



Community Engagement Policy

Policy Statement

The community has a role in helping to set the strategic objectives, program priorities and service levels to be pursued by Council. A comprehensive range of community engagement processes is available to assist the community to participate in Council decision-making and to be informed about Council activities. This policy identifies the principles that underpin Council's approach to community engagement.

Related Legislation, Circulars or Guidelines (as amended)

- Local Government Act 1993 No. 30 and Regulation
- Local Government Amendment (Planning and Reporting) Bill 2009
- Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979
- Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000
- Protection of Environment Operations Act 1997
- National Parks and Wildlife Service Act 1974
- Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA Act)

Does this Document Replace an Existing Policy, Procedure or Plan?

- Yes, this document replaces Council's Executive – Associated Policy: *Community Engagement* (Adopted 15/12/2005).

Related Council Policy or Procedure

- Coffs Harbour City Council Community Engagement Procedure
- Internal Consultation and Communication Policy

Application and Distribution

It is mandatory for all Council officials to comply with this Policy.

This Policy is available on Council's website under Council Policies.

Approved by:

Executive Team.....

[Meeting date]

Council 26 May 2011 Resolution CS11/21

[Meeting date & Resolution No.]

Signature:

General Manager

Effective:	Review Date:
Distribution :	Record Number:
Responsible Council Department/Officer:	
Version History Table:	

Key Responsibilities

<i>Position</i>	<i>Directorate</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>
Mayor	Council	To lead Councillors in their understanding of, and compliance with, this Policy.
General Manager	Executive	To lead staff (either directly or through delegated authority) in their understanding of, and compliance with, this Policy. To approve resources to develop, implement and review this Policy.
Directors	All Directorates	To communicate, implement and comply with this Policy.
Director of Corporate Business	Corporate Business	To ensure (directly or through delegation) the distribution and communication of the Policy to specified persons. To ensure (directly or through delegation) the approved Policy are available in hard copy and electronically on Council's website.
Executive Manager HR & Organisational Development	Corporate Business	Facilitate the provision of regular training to all Council officials on their role and responsibilities in relation to this Policy and related procedures.
Executive and Managers	All Directorates	To implement this Policy and related procedures. To lead staff in their understanding of, and compliance with, this Policy.
All Council officials	Council	To comply with this Policy and related procedures.

Community Engagement Policy

1. Introduction

Community engagement and/or participation refers to the broad manner in which the views, aspirations and values of the community are communicated to ensure they are effectively able to inform, influence and assist in the decision-making of Council.

True participation involves an active exchange of information and viewpoints between the community and Council.

A suite of methods and techniques is available to ensure that community engagement and participation are effective. This policy seeks to create the framework in which these operate and sets the direction for the policy's implementation which will be through a variety of associated procedures and processes.

The range and scope of decisions made by the Council are broad, involving various degrees of complexity and requiring varying levels of expertise and accountability.

The purpose of this engagement policy, with respect to community participation in the decision-making process, is to improve the decision-making capacity of the Council by:

- Ensuring access to information that is relevant to the issue at hand;
- Providing mechanisms for ensuring the views, values and vision of those likely to be affected by the decision are available to decision-makers;
- Balancing the right of all members of the community to be involved in the decision-making process with the need for this process to be accountable, efficient and fair;
- Ensuring that it is clear that, ultimately, the decision-making authority of the Council rests with the community's elected representatives;
- Providing for increased levels of community participation in decision-making where appropriate.

2. Definitions

Here is the meaning of key terms used in the Policy:

Community: All people, groups or organisations that reside or operate in the Coffs Harbour region.

Consultation: The way the views of particular stakeholders or the wider community are sought in order to improve outcomes.

Participation: Active processes in which the community is involved in formulating plans or influencing outcomes.

Engagement: Broad activity that encompasses both Consultation and Participation.

3. Objectives

The objectives of Council's Community Engagement Policy are to ensure Council:

- Effectively carries out its responsibilities and roles in relation to community engagement;
- Involves the community in a broad range of issues;
- Has effective mechanisms for the dissemination of full and accurate information;
- Is sensitive to, and understands the impact of, its decisions on the community;
- Identifies and resolves concerns early in decision-making processes;
- Provides an effective means of informing elected representatives of local concerns;
- Enhances decision-making at Council and committee level;
- Provides recognised channels and opportunities for the community to effectively and directly outline concerns and needs;
- Enhances the community's knowledge and understanding of local government structures, functions, responsibilities, processes and decision-making mechanisms;
- Assists in reinforcing the community's sense of collaborating in government decision-making.

4. Policy Statement

4.1 Principles

There is no universal model of community engagement. For Coffs Harbour City Council the following general principles will apply to all community engagement

FLEXIBILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS

It must be flexible and the techniques must be appropriate to the target group. Account should be taken of language, literacy, cultural barriers and disability. Additional resources may need to be provided, where appropriate, to allow disadvantaged groups to participate. Information and relevant documents must be available in simple and clear language.

TIMING

The timing of any engagement is critical; it should be a priority consideration in the early stages of any planning or decision-making process and should be built into decision-making action plans and timetables. In addition, adequate time must always be provided for response by the community and to accommodate stakeholders with time constraints.

TRANSPARENT

The engagement process must be transparent and should be clearly laid out at the beginning so that participants know at what stages of the process they will have the opportunity to participate. Participants need to be aware of how their input will be used in the decision-making process. Adequate feedback should be provided to participants.

INCLUSIVE

Efforts should be taken to identify and involve all interested parties or stakeholders. Participants should also represent a cross-section of the individuals in the community being consulted.

EFFECTIVE

All engagement should include clear community objectives and performance measures in order to determine whether it has been successful.

ENHANCEMENT

Community engagement should enhance and not frustrate the processes of decision-making and should be designed for this purpose.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

The abovementioned principles notwithstanding, community engagement should take into account the Principles of Social Justice as identified by the NSW Government. These are defined as:

- Equity – there should be 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.
- Access – all people should have fair access to services, resources and opportunities to improve their quality of life.
- Participation - everyone should have the maximum opportunity to genuinely participate in decisions which affect their lives.
- 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.

4.2 Implementation

Council is committed to active engagement processes and to choosing strategies that are appropriate to the business of Council given the nature of its work and the time and resources available. Staff facilitating engagement processes must be guided by the principles contained in this policy and decide on the nature and style of interaction depending on a range of factors. This policy will be supported by procedure and process documents which will provide an appropriate format for the type of engagement required for a particular issue. There are a range of approaches available. One such broad framework is that outlined by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). It outlines five categories of community participation and these are:

- Inform - Giving information to the community
- Consult - Obtaining community feedback
- Involve - Participating directly with the community
- Collaborate - Partnering with the community to create solutions

- Empower - Placing final decision making in the hands of the community

4.3 Access

- Public access to information about Community Engagement will generally be through Council's website. Hard copy information will also be available from Council's administration centre and libraries.
- Reasonable access assistance will be available to persons with special needs.

4.4 Responsiveness and Accountability

There are numerous elements that need to be considered to determine the appropriate scope and scale of engagement and these issues will be addressed in associated procedural and process documents. However the primary steps can be identified as having regard to the need to:

1. Determine the potential level of impact of the issue;
2. Determine the appropriate level or scope of participation;
3. Decide on an engagement method or methods; and
4. Prepare, implement and evaluate an engagement strategy/plan.

Different projects, issues or proposals require different levels of community engagement. The level of community participation that is appropriate depends on the level and scale of impact as discussed above, and will be determined having consideration of:

- The urgency of the issue and the time available for deliberation and decision making;
- The availability of resources (including staff, facilitation skills, venues, technology and financial resources);
- The needs of accountability, transparency and equity; and
- The improved decision-making and information flows that might emerge from greater levels of participation.

4.5 Privacy and Confidentiality

The principles and practice of Council's Privacy Management Plan will be applied.

4.6 Integrity, Dignity and Respect

Council is committed to conducting all community engagement activities in line with the adopted Code of Conduct with particular reference to Section 6 – General Conduct Obligations.