



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Glen Innes Severn Council acknowledges and pays respect to the Ngoorabul people as the traditional custodians of this land, their elders past, present and emerging and to Torres Strait Islander people and all First Nations people.



Council values and statements

Values: Respect, Integrity, Courage, Honesty and Transparency.

Vision: A prosperous connected community that nurtures its people and places.

Mission: To be a 'can do' Council, that is, a Council that is proactive and prioritises affordable and relevant service delivery for its community.

Slogan: Embracing Change, Building on History

A person wearing a dark coat and a hat is walking away from the camera down a path lined with tall, slender trees with vibrant yellow autumn foliage. The ground is covered in fallen yellow leaves. The scene is captured in a soft, slightly hazy light, suggesting a misty or overcast day.

INTRODUCTION

Council first adopted the Community Engagement Strategy in 2010 in preparation for the Community Strategic Plan, to ensure that the community was engaged in line with the social justice principles: *equity, access, participation and rights*.

Further, the Strategy was developed to guide Council in community engagement for a variety of purposes such as when developing new policy, in relation to significant planning matters, new services or in response to the identification of the sale of major assets.

The Engagement Strategy is set out to clearly communicate the Aims, Benefits, Purpose and Principles of Community Engagement followed by Levels, Methods, **and** Stakeholders, **and** Evaluation and Feedback. At the end of the document, practical guidelines are provided to assist staff in their roles in facilitating Community Engagement.

DOCUMENT AUTHORISATION

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:		DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE AND COMMUNITY SERVICES MANAGER OF GOVERNANCE, RISK AND CORPORATE PLANNING (MGRCP)			
REVIEWED BY:		MGRCP and MANEX			
REVIEW DUE DATE:		April 2024 December 2024			
VERSION NUMBER:		4			
VERSIONS:	DATE:	RESOLUTION NO:	DESCRIPTION OF AMENDMENTS:	AUTHOR / EDITOR:	APPROVED / ADOPTED BY:
4	28/07/2022	TBC	Amendments include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New format and design template; • Addition of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Why community engagement is important</i> section; - <i>Applicability</i> section; - <i>Variation and Review</i> section; • Removal of some academic information in <i>Definitions</i>; and • Other minor amendments throughout. 	MGRCP	Council
3	28/06/2018	13.06/18		DCCS	Council
2	26/03/2015	8.03/15		DCCS	Council
1	22/3/2012	77.03/12		DCCS	Council

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General Manager

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Date

Contents

.....	1
Introduction	3
DOCUMENT AUTHORISATION.....	4
Purpose	6
Applicability.....	7
Outcomes.....	8
Benefits	8
Stakeholders	9
Definitions.....	10
Principles.....	11
Levels of community engagement.....	13
Methods of Community Engagement.....	14
Evaluation	15
Feedback.....	16
Community Engagement for the Glen Innes Community Strategic Plan.....	16
Implementation Stages of Community Engagement for Strategic Planning	17
LEGISLATION AND SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS.....	17
VARIATION AND REVIEW	18

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PURPOSE

The purpose of the Community Engagement Strategy is to form part of Council's strategic planning and is particularly important when:

- Preparing and reviewing Strategic Plans;
- Developing Council Policy;
- Considering changes to Community Sites;
- Planning Council Services;
- Legislation requires consultation/engagement;
- Proposing improvement to facilities and services; **and**
- Developing or planning major projects.

WHY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS IMPORTANT - “closing the loop”

Community engagement is more than processes and strategies. It's an opportunity for Council to demonstrate that Local Government is for the service of the community. Its reason for existence is very grass roots in terms of communication - engagement builds the relationship between Council and the community.

Community engagement recognises the importance of developing and maintaining respect. It is an opportunity for Council to show respect for the community. Engagement includes listening, learning and acknowledging. This then positively impacts on the community's perception of Council and in turn on Council's reputation.

Positive perception supports seeing Council as part of the community. It supports Council as an “enabler” and not as a “controller”. Good engagement closes the loop – it connects what the community wants and needs with how the Council responds to these wants and needs.

In turn, effective community engagement furthers itself – if the engagement is positive, beneficial and nourishing, it encourages more engagement. Communities do not want to engage with Council's that do not listen. When community engagement is a proven performer, it drives more engagement, more satisfaction and a better relationship overall between Council and the community.

APPLICABILITY

This strategy applies to:

- All Council Staff and other stakeholders who are involved in creating, reviewing and developing strategic plans, policies, planning Council services or proposing improvements to facilities and services, and developing or planning major projects;
- The Management Executive Team (MANEX);
- The Manager of Governance, Risk and Corporate Planning; and
- Councillors.





OUTCOMES

The ~~aims~~ **outcomes** of the Community Engagement Strategy ~~is~~ **are** to:

- Involve the Glen Innes Severn Community in the development, implementation and review of policies, plans, projects, programs and issues of importance;
- Actively inform the development and review of Council's Strategic Plans;
- Establish standard practices and a consistent approach, across Council departments, to consultation and engagement processes;
- Establish appropriate methods to maximise community engagement;
- Provide information to enable Council officers to understand and apply the principles of effective community engagement;
- Outline methods of proactively and regularly informing the community about the outcomes from the engagement activities; **and**
- Strengthen communication between Council **internally and with the community** through an ongoing flow of information.



BENEFITS

Generally, communities feel more connected with Councils if they are given the opportunity to contribute to the governance of their **Local Government Area (LGA)**. Effective community engagement strengthens trust, goodwill and respect between Councils and their communities. Community engagement also helps Councils to make sure they are providing services that meet residents' interests and needs. Other key benefits include:

- Clear and effective communication to residents and community groups about Council's role, services and activities;
- Increased community understanding into **the** allocation of resources within Council;
- Building local capacity for participative democracy, community leadership, and community wellbeing;
- Offers an opportunity for Council to delegate responsibilities to community organisations and to develop partnerships with these **organisations**;
- Use of stakeholders' knowledge and expertise to help Council to make sound decisions;
- Identification of the potential impacts of proposals / plans;
- Dealing with controversial or sensitive issues at the planning stage and in a collaborative manner;
- Enhances the opportunity for a variety of perspectives and range of solutions on any **particular** issue;

- Commits Council to being open and accountable;
- Assists Council to prioritise services and make better use of resources;
- Enables Council and the community to work together to achieve balanced decisions;
- Increases Council's capacity to address fundamental social problems; **and**
- Offers opportunities for residents to contribute to and influence outcomes which directly affect their lives.



STAKEHOLDERS

~~As a minimum, the Community Engagement Strategy must identify relevant stakeholder groups within the community and outline methods of engaging each group.~~

Council defines 'Community' as people who live within the Glen Innes Severn Council LGA and/or want to live, visit, work and/or invest within the LGA.

On the broadest level the community includes:

- Residents;
- Ratepayers;
- Employees working in the LGA;
- Frequent visitors to the area;
- Organisations;
- State and Federal Government agencies;
- Non-government agencies; **and**
- ~~Private Sector Businesses.~~

Specifically, stakeholders in the Glen Innes Severn LGA may be seen in two (2) categories: communities of place, and communities of interest.

Communities of interest may include but are not limited to:

- Industry Groups including farmers, ~~Business in Glen (BIG)~~ **Glen Innes Business Chamber**, the ~~Glen Innes Highlands Visitor Tourist~~ **Association (GIHVA)**, major business owners, and ~~Country Essential~~ **Energy**;
- **Attract, Connect, Stay**;
- Schools;
- Sporting Groups;
- Clubs;
- Arts and Cultural Groups;

- Youth;
- Children;
- Aboriginal community;
- Older People;
- People with Disabilities;
- People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds;
- Socially Disadvantaged groups;
- Other special interest groups;
- Federal and State and non-government agencies;
- Community Committees of Council;
- Advisory Groups; **and**
- Councillors and Council Staff.

Communities of place may include but are not limited to:

- Glen Innes residents;
- Village residents;
- The rural community excluding those in the villages; **and**
- Residents of an identifiable location with interests in particular site-related issues.



DEFINITIONS

Community engagement is *the action that agencies take to enable them to consult, involve, listen and respond to communities through ongoing relationships.*

The NSW Planning System Handbook (2003) defines “community engagement” as:

“...the community processes in which the general community and other interested parties are invited to contribute to particular proposals or policy changes. Community engagement has the potential to go beyond merely making information available or gathering opinions and attitudes. It entails a more active exchange of information and viewpoints between the sponsoring organisation and the community...”

Community engagement is a way of including the views of the community in planning and decision-making processes and in the development of policies and strategic documents. It can be seen as part of a continuum which includes:

- *Information giving (communication);*
- *Information seeking (data collection / scoping);*

- ~~Information sharing;~~
- ~~Participatory decision making;~~
- ~~Responding to community-initiated issues; and~~
- ~~Continuous research into communication methods.~~

Community engagement is a regular and important part of Council's everyday services and involves the interaction of Council and stakeholders in a variety of settings and circumstances.

The process of engagement can extend from a phone call or letter to a program of major community meetings. It must be tailored to suit the situation, keeping in mind money and time expended in the short term. The initiative to engage may come from inside Glen Innes Severn Council or from outside.



PRINCIPLES

Community Engagement will be based on the four (4) social justice principles:

1. **Equity:** Everyone should experience fairness in decision making, prioritising and allocation of resources, particularly for those in need. Everyone should have a fair opportunity to participate in the future of the community. The planning process should take particular care to involve and protect the interests of people in vulnerable circumstances.
2. **Access:** Everyone should have fair access to services, resources and opportunities to maintain or improve quality of life through community activities.
3. **Participation:** Everyone should have the maximum opportunity to genuinely participate in decisions that affect their community.
4. **Rights:** Equal rights should be established and promoted, with opportunities provided for people from diverse linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds to participate in community life.

Skills required for effective community engagement include:

- **Attentive listening;**
- **Speaking** clearly and concisely;
- **Negotiating;** and
- **Consensus building.**

Regardless of the methods used, effective engagement is characterised by:

Clarity of Purpose:

- Clearly define why the engagement is occurring and its context, ~~in-order~~ to plan and resource an effective process;
- Make sure that community engagement activities are realistic and expectations are not raised unnecessarily; **and**
- Make sure participants know how their information will be used.

Openness, Respect and Accountability:

- Engagement with the local community is approached in an open and respectful manner with clear lines of accountability;
- Be open, honest, transparent and timely about the aims of community engagement and what it hopes to achieve;
- Community engagement with minors will adhere to relevant Child Protection legislation, best practice and duty of care guidelines; **and**
- Council must also recognise the risk management issues and act on its duty of care to all participants.

Hospitality: Engagement will be carried out in a friendly, welcoming and comfortable environment.

Willingness to Manage Conflict in a Constructive Manner: Effective community engagement does not always lead to agreement. Council should acknowledge that conflict is often part of the engagement process, and work to create an environment where different opinions can be expressed in a mutually respectful and constructive way.

Inclusiveness: Ensure that a cross section of the community is invited at the community engagement activity. A suggested breakdown of a group for engaging on a broad topic is a mix of experts, local agencies and services (1/3); people with strategic or political interests in the issue (1/3); and people representing the general demographic (1/3).

Communication:

- There should be opportunities for all those present to express their opinions;
- All participants must have access to relevant, accurate, unbiased and clear information, and commit themselves to sharing information; **and**
- Well-communicated information can motivate, increase interest and promote a willingness to be engaged in a specific project.

Timeliness: An adequate period of notice will be given for each community engagement activity. Ideally the minimum period should be two (2) weeks.

Feedback and Reporting: Feedback should be provided to participants, which may include information on the impact of their views on decision making.

Integration of Community Engagement activities: To ensure that effort and resources are not duplicated, and so residents do not suffer from “consultation fatigue.”

LEVELS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The **International Association for Community Participation (IAP2)** has identified five (5) levels of Community Engagement. The following table is based on the IAP2's work; however, some of the terminology has been amended for Council's purposes:

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Engagement Goal	To provide the community with balanced and objective information to help them understand a problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain community feedback on alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that community concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the community in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the community. Close the loop.
Promise to the Community	We will tell you about our decision.	We will listen to and acknowledge your opinion.	We will involve you in decisions to endeavour to incorporate your needs.	We will work together to develop an outcome.	We will implement what you decide.
Role of the Community	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Decide

The most appropriate levels of consultation will vary, according to the type of issue under consideration, and its impact on the community. However, it should be noted that, under the *Local Government Act 1993*, it is usually only the elected body of Council which is empowered to make decisions. Therefore, engagement activities conducted at the ‘Empower’ level will be unusual.

Council may also be required to follow a prescribed consultation or engagement process under various *Acts and Regulations*, for example the exhibition of a draft Local Environmental Plans.

METHODS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

(Including hard-to-reach target groups)

Methods of engagement should be selected based on the basis of:

- Level of engagement required;
- Target group for the information exchange or involvement; and
- Composition of the stakeholder groups particularly when engaging on broad topics.

The following table demonstrates example techniques for community engagement:

Level 1 Inform	Level 2 and 3 Consult and Involve	Level 4 and 5 Collaborate and Empower
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters, email, SMS; • Letterbox drops/ unaddressed flyers; • Council Newsletters; • Weekly Newspaper – Our Council Columns (hardcopy and digital); • Media Releases/alerts; • Brochures; • Community noticeboards; • Posters; • Radio sessions/interviews; • Council Business Paper Reports, minutes and summaries; • Website information; and • Social media – such as Council’s Facebook page. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drop-in sessions; • Interviews; • Public Exhibition; • Images; • Suggestion box; • Community satisfaction surveys; • Street stalls; • Website interactions; • Workshops / seminars; • Meetings, by invitation, with community and advisory groups; • Site meetings / tours; • Personal briefings; • Networking; and • Customer feedback / complaints / online comments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups; • Workshops; and • Service reviews. • Close the loop channels for individual, group or community.

Strategies that can be used to engage hard-to-reach groups include:

- Ensuring community engagement is promoted through ~~a number of~~ different media platforms, for example in newspapers, resident newsletters, over the radio, online and through flyers;
- Using Plain English, both to promote community engagement and during community engagement;
- Following cultural protocols and ensuring the person/s have authority to speak on behalf of their community or group;
- Avoiding using assumptions, generalisations, or insensitive language about people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds or their beliefs;
- Seeking the support of agencies (including sections of Council) providing services to special needs groups;
- Providing incentives to encourage groups and/or individuals to become involved in community engagement;
- Using age-appropriate methods and materials for children and young people; **and**
- Taking the opportunity to carry out engagement activities at activities, events or festivals in the community.

~~See Appendix A for suggested methods and levels for particular projects.~~



EVALUATION

Evaluation should be completed after each community engagement activity. The evaluation should assess:

- Community representation;
- Type of communications / publicity methods most suitable;
- Method used for engaging the community;
- Timing (i.e., promotion time **lead in** and time of the actual activity); **and**
- Qualitative and quantitative information gained and gathered.

The assessment results will be used to improve future engagement plans and processes.

~~See Appendix B for a checklist used to evaluate community engagement activities.~~



FEEDBACK

Providing feedback to those participating in community engagement enhances the process and is essential. The method for feedback will relate to the type of community engagement and may range from individually addressed feedback to press releases / minutes.

Council should demonstrate that community feedback is important by informing the community of the outcomes and results of community engagement. Feedback communication should be on project checklists under “communication”.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR THE ~~GLEN INNES~~ COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN

Section 406 of the **Local Government Act 1993 (the Act)** legislates for the development of Community Strategic Plans in accordance with the Integrated Planning and Reporting Guidelines 2021 published by the ~~former Division of Local Government~~ Office of Local Government (OLG).

Accordingly, Council must prepare and implement a Community Engagement Strategy for engagement with the local community in developing and reviewing the **Community Strategic Plan (CSP)**.

- ~~1. The Community Strategic Plan Engagement Strategy must be based on the four (4) social justice principles: equity, access, participation and rights.~~ A Community Engagement Strategy must be prepared, adopted and implemented, based on social justice principles, for engagement with the local community to support Council in developing its plans and determining key activities. This includes development of the CSP, and all relevant Council plans, policies and programs;
2. All relevant stakeholders within the community ~~should~~ must be identified and methods of engaging those groups outlined, including NSW Government Stakeholders (e.g., Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, Transport for NSW);
3. The Strategy must be reviewed by 31 December in the year of the local government elections, as part of the broader review of the CSP;
4. Council must be satisfied that it has given the community an opportunity to have their say, consult / engage with **all** representative groups, consider how to hear from the “hard to reach” groups and consider inter-generational forums for discussion;
5. Due consideration must also be given to **the expected levels of service expressed by the community** when preparing the CSP; and
6. The Strategy should allow for community participation at various stages of the planning process.

The Engagement Strategy for the CSP should be asking the Questions “Where are we now?” and “Where do we want to be in 10 years time?”

Implementation Stages of Community Engagement for Strategic Planning

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted discussions with particular groups, State agencies etc. to help prepare information that will inform the CSP; • Identify current Council strategies and plans; • Identify regional strategies and plans; • Collect relevant feedback from recent engagement activities. (Surveys, forums etc.); • Gather information relating to demographics and geography of the Local Government Area; • Commence review of Asset Management Plans; and • Engage with the community regarding the financial framework applicable to Council and the associated constraints that it has on Council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A series of engagement activities based on the information gathered in Stage 1; • A range of different activities involving various groups at different times; • Engage with the community on levels of service and possible resourcing; • A draft CSP will be prepared; and • Engage with the community regarding the financial framework applicable to Council and the associated constraints that it has on Council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the draft CSP, Resourcing Strategies and Delivery Program; • The community will collaborate with Council to refine the draft CSP; • Broad range information sessions will ensure that as many community members as possible are aware of the draft CSP and the Delivery Program; • Targeted discussions and focus groups may be appropriate; and • Engage with the community regarding the financial framework applicable to Council and the associated constraints that it has on Council.

LEGISLATION AND SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Relevant Legislation, Regulations and Industry Standards include:

- *Local Government Act 1993 –*
402A Community engagement strategy
*A council must establish and implement a strategy (called its **community engagement strategy**) for engagement with the local community when developing its plans, policies and programs and for the purpose of determining its activities (other than routine administrative matters).*

Note: A council is not required to establish and implement a Community Engagement Strategy in accordance with section 402A, as inserted by the amending Act, until 12 months after the next ordinary election of councillors following that amendment.

- **OLG Integrated Planning and Reporting Guidelines;** and
- **OLG Integrated Planning and Reporting Handbook.**

Relevant Council Policies and Procedures include:

- Media Policy;
- Communication Policy;
- Social Media Policy;
- Communication Strategy 2020-2025;
- Public Exhibition Guidelines;
- Policy Document including Guidelines for Councillor Workshops; and
- Lobbying of Councillors Guidelines.



VARIATION AND REVIEW

The Community Engagement Strategy will be reviewed prior to 31 December in the year of the ordinary Local Government elections, or earlier if deemed necessary, to ensure that it meets the requirements of legislation and the needs of Council. The term of the Strategy does not expire on the review date, but will continue in force until superseded, rescinded or varied either by legislation or a new resolution of Council.