

COUNCIL POLICY



Policy name	Community Engagement Policy
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Abstract This policy provides a framework for how Council engages with the community.

Dates	Policy or amendment approved 21 May 2014 Policy or amendment takes effect 16 Jul 2014 Policy is due for review (up to 4 years) 21 May 2016
Endorsed by	Senior Management Group
Approved by	Gunnedah Shire Council, at its Ordinary Meeting of Council held 16 July 2014 Resolution number: 11.07/14
Policy Custodian	Manager, Customer and Community Relations
Relevant to	All Gunnedah Shire Council staff and Gunnedah Shire Council residents
Superseded Policies	Nil
Related documents	Draft Community Engagement Strategy May 2010 and Community Engagement Matrix
Related legislation	NSW Local Government Act 1993
File number	784388

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of the Community Engagement Policy is to provide a benchmark for Gunnedah Shire Council's (GSC) commitment to ensuring active participation, community wide consultation and thoughtful evaluation in Council's community engagement processes.
- 1.2 The policy will guide the delivery of these processes, taking a whole-of-organisation approach to better inform decisions regarding policy, planning and delivery.
- 1.3 This policy supports Gunnedah Shire Council's 2013 – 2017 Operational Plan with reference to strategy 1.2.9 Undertake community engagement in accordance with Council's Community Engagement Strategy.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to all areas of Council operations. Councillors, all Council staff and Council contractors, Council Engagement Forums, Reference groups and Networks in addition to short term engagement bodies such as steering groups and advisory committees
- 2.2 This policy articulates GSC's commitment to engaging the community as a matter of principle and as a strategy for ensuring the establishment of strong partnerships, accountability, equity and sustainable decision making processes.
- 2.3 The policy seeks to ensure the outcomes of community engagement processes result in quantifiable information relating to community needs, aspirations and options and that these are tabled and considered by Council prior to resolving on an issue.
- 2.4 Community engagement does not necessarily mean achieving consensus, however it does involve seeking broad informed agreement and the best possible solution for Council and the community.

- 2.5 Community feedback accrued through the engagement process will be considered along with financial, legal and sustainability considerations in decision-making.
- 2.6 In developing the policy, the *IAP2 Spectrum of Participation* was referenced by GSC. This model is identified as an international benchmark for community engagement processes; identifying five levels of public participation (or community engagement) related to the impact of the proposal under consideration namely:
- Inform
 - Consult
 - Involve
 - Collaborate
 - Empower
- 2.7 From this model, it is apparent that a continuum of community engagement and participation exists within the decision making process and that all levels of engagement are appropriate and legitimate in nature.
- 2.8 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
Community engagement goal	To provide the community 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 community 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 tie identification of a preferred solution	To place final decision making in the hands of the public
Promise to the community	We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge aspirations and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how community 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
Example techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact sheets • Websites • Open Houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comment • Focus groups • Surveys • Public meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Deliberative polling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory Committees • Consensus building • Participatory decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen Juries • Ballots • Delegated decision

2.9 Community Engagement Framework

2.9.1 The Community Engagement Policy provides a broad framework and policy direction for engagement and is supported by a Community Engagement Matrix (attached to this policy) and Community Engagement Toolkit (attached to this policy). Implemented as an interdependent resource, the policy, matrix and toolkit provides Council staff, contractors and consultants with clear guidelines on community engagement processes.

2.9.2 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.

2.10 Legislative Implications

2.10.1 While community engagement is not mandated in all cases, in some matter council is bound by legislation with regard to community engagement. In these mandated cases, Gunnedah Shire Council will adhere to legislative requirements.

2.10.2 Community engagement is mandated under the following legislation:

2.10.2.1 NSW Local Government Act 1993

2.10.2.2 Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979

2.10.2.3 Public Health Act 2010

2.10.2.4 The Roads Act 1993

2.10.3 Further to mandated cases whereby the afore mentioned legislation applies, Council can elect to undertake community engagement where local sensitivities or project complexities warrant additional effort and or on Council officer recommendation.

2.10.4 Such occasions may include:

- Strategy Planning - Refers to the development of strategic plans and projects that informs the Management Plan and Business Plans.
- Policy Development or Implementation - Any policy development that may result in direct impacts on the community.
- Community specific issues. - Any changes to the community that may result in direct impacts on the community.
- Service Planning - The development or improvement of a service or significant change to current delivery standards.

- Areas of Improvement - Refers to any improvement required to increase the quality of lifestyle for the community i.e. open space, shopping precincts, key infrastructure.
- Council's decision to undertake non-mandated community engagement will be influenced by feasibility, time considerations and the degree of perceived direct impact on the community.

3. Definitions

Term	Definition
Community	Refers to residents, ratepayers and visitors including individuals, groups, organisations, business, industry and government who have a stake or interest in the Gunnedah LGA.
Stakeholders	An individual or group who may be affected by, or have a specific interest in the decision or issue under consideration by GSC.
Community Engagement	Refers to the mutual communication and deliberation that occurs between Council and the community. It involves informing, consulting, involving and collaborating with the community.
Community Engagement Matrix	A planning tool that provides staff with direction on engagement planning and provides guidance on when and how staff should engage with the community.
Community Engagement Toolkit	A user guide that provides staff with 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

- Note 5.1

5. Policy Statement

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

5.1 Council is committed to the following Principles of engagement:

- Ensuring community engagement is conducted in a considered and proactive approach.

- Creating transparent and accurate information channels that uphold principles of respect, honesty and integrity.
- Clearly articulating the issue under consideration to the community /stakeholders.
- Clearly identifying the level of community influence 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 resourcing to the community engagement process.
- Ensuring legislative requirements are met.

5.2 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 established by ensuring decisions are soundly based on evidence of informed community opinion and take account of the views and experiences of those affected by them.
- Improved community ownership of outcomes and decisions enhancing civic pride, empowerment and sense of worth.
- Builds a sense of community and helps establish sustainable Partnerships.
- Reduces prospects of conflict and community apprehension.

- Improved 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.

6. Accountability, roles and responsibilities

The Manager Customer and Community Relations is responsible for ensuring policy implementation, compliance, monitoring, evaluation and review and responsible for providing advice in relation to this policy.

6.1 Policy Custodian – Manager Customer and Community Relations

6.2 Responsible Officer – No delegations applicable

7. Monitoring and Evaluation

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

7.2 Industry stated evaluation approaches will be adapted by Gunnedah with regard to community engagement evaluation requirements.

8. Acknowledgements

8.1 Bayside City Council

8.2 Warringah Council

8.3 Central Desert Shire Council

9. Version control and change history

Date	Version	Approved by & resolution no.	Amendment
16 Jul 2014	0.3	11.07/14	Ordinary Meeting 16 Jul 2014
01 Jul 2014	0.2	Draft – based on 2010 draft	Inclusion of Framework approach with policy, matrix and toolkit.
25 Aug 2010	0.1	Adopted 25 August 2010. Minute Number 33.5	