to undertaking relevant community engagement in delivery of its functions.

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to all areas of Council operations. Councillors, all Council staff and Council contractors.

## 3. Definitions

| Term                                | Definition  |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Community</b>                    | Refers to residents, ratepayers and visitors including individuals, groups, organisations, business, industry and government who have a stake or interest in the Gunnedah LGA.  |
| <b>Stakeholders</b>                 | An individual or group who may be affected by, or have a specific interest in the decision or issue under consideration by GSC.   |
| <b>Community Engagement</b>         | Refers to the mutual communication and deliberation that occurs between Council and the community. It involves informing, consulting, involving and collaborating with the community.   |
| <b>Community Engagement Toolkit</b> | A user guide that provides staff practical guidance and advice on 'how to' undertake different types of engagement with the community. It outlines the tasks that should be undertaken and suggests a range of approaches aimed at encouraging community participation. |

## 4. Policy Principles

4.1 Gunnedah Shire Council is committed to ensuring the Gunnedah Shire community is actively involved in decision making that affects their lives. Community engagement is observed as a vital element in strengthening partnerships and building sustainable communities for the future.

4.2 Council is committed to the following principles of engagement:

- Ensuring community engagement is conducted in a considered, proactive and planned manner.
- Providing transparent and accurate information that upholds principles of respect, honesty and integrity.
- Clearly articulating the issue under consideration to stakeholders.
- Clearly identifying the level of community engagement appropriate.
- Seeking out those potentially affected by the decision.
- Offering a range of methods of engagement to enhance accessibility and opportunities for participation.
- Recognising and making provision for socio-cultural diversity, needs and values of those involved in the process including decision makers.

- Considering community input in the decision-making process.
- Providing feedback to participants identifying how their input influenced the outcome.
- Evaluating the engagement process and outcomes.
- Providing adequate attention to resourcing the community engagement process.
- Ensuing legislative requirements are met.

4.3 The benefits of community engagement are identified as:

- Improved civic governance through assisting elected representatives and GSC officers to understand, and be informed by, the views of the community when making decisions on their behalf.
- Improved decision-making processes by considering evidence of informed community opinion and taking into account of the views and experiences of those affected.
- Improved community ownership of outcomes and decisions enhancing civic pride and empowerment.
- Builds a sense of community and helps establish sustainable partnerships.
- Reduces prospects of conflict and community apprehension to change.
- Ongoing improvement of skill level, understanding and knowledge of council staff and community members with regard to the community engagement process.
- Establishes GSC as a reputable, open and transparent organisation by following an accessible, clear and systematic participatory process.
- Creates open communication channels providing for consultation, information sharing and feedback.

## **5. Policy Statement**

- 5.1 The policy seeks to ensure the outcomes of community engagement processes result in measurable information relating to community needs and aspirations, and that these are considered by Council when making decisions.
- 5.2 Community engagement does not necessarily mean achieving consensus, however it does involve seeking broad informed opinion and working toward the best possible solution for Council and the community.
- 5.3 Community feedback accrued through the engagement process will be considered along with financial, legal and social considerations in decision-making.

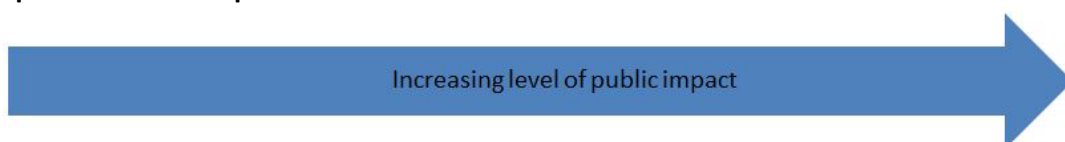
5.4 In developing the policy, the IAP2 Spectrum of Participation was referenced by GSC. This tool is recommended by the Office of Local government for preparation of Community Engagement Strategies and promotes sustainable decisions by communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including the decision-maker. The spectrum identifies five levels of public participation (or community engagement) related to the impact of the proposal under consideration namely:

- Inform
- Consult
- Involve
- Collaborate
- Empower

5.5 This model shows appropriate levels of engagement for projects of all scopes and types and provides the framework for a practical way forward for project managers and communications officers.

5.6 The IAP2 Spectrum requires that the level of engagement must be determined by considering the issue, problem or opportunity requiring community engagement, the objectives to be achieved by engaging and the extent that the community can assist Council to make decisions.

### IAP2 Spectrum of Participation



|                                   | INFORM  | CONSULT   | INVOLVE   | COLLABORATE  | EMPOWER  |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|--|--|
| <b>Public Participation Goal:</b> | To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, 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. |
| <b>Promise to the Public:</b>     | We will keep you informed.  | We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns 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 direct 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.                         |

5.7 The Community Engagement Policy provides a broad framework and policy direction for engagement and is supported by an Engagement Toolkit implemented as an independent resource, the policy and toolkit provides Council staff, contractors and consultants with more detailed guidelines on community engagement processes.

5.8 The level of community engagement undertaken relates directly to the level of community involvement required, and should always be appropriate to the nature, complexity and impact of the issue, plan or strategy.

- 5.9 For practical purposes, the IAP2 Spectrum has been applied to a GSC model to allow for clear approvals processes. The model divides projects into routine and non-routine categories. Routine projects do not require a formal written plan. Non-routine projects require a written communications plan and may require consultation with the Media and Communications Team. Implementation and evaluation largely remains with the project manager.



- 5.10 Projects fall into the 'Routine' category if the project:
- Is part of the day-to-day operational work of Council with minimal impact on services and facilities; and
  - Will not cause major inconvenience or changes to accessibility.

Projects fall into the 'Non-Routine' category if the project:

- Will have a major impact on services or facilities;
- Will guide future decision-making or changes;
- Will cause significant inconvenience or changes to accessibility;
- Has the potential to become controversial;
- Involves an issue with a high level of community ownership.

- 5.11 Projects that meet the 'Routine' definition need to be delivered in accordance with this policy and uphold the following criteria:

- Identification of all relevant stakeholders.
- Full consideration must be given to the information required by all stakeholders.

- Stakeholders should be given appropriate notification time to allow them to make any necessary arrangements and fully consider relevant issues.
  - Consideration should be given to the most effective methods to contact and inform/consult with stakeholders.
  - Stakeholders must be provided with clear, concise and accurate information.
  - Feedback from stakeholders must be recorded and fully considered.
  - All legislative requirements must be met.
  - Media materials must be approved through the appropriate Director and the Media and Communications Team.
- 5.12 Projects that meet the 'Non-Routine' definition will require a formal Community Engagement Plan. This plan must follow the steps and guidelines included in the Community Engagement Toolkit. The toolkit has been informed by the IAP2 Spectrum.
- 5.13 In some matters, Council is bound by legislation with regard to community engagement. In these cases, Council will adhere to legislative requirements.
- 5.14 Further to cases whereby the aforementioned legislation applies, Council can elect to undertake community engagement where local sensitivities or project complexities warrant additional effort.

## **6. Accountability, roles and responsibility**

- 6.1 The GSC General Manager is responsible for ensuring policy implementation, compliance, monitoring, evaluation and review occur throughout the organisation.
- 6.2 The General Manager may sub-delegate to staff the authority to approve non-routine engagement plans.
- 6.3 The relevant GSC Manager is responsible for determining whether a project or activity is 'Routine' or 'Non-Routine' and following the requirements in this policy for delivery of projects deemed to be 'Routine'. For 'Non-Routine' projects, managers are responsible for development of an appropriate plan in accordance with this policy and seeking the relevant approvals.
- 6.4 The Media and Communications Team are responsible for advice with regard to Community Engagement Plans and other communications and media matters. All media materials must also be approved by the Media and Communications Team.

## **7. Monitoring and Evaluation**

Compliance with the policy will be measured through evaluation of individual community engagement plans submitted for approval prior to the commencement of engagement activities.

## 8. Acknowledgements

Bayside City Council  
Warringah Council  
Central Desert Shire Council

## 8. Version Control and change history

| Date        | Version | Approved by & Resolution No.                   | Amendment   |
|-------------|---------|--|---|
| 16 Dec 2020 | 1       | Council Meeting 16/12/20<br>Resolution 8.12/20 | Review of previous<br>Community Engagement<br>Policy. |
|             |         |  |   |