



Community Engagement **TOOLKIT**

Gunnedah Shire Council's Community Engagement Framework 2014

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Introduction

This Community Engagement Toolkit is a practical guide to assist staff, councillors and external consultants in implementing community engagement processes.

The Community Engagement Toolkit is a companion guide to the Community Engagement Matrix developed by council to ensure consistency and excellence when engaging with the community and internally within the organisation.

Gunnedah Shire Council's Community Engagement Framework includes three (3) interdependent resources that must be implemented to ensure a commitment to best practice in Community Engagement.

These include:

- Community Engagement Policy: A document that provides the policy direction for engagement.
- 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.

GSC's Community Engagement Toolkit reflects five levels of public participation as outlined in the IAP2 Spectrum of Participation namely:

- Inform
- Consult
- Involve
- Collaborate
- Empower

Using this information, staff can determine their approach to the type of engagement with consideration to the availability of resources and skills and apply to the Community Engagement Matrix.

This toolkit has been developed for Gunnedah Shire Council with the assistance of Warringah Council and Sunshine Coast Council. Gunnedah Shire Council wishes to congratulate both Council's in setting the benchmark for Community Engagement for Regional Councils.

Techniques for Informing

These techniques are intended for use when council wants to provide information to the community, usually when council is:

- Announcing a project with accompanying engagement processes
- Seeking to educate the community
- Wanting to provide an update on the progress of an engagement activity or process.

Suggested methods for recording data:

- Staff notes from discussions with respondents.
- Encouraging submissions.
- Collating feedback that you have received can be as simple as including it in a project summary or report.

Targeted Written and Email Correspondence

Personally addressed letter or email informing residents or organisations of a project, issue, service or action.

The Purpose

- To respond to written correspondence from a resident or organisation.
- To advise a resident or organisation of a project, issue, service, action or other information.

Content

Address the basic 'who, what, where, when, why' as appropriate. For example:

- Who is the issue or matter affecting or who is involved?
- What is the decision, issue or what does the recipient need to do?
- Where will meetings be held or where will information be available?
- When is an activity taking place or when is a meeting being held?
- Why is council changing policy or why is council providing advice?
- How can the recipient become involved further?
- Provide staff contact details where appropriate (i.e. name and phone number). There should generally be an opportunity for a personal or written response from the resident or organisation.
- Include the appropriate sign-off for the correspondence, e.g. Mayor, General Manager or Manager.

Helpful Hints

- Use 'plain English'.
- Check that your letter/email is easy to understand (if in doubt ask someone else to read it).
- Avoid using 'jargon'.
- Check that your letter/email has all the right facts, e.g. the correct dates and times of meetings.

Distribution

- Include supporting information/attachments where appropriate.
- Forward the signed letter by mail or email. Where a letter is faxed, an original should also be forwarded.
- Register a copy of the letter/email on council records via Dataworks.

Protocols

- Written correspondence that refers to council policy or makes a decision or commitment on behalf of council must be endorsed by a Manager or Executive Director.
- All correspondence received by council from the community or other stakeholders should be acknowledged within two days and where possible responded to within 10 working days.

Things to Consider

- Have you considered possible language barriers?
- Have you checked council's protocols on who should sign the correspondence?
- Does your supervisor/Manager need to authorise the correspondence?

Associated Costs

- Allow for material, printing and mailing costs.

Brochure or Leaflet

A leaflet designed to provide information on a particular topic or project.

The Purpose

- To present more complex or detailed information in an easy-to-read format.
- To create or promote a desired image for an activity, event or service.

Content

- Determine the main messages of the publication.
- Develop topic headings and key points.
- Provide all essential information e.g. 'who, what, where, when, why and how'. For example:
- **who** the information is relevant to
- **what** is happening, e.g. details of an activity or service
- **where** the activity or service will be held
- **when** the activity or service will take place
- **why** the activity or service will be beneficial
- **how** people can participate in the activity or service or obtain further information
- **include** contact details where appropriate.

Helpful Hints:

- Be clear and concise (use 'plain English').
- Include all essential information, yet don't say too much.
- Understand and reflect the 'language' of the target market.
- Limit the amount of text for readability.

Design

- It is recommended that staff consult the Design Guidelines developed for Council collateral.
- Prepare some thoughts on the 'layout' and size of the brochure/leaflet.
- Design heading styles and positioning.
- Include sketches, cartoons, graphs, charts and photographs for visual appeal.
- Obtain feedback on the design and content, including from Manager Customer Service and Communications.

Helpful Hints:

- Utilise scanners and digital cameras where available and appropriate (for visuals).
- Ensure design style is consistent with budget availability, i.e. consider printing costs.
- Make sure the font is not too small, i.e. it should be readable.

Distribution

- Before printing and distribution, obtain approval from your Manager and in some cases the Executive Director depending on relevant protocols.
- Determine the number of brochures/leaflets required.
- Arrange printing of the brochure/leaflet either through council resources or externally for more 'up market' material, e.g. 'glossy' brochure.
- Arrange distribution/postage.
- Register final copy on council records – Dataworks.
- Circulate a copy of the brochure/leaflet to all councillors and senior management for their information (with an attached memo).

Helpful Hints:

- Consider using ecologically sustainable materials and printers, e.g. recycled paper.
- Consider opportunities to include brochure/leaflet with rate notices or other newsletters.
- Consider inserting brochure/leaflet in local paper.
- Consider whether to make the brochure available online as a PDF to reduce printing costs.
- Endeavour to distribute through schools where material is relevant to young people or families.
- Letter box drops are often affordable, although ideally material would be placed in a council envelope to avoid being seen as 'junk mail' (noting that this is higher cost).
- Recipients can be selected and mail can be personalised using council's Geographical Information System (GIS) through Information Technology Services.

Protocols

- Final copies of brochures and leaflets should be sent to Manager Customer Service and Communications for reference and registered in Dataworks.
- All brochures and leaflets must be endorsed by your Manager.

Things to Consider

- Have you considered language barriers or people with sight impairments?
- Have you considered linking with other council business units (for combined messages)?
- Have you checked that the brochure/leaflet complies with council's branding guidelines (e.g. logo position and design, layout etc.)?
- Has the brochure/leaflet been authorised by Manager Customer Service and Communications?
- Does the brochure/leaflet need to be endorsed by the Executive Management Team or council?
- Have you allowed sufficient time for printing and distribution?

Associated Costs

- Allow for printing and mailing costs.

Letter Box Drop

The distribution of information to residents via their letter boxes using a commercial provider.

The Purpose

- To inform residents of an issue, project, action or other matter.

Content

- Prepare the material (letter, leaflet, feedback form etc.).
- Include details of who, what, where, when, why, how (refer written correspondence and brochure or leaflet).

Helpful Hints:

- The material should be clearly identified as an important message from council (so that it is not seen as junk mail).
- Ideally in a council envelope, clearly identifying the project or issue is more likely to be read.

Distribution

- Determine the appropriate spread of distribution (i.e. streets, randomly selected houses, suburbs etc.).
- Arrange the distribution via the Customer Service and Communications Team.

Helpful Hints:

- Letter box drops through Australia Post are generally effective and affordable although have long lead times.
- Other service providers can be used – refer to Customer Relations Branch for current suppliers and quotes.
- Give at least two weeks' notice for the distribution.
- Best not to do letter box drops during holiday periods.
- Consider including a 'reply paid' envelope if seeking a response.

Protocols

- Councillors should be made aware of any material that is being distributed to the community in their division.
- Any material distributed to the community should be clearly defined, including the logo and design consistent with the council's corporate branding guidelines.

Things to Consider

- Does your material clearly identify that it is from council?
- Have you obtained the appropriate approvals?
- Have you considered language barriers or people with sight impairments?

Associated Costs

- Allow for the cost to prepare material.
- Allow for letter box drop cost.
- Allow for 'reply paid' cost of envelopes (if appropriate).

Advertisements and Public Notices

Paid or free advertisements and public notices of an event, project or meeting, in a local newspaper or a targeted publication such as a school newsletter.

The Purpose

- To inform the community about an event, meeting, project or other matter.

Organisation

- For a paid notice in a local newspaper or other publication contact the sales representative for the publication to discuss requirements.
- Provide information on the size of the notice and the preferred page and column location.
- Provide information to assist design of the advert, including layout and font.
- Forward the advert to enable a written quotation.
- Confirm acceptance of the quotation and arrangements in writing.
- Please note that Customer Service and Communication Team does not arrange publication of paid advertisements. It is the responsibility of the individual project team.
- In the instance of quoting the Mayor, liaise with the Executive Office in particular:
 - a) Discuss the available space and wording of the message.
 - b) Prepare the information.
 - c) Provide the information to the Executive Office for modification and inclusion.
- In the instance of a free notice, e.g. in a school newsletter or in local free community newspapers, please contact the Customer Service and Communication team for assistance. You should also make personal contact with the organisation to seek approval for inclusion in the newsletter or other material. In particular:
 - a) Agree on the size of the notice.
 - b) Design the notice, including layout and font.
 - c) Forward the notice for inclusion, either by email, fax or in writing (as agreed).

Content

Prepare the information taking into consideration:

Provide all essential information e.g. 'who, what, where, when, why and how'. For example:

- **Who** the information is relevant to
- **What** is happening, e.g. details of an activity or service
- **Where** the activity or service will be held
- **When** the activity or service will take place
- **Why** the activity or service will be beneficial
- **How** people can participate in the activity or service or obtain further information

Helpful Hints:

- Use 'plain English'.
- Keep the message simple and relatively short.
- Provide details that will enable participation, e.g. when, where.
- Include contact details so that people can contact you for more information.

Things to Consider

- Have you submitted the advert in time for its distribution?
- Has the advert been endorsed by your Manager or Executive Director?

Associated Costs

- Allow for advertising cost for notices in local newspapers.

Media Release

News story in the local paper or other media e.g. radio, metropolitan newspapers, magazines.

The Purpose

- To advise the broad community of an activity, issue, action, service or project.
- To raise the profile of an issue and generate debate or interest.

Content

- Write the story, including information on who, what, where, when, why and how as appropriate (as for 'written correspondence').

Helpful Hints:

- Write in a creative and interesting, although easy-to-read style. Aim to generate interest but 'keep it simple'.
- Check that you have included accurate facts and quotations and that they are consistent with council policy.
- Liaise with Customer Service and Communications to arrange a photo shoot or send quality photos to increase the 'human interest' appeal of the story.
- Include a contact name and telephone number.

Feedback

- Enable feedback from the community by including contact details or a process for submissions or input.

Distribution

- Forward the media release following approval from your Manager to Customer Service and Communications Team for final approval and for distribution to press.

Helpful Hints:

- Personal contact with the various media organisations may generate greater interest in the story or information.
- Sometimes it helps to also take out a paid advertisement.

Protocols

- All media releases are to be endorsed by Manager Customer Services and Communications and your Manager and in some cases Executive Director.
- Any reference to council policy or the views of a councillor or senior management are to be endorsed by the Executive Director and the councillor being quoted.

Things to Consider

- Has your media release been appropriately approved?
- Have you also used other methods of communication?
- Not all residents and stakeholders will read newspapers or listen to the radio, and there is no guarantee that your story will be 'taken up' by the media.
- Have you checked newspaper deadlines for media releases or advertisements?

Associated Costs

- The greatest cost is time and staff resources in preparing the media release.
- There could be related advertising costs.

Information Displays

The display of information (visual and / or auditory) either on-site or at a prominent public location.

The Purpose

- To inform the community of a proposal, action or service through the effective presentation of material, e.g. plans, concept designs, posters, videos, and products.

Content

- Determine and collect all information that should be included in the display, e.g. plans, documents, photographs, videos, symbols / logos and products.

Helpful Hints:

- Consider the market that you are targeting and the type of information that will be of relevance to them.
- Where possible, use visual and auditory methods to cater for people with hearing or sight impairments.
- Include items that will generate interest. Maps of the area seem to attract people as they try to locate their house or other familiar landmarks.

Presentation

- Determine the best way to present the information, e.g. on a board, as a mobile display (bus / motor vehicle / trailer), within a building or marquees etc.
- Book presentation space if required, e.g. display area in libraries, shopping centres.

Helpful Hints:

- Use large print on information boards, e.g. large headings and readable summaries.
- Make display colourful and interesting, e.g. include colour photos, maps, plans, sketches, logos etc.
- For broad community matters, locate display in a public place that generates high levels of pedestrian traffic, e.g. shopping centres.
- For on-site displays, locate the information at a central meeting point, e.g. building or car park.
- Include 'experiential' activities where appropriate, e.g. 'make a worm farm' for recycling or 'try an exercise' for physical activity.
- Students or community organisations could be involved in handing out materials (to reduce costs if necessary).

Protocols

- Any displays or material should be clearly defined as belonging to Gunnedah Shire Council, including the logo and design consistent with council's image.

Things to Consider

- Does any of the information in your display need to be endorsed by council?
- Have you provided all relevant information to appropriately inform the community (particularly relating to a proposal)?
- Have you included contact details so that people can take further action if desired?

Associated Costs

- The cost will depend on the approach used, i.e. an information board will cost less than a display with equipment, materials and related 'experiential' activities.
- Allow for the cost of preparing material (e.g. plans, maps, sketches etc., if not already prepared).

Bulk Email – Community Contacts Databases

Bulk email sent to community members and stakeholders informing them of a project, issue, service or action, using an existing database e.g. Civic database, media release database.

The Purpose

- To inform community members of a project, issue, service or action or to invite community feedback or involvement.
- To provide feedback and updates on projects, services or issues.

Content

Address the basic 'who, what, where, when, why' as appropriate. For example:

- Who is the issue or matter affecting or who is involved?
- What is the decision, issue or what does the recipient need to do?
- Where will meetings be held or where will information be available?
- When is an activity taking place or when is a meeting being held?
- Why is council changing policy or why is council providing advice?
- How can the recipient become involved further?
- Provide staff contact details where appropriate (i.e. name and phone number). There should generally be an opportunity for a personal or written response from the resident or organisation.
- Include the appropriate sign-off for the correspondence, e.g. Mayor, Executive Director or Manager.

Helpful Hints

- Use 'plain English'.
- Check that your email is easy to understand (if in doubt ask someone else to read it).
- Avoid using 'jargon'.
- Check that your email has all the right facts, e.g. the correct dates and times of meetings.
- Include links to key documents and web sites.

Distribution

- For bulk emails include supporting information/links where appropriate – no attachments.
- Register a copy of the email in Dataworks.

Protocols

- Any bulk emails to community groups must be approved by Manager Customer Service and Communications prior to sending.
- Bulk emails from the community contacts register should be centrally coordinated to avoid conflicting and multiple messages from council.

Things to Consider

- Have you considered possible language barriers?
- Have you checked council's protocols on who should sign the correspondence?
- Does your supervisor/manager need to authorise the correspondence?
- Do you also need to send a letter to those with no email?

Associated Costs

- Minimal costs via email.
- Special rates for bulk SMS depending on quantity.
- Some postage costs for mail-outs to those without email access.

Banners, Posters and Site Signage

The display of information (visual and/or auditory) either on-site or at a prominent public location.

The Purpose

- To inform the community of a proposal, action or service through the effective presentation of material, e.g. plans, concept designs, site signage, posters, videos and products.

Content

- Determine and collect all information that should be included in the display, e.g. plans, documents, photographs, videos, symbols/logos and products.

Helpful Hints:

- Consider the market that you are targeting and the type of information that will be of relevance to them.
- Where possible, use visual and auditory methods to cater for people with hearing or sight impairments.
- Include items that will generate interest, such as a mascot or a video with topical information.

Presentation

- Determine the best way to present the information, e.g. on a board, as a mobile display (bus / motor vehicle / trailer), within a building or marquees etc.
- Book presentation space if required, e.g. libraries, shopping centres

Helpful Hints:

- Use large print on information boards, e.g. large headings and readable summaries.
- Make display colourful and interesting, e.g. include colour photos, maps, plans, sketches, logos etc.
- For broad community matters, locate display in a public place that generates high levels of pedestrian traffic, e.g. shopping centres.
- For on-site displays, locate the information at a central meeting point, e.g. building or car park.

The Purpose

- Any displays or material should be clearly defined as belonging to Gunnedah Shire Council, including the logo and design consistent with council's branding guidelines.

Things to Consider

- Does any of the information in your display need to be endorsed by council?
- Have you provided all relevant information to appropriately inform the community (particularly relating to a proposal)?
- Have you included contact details so that people can take further action if desired?
- Check to see whether Customer Service and Communications has existing signage which can be used.

Associated Costs

- The cost will depend on the approach used, i.e. an information board will cost less than a display with equipment, materials and related 'experiential' activities.
- Allow for the cost of preparing material (e.g. plans, maps, sketches etc., if not already prepared).

Social Media

The use of new technologies and social media to inform the community of specific topic, project, issue or event.

The Purpose

- To inform the community of a proposal, action or service through the effective presentation of material, e.g. plans, concept designs, site signage, posters, videos and products

Helpful Hints

- Use 'plain English'.
- Check that your message is easy to understand (if in doubt ask someone else to read it).
- Avoid using 'jargon'.
- Check that your message has all the right facts, e.g. the correct dates and times of meetings.
- Include links to key documents and other web sites.

Protocols

- Social Media listings should be approved by Manager Customer Service and Communications prior to inclusion.

Things to Consider

- Have you considered possible language barriers?
- Does your supervisor/manager need to authorise the correspondence?

Associated Costs

- Nil

Website

The use of the Council web site to inform and communicate activities, projects, events etc of Council.

The Purpose

- To inform community members of a project, issue, service or action or to invite community feedback or involvement.
- To provide feedback and updates on projects, services or issues.

Content

Address the basic 'who, what, where, when, why' as appropriate. For example:

- Who is the issue or matter affecting or who is involved?
- What is the decision, issue or what does the recipient need to do?
- Where will meetings be held or where will information be available?
- When is an activity taking place or when is a meeting being held?
- Why is council changing policy or why is council providing advice?
- How can the recipient become involved further?
- Provide staff contact details where appropriate (i.e. name and phone number). There should generally be an opportunity for a personal or written response from the resident or organisation.
- Include the appropriate sign-off for the correspondence, e.g. Mayor, Executive Director or Manager.

Helpful Hints

- Use 'plain English'.
- Check that your message is easy to understand (if in doubt ask someone else to read it).
- Avoid using 'jargon'.
- Check that your message has all the right facts, e.g. the correct dates and times of meetings.
- Include links to key documents and other web sites.

Distribution

- For bulk emails include supporting information/links where appropriate – no attachments.
- Register a copy of the email in Dataworks.

Protocols

- Website listings should be approved by Manager Customer Service and Communications prior to inclusion.

Things to Consider

- Have you considered possible language barriers?
- Does your supervisor/manager need to authorise the correspondence?
- Do you also need to send a letter to those without internet access?

Associated Costs

- Minimal costs.
- Some postage costs for mail-outs to those without internet access.

Techniques for Consulting

These techniques are intended for use when council is seeking ideas and input from the community on a particular issue or project such as:

- Draft policy, Plan or Strategy.
- Development of a park master plan.

Suggested methods for recording feedback:

- General comment forms
- Completed questionnaire
- Post-it notes short comments in response to particular questions
- Staff notes from discussions with participants
- Additional submissions.

Suggestion Box

Provision of a feedback mechanism for customers to lodge ideas and suggestions.

The Purpose

- To enable programs and services to be improved, in response to community ideas and feedback.

Setup

- Purchase or design a box that is large enough to be seen and will hold responses.
- Clearly indicate the box is for 'suggestions', and the name of the project.
- Locate the suggestion box in a prominent location.
- Provide blank paper or comment forms and pens for people to record their suggestions.

Helpful Hints:

- A front counter or entrance location is likely to be most visible and attract people as they are leaving or entering the facility.
- Make the box colourful so that it 'stands out'.
- There should be somewhere nearby for people to sit while they are recording their comments.
- The suggestions will generally be anonymous, but the option for recording contact details should be given for people who may want a follow-up.
- Promote the existence and location of the suggestion box in any newsletters, other correspondence or notice board.
- Consider establishing an electronic suggestion box using a dedicated email address (to create such an address talk to IT).

Ideas for Recording and Collating Input:

- A sheet with some questions or spaces for comments could prompt more creative responses.
- Record the suggestions made each week on a notice board and/or through newsletters and other correspondence.
- Consider how you can pass the suggestions onto management, i.e. through a report?

Things to Consider

- How will people know when you have taken their ideas on board, i.e. is there any way of giving feedback to people and/or advising people of actions?

Associated Costs

- Allow for the cost of the suggestion box or material.
- Allow for the cost of related forms.

Interview – In person / telephone

Informal or semi-formal discussion between council representative/s and one stakeholder or a small group.

The Purpose

- To enable discussion of an issue or project that relates to the person/people concerned.
- To provide or obtain information at a more personal level.

Organisation

For a meeting that is organised in advance:

- Arrange the meeting through telephone contact or letter, clearly outlining the purpose of the meeting.
- If required, follow up to confirm the meeting details and its purpose.

Content

- Prepare for the meeting, outlining information that is sought or is to be presented, and the key questions to ask.
- Consider the preparation of a detailed interview schedule for some projects.

Helpful Hints:

- Where meetings are 'on the spot'/not pre-arranged (e.g. a community member has arrived at council requesting to speak to someone), still take a minute or two to gather thoughts and prepare key points ready for the discussion.
- Take any supporting material such as reports or maps to the meeting to assist in discussions.

Hold Meeting

- Give the meeting participant/s your business card for further contact and to formalise the meeting.
- Hold the meeting in a space that is relatively quiet and where there are unlikely to be interruptions.
- Take care not to make commitments at the meeting that require council endorsement or are policy related.
- If the meeting is discussing a contentious issue it is recommended two council officers are present.

Ideas for Recording and Collating Input

- Document the meeting discussions and where appropriate provide the meeting participants with a copy of the notes.
- Formally advise other council staff of any items discussed that could be an issue for council or relate to another work area or project.
- Place a copy of the meeting notes on council record via Dataworks.

Things to Consider

- Should another staff member be present if the issue is contentious or the participants could infer a council policy decision?
- Have you adopted an open and accountable approach, e.g. providing information and access to reports sought?
- Ensure that the other party is comfortable.
- Consider sending key questions and discussion topics in advance to promote good participation.

Associated Costs

- Minimal costs

Feedback Form

A structured form which allows the community to provide feedback in response to a publicly available proposal, draft plan or issue.

The Purpose

- To enable broad community feedback on a proposal, draft plan or issue.

Preparation

- Prepare the feedback form.
- Prepare the display materials, including concept design, sketches and draft plans.
- Determine the locations for exhibition.
- Book display space
- Prepare the display (refer to information Displays).

Helpful Hints:

- Keep the design of the form as simple as possible.
- Be mindful of the type of data you are seeking when designing the form.

Protocols

- All feedback forms need to be approved by your Branch Manager.

Promotion

- This will depend on the type of feedback sought. Some forms will simply be distributed at the end of a workshop or forum, others will be linked to a display which is broadly advertised.

Things to Consider

- Have you provided contact details to enable forms to be returned?

Associated Costs

- The cost of using a feedback form is generally very minimal.

Ideas for Recording and Collating Input:

- A sheet with some questions or spaces for comments could prompt more creative responses.
- Record the suggestions made each week on a notice board and/or through newsletters and other correspondence.
- Consider how you can pass the suggestions onto the relevant stakeholders.

Inviting Submissions

A letter or a media promotion seeking written presentation of views, on a proposal, concept or activity, at the public exhibition stage.

The Purpose

- To formally advise people of a proposed direction and seek their views.
- To provide the opportunity for the community to provide formal input in determining whether a proposal, concept or activity is appropriate.

Organisation

- Determine the most appropriate approach to seeking written submissions. For example, forwarding a letter inviting a submission will be most appropriate for local issues or directions i.e. the redesign of a local park. A media promotion inviting submissions may be more appropriate for a Gunnedah Shire regional issue. Email notification should also be considered to registered community contacts.
- For items that are more contentious or significant, it may be advisable to forward a letter to targeted communities (that are most affected) and also undertake a media promotion seeking submissions from the broader community.
- For a letter inviting a submission, design the letter and arrange the printing and distribution.
- For an email inviting a submission, design the email and arrange the bulk distribution via the bulk email service. Refer to Customer Service and Communications.
- For a media promotion inviting a submission, design the notice and arrange for its publication.
- Prior to forwarding the letter or notice, obtain approval from your Manager and from Executive Directors where required.

Content

- For a letter/email or media promotion inviting a submission, include all details of the proposal, concept or action, including:
- What is proposed and when it will be implemented
- How and where people can obtain more detailed information, e.g. reports
- How people can respond and who to
- What sort of information should be included in the submission, e.g. specific details of concerns, who is impacted and why, any issues regarding the process etc.
- Copies of any concept designs / plans

Things to Consider

- Have legislative requirements when seeking 'formal' submissions been met?
- Has your letter, email or notice been approved by your Manager?
- Have you advised senior management and council that you are seeking submissions?
- Does your letter or notice need to be approved by senior management, i.e. is the item contentious?

Feedback

- All submissions should be analysed in terms of common themes and presented in a report.

Associated Costs

- Allow for the cost of printing and mailing letters.
- Allow for the cost of advertising for the media promotion.

Surveys – Telephone and Written

A structured tool to gather data and information, e.g. a questionnaire used to assess needs, gain feedback or gauge community opinion. Can obtain both quantitative (demographics, numbers, discrete answers) and qualitative (ideas, comments, feedback) data.

The Purpose

- To obtain information from a representative sample within the community.
- To enable a considered response to an issue or item (allowing time and providing adequate background information).

Survey Design

Determine the broad objectives of the survey before developing the specific survey questions. For example:

- Why is the survey being undertaken?
- What information is sought?
- Who should the survey target?
- How will the information be used?

Helpful Hints:

- Each question should have an objective/purpose.
- Use 'plain English'.
- 'Closed' questions are easier to collate than 'open' text responses, i.e. tick box choice of answer.
- 'Open' questions can provide greater depth and understanding of an issue by allowing respondents to answer in a way that's meaningful to them.
- Also allow for individual answers, e.g. 'other', or 'other comments'.
- Check if the order of questions is logical. Wherever possible arrange a trial run of the survey to test respondents' understanding of the survey intent.
- Consider the number of questions and length of the survey in relation to the survey method.
- Request demographic information, e.g. age, gender and location (street, postcode) and, for some surveys, ethnicity.
- Generally, do not request financial information (often seen as too personal). If financial information is relevant provide ranges e.g. \$45,000–\$60,000
- Provide respondents with the choice of remaining anonymous or giving their personal details. Personal details can be collected for the purposes of keeping respondents informed as to the progress of a project.
- Include a short introduction/background at the commencement of the survey to explain the project and how information gained from the survey will be used to inform the project.

Pilot Survey

- Seek feedback on the draft survey from other council staff who have undertaken community engagement activities and people in the target group if possible.
- Modify the survey as appropriate.

Distribution

Determine the best method of distribution. A combination of methods also allows access to the same survey in a variety of formats.

- Mail-out
- Telephone
- Online
- Interview (street, shopping centre, facility etc.)
- Hand-out (linked to service, facility or workshop)

For any survey, establish the survey data base. Some options include:

- Obtain name and address through one of council's databases or service user records.
- Contact Customer Service and Communications Manager to seek assistance with resident and ratepayer information.
- Link mail-out to rates or council newsletter.

For a telephone survey:

- Seek advice and assistance from the Customer Service and Communications team or from external market research company.

For a mail-out survey:

- Develop letter/s and reply-paid envelopes.
- Determine how many responses are required.
- Print and distribute the survey form, letter/s, reply-paid envelopes etc. (as appropriate).

Helpful Hints:

- Aim to obtain 10% of the total survey distribution.
- Seek advice regarding appropriate sample sizes.
- Remember, community engagement and feedback is not the same as representative research.
- Consider a folded back-to-back survey form (not too long, easy to follow and no risk of losing pages).
- Clearly address reply-paid envelopes to Gunnedah Shire Council.
- A telephone survey requires specialist communication skills and should generally be undertaken by a market research company.

Recording and Collating Responses

- Undertake cross-tabulation of data, e.g. age and gender cross-tabulated with questions such as type of activity participated in.
- Analyse and summarise the findings.
- This is much easier using online survey tools.
- Enter hard-copy responses into the online survey tool collation to allow both sets of responses to be collated and analysed as one group, making the task easier and more manageable.

Helpful Hints:

- The services of a data collation/market research company are likely to be required for a larger survey (100 or more responses).

Protocols

- Community surveys that relate to the Gunnedah Shire region or a priority issue should be endorsed by the Executive Director.
- Councillors should be provided with a copy of community surveys prior to distribution.

Things to Consider

- Be careful to avoid leading questions.
- If collecting personal details, be aware of the provisions of the *Information Privacy Act (2009)*.
- Have you considered possible language barriers?
- Have you adopted a personal approach, e.g. personalised letters or a friendly interview approach?
- Is there potential to link with other work areas in council, to reduce the number of surveys undertaken and/or to reduce costs?
- Have you undertaken or planned other methods of engagement to complement the survey?
- Have you considered how the results will be communicated?

Associated Costs

- For mail-out surveys, allow for printing and mailing costs.
- For telephone surveys, allow for market research costs or in-house staff and telephone costs.
- For interviews, allow for printing and interviewer costs.
- For hand-out surveys, allow for printing costs.
- For all surveys, allow for data collation costs, analysis costs and staff time costs.

Hotline or Phone-in

A time-limited opportunity for the community to make contact or provide feedback in a semi-structured context.

The Purpose

- To obtain comment or feedback on a topic, e.g. an issue, proposal, action or project.
- To give people the opportunity to discuss particular needs, opinions or concerns.

Setup

- Determine the telephone contact arrangements, e.g. establish a designated telephone number, or allocate the task to a market research agency.
- Provide training if in-house, e.g. how to respond to or generate comments. A consistent set of information needs to be provided to the public from each staff member involved in the phone-in.
- Develop Frequently asked Questions (FaQs) and Possibly asked Questions (PaQs) to assist staff with conveying this consistent message.
- Determine the period of the hotline/phone-in.
- Develop a question prompt sheet and a system to record responses.

Helpful Hints:

- For broader community phone-ins, a telephone number that can be answered by more than one operator is required.
- Consider operating the hotline/phone-in after hours as well as during business hours (for people who work or have limited free time during the day).
- Generally, do not undertake the hotline/phone-in during school holidays (particularly the Christmas break).

Promotion

- Advertise the hotline/phone-in. Contact the Customer Service and Communications team for assistance.
- For broad community phone-ins, advertise thoroughly via local newspapers, posters, mail-outs, email and community newsletters.
- Advertise details on what the topic is about, why people should be involved, who they are ringing, when to ring, what number to ring.

Protocols

- All hotline/phone-ins must be endorsed by your Manager / Director and the Customer Service and Communications Manager.

Recording and Collating Input

- General comments recorded.
- Record responses to specific questions.
- Consider the use of an issues log outlining what minimum information is to be recorded.
- A checklist of possible topics will help identify and respond to feedback quickly.
- Develop a project database of known affected residents with relevant property information. Record their comments and concerns in the database.

Things to Consider

- Have you adequately explained the topic and the purpose of the phone-in in your promotions?
- Have you considered possible language barriers and the need for interpreters?
- Have you obtained the necessary approval and informed senior management and councillors?

Associated Costs

- If outsourced, the cost of the research company should be factored in (quotes should be obtained).
- If in-house the cost of staffing the phone/s during and outside work times should be factored in.
- Allow for advertising costs.

Techniques for Involving

These techniques are intended for use when council is seeking to involve the community – particularly when:

- The issue is complex
- There is a great disparity of views or a number of possible options/outcomes
- There is the opportunity for the community to learn from each other by participating in group processes.

Suggested methods for recording the outcomes of group processes:

- General comment forms
- Completed questionnaire
- Post-it notes short comments in response to particular questions
- Staff notes from discussions with participants
- Additional submissions
- Flipchart paper
- Formal evaluation forms following a group meeting such as workshop evaluation.

Generally, the majority of information you collect from Techniques for Involving Groups of People will be qualitative data. Please refer to Recording and Collating Input from Techniques for Seeking Feedback for suggestions about how to handle the data you've collected.

Webpage

Using council website to communicate activities, projects, events etc.

The Purpose

- To inform the community of a proposal, action or service through the effective use of the council website.

Content

- Determine and collect all information that should be included in the webpage, e.g. plans, documents, photographs, videos, symbols/logos and products.

Helpful Hints:

- Do you need a dedicated project page or can your information be included with an existing page?
- Consider the market that you are targeting and the type of information that will be of relevance to them.
- Where possible, use visual and auditory methods to cater for people with sight or hearing impairments.
- Include items that will generate interest, subject site maps or a video with topical information.
- Discuss how to present the page with Webmaster and/or council's web team.

Presentation

- Determine the best way to present the information, e.g. downloadable attachments or small images.

The Purpose

- Any displays or material should be clearly defined as belonging to Gunnedah Shire Council, including the logo and design consistent with council's branding guidelines.

Things to Consider

- Does any of the information in your display need to be endorsed by council?
- Have you provided all relevant information to appropriately inform the community (particularly relating to a proposal)?
- Have you included contact details so that people can take further action if desired?

Associated Costs

- The cost will depend on the approach used, i.e. if your webpage is a repository of information it will be less resource intensive to manage than an interactive webpage with other functionality such as providing comment.

Social Media

The use of social media to inform the community of a specific topic, project, issue or event.

The Purpose

- To promote and market events, projects and programs.
- To provide updates on significant ongoing projects.
- To respond to community issues with up-to-date council information on the issue.
- To provide up-to-the-minute advice and guidance in a time of disaster or crisis.

Content

Address the basic 'who, what, where, when,' as appropriate. For example:

- Who is the issue or matter affecting or who is involved?
- What is the decision, issue or what does the recipient need to do?
- Where will meetings be held or information be available?
- When is an activity taking place or a meeting being held?

Helpful Hints

- Use 'plain English'.
- Check that your email/post is easy to understand (if in doubt ask someone else to read it).
- Avoid using 'jargon'.
- Check that your post has all the right facts, e.g. the correct dates and times of meetings.
- Social media posts should be short and sharp.
- Consider the need for moderation of comments and feedback.

Distribution

- Contact Customer Service and Communications team to make the post.

Protocols

- Customer Service and Communications manages and monitors council's Facebook page.

Things to Consider

- Have you considered possible language barriers?
- Does your supervisor/manager need to authorise the correspondence?

Associated Costs

- No cost incurred using Facebook.

Online Forum

A group discussion about a topic or issue whereby people can participate and contribute over an extended period of time. Participants can respond to other people's comments and follow the 'thread' of conversation.

The Purpose

- To generate interest regarding a topic and enable community participation in discussion at a time and location convenient to them.
- To provide an additional opportunity for people to contribute to an engagement process.
- To encourage online discussion about a topic or project.

Preparation

- Define the topic of the forum.
- Arrange background information to be available on the online forum website.
- Develop a framework for questions and discussion.
- Organise the online forum environment through an external service provider (council does not have the capacity to host an online forum in-house).
- Promote the forum.

Helpful Hints:

- Targeted promotion to interest groups (e.g. personal invitation), in addition to broad promotion, should result in greater participation.
- Keep questions simple as there will not be a facilitator of the conversation.
- Consider whether there is the need for comments to be moderated before they are made 'live'. Moderation should be completed in an expedient manner. The forum environment is aimed to simulate a real-time conversation.
- Consider the need for moderation of comments and feedback.
- Establish ground rules or conditions for contributions up front.
- Consider whether you will allow forum participants to be anonymous or whether they need to register before contributing.

Feedback

- Give participants the opportunity to be involved in further meetings or comment on an output.
- Take contact details of all those who wish to be involved in the project/issue. Ensure that contact details are in the correct format for inclusion in Dataworks

Things to Consider

- Where have you advertised the opportunity of an online forum?
- Is the topic relevant to the community and can it generate further interest or action?

Associated Costs

- Allow for the cost of an external provider to host and moderate an online forum.

Online Survey (Refer Surveys)

A structured tool to gather data and information, e.g. a questionnaire used to assess needs, gain feedback or gauge community opinion.

Can obtain both quantitative (demographics, numbers, discrete answers) and qualitative (ideas, comments, feedback) data.

The Purpose

- To obtain information from a representative sample within the community.
- To enable a considered response to an issue or item (allowing time and providing adequate background information).

Survey Design

Determine the broad objectives of the survey before developing specific survey questions. For example:

- Why is the survey being undertaken?
- What information is sought?
- Who should the survey target?
- How will the information be used?

Helpful Hints:

- Each question should have an objective/ purpose.
- Use 'plain English'.
- 'Closed' questions are easier to collate than 'open' text responses, i.e. tick box choice of answer.
- 'Open' questions can provide greater depth and understanding of an issue by allowing respondents to answer in a way that's meaningful to them.
- Also allow for individual answers, e.g. 'other', or 'other comments'.
- Check if the order of questions is logical. Wherever possible arrange a trial run of the survey to test respondents' understanding of the survey intent.
- Consider the number of questions and length of the survey in relation to the survey method.
- Request demographic information, e.g. age, gender and location (street, postcode) and, for some surveys, ethnicity.
- Generally, do not request financial information (often seen as too personal). If financial information is relevant, provide ranges e.g. \$45,000–\$60,000
- Provide respondents with the choice of remaining anonymous or giving their personal details. Personal details can be collected for the purposes of keeping respondents informed as to the progress of a project.
- Include a short introduction/background at the commencement of the survey to explain the project and how information gained from the survey will be used to inform the project.

Pilot Survey

- Seek feedback on the draft survey from other council staff in the target group if possible.
- Modify the survey as appropriate.

Distribution

Determine the best method of distribution and promotion of the survey.

- Contact Customer Service and Communications for assistance in finalising the online survey using council-approved online software.
- Determine who the online survey link will be sent to.
- Determine how you will promote the online survey to gain meaningful responses.

Helpful Hints:

- Aim to obtain 10% of the total survey distribution.
- Remember, community engagement and feedback is not the same as representative research.

Recording and Collating Responses

- Undertake cross-tabulation of data, e.g. age and gender cross-tabulated with questions such as type of activity participated in.
- Analyse and summarise the findings.
- This is much easier using online survey tools.

- Entering hard-copy responses into the online survey tool collation allows both sets of responses to be collated and analysed as one group, making the task easier and more manageable.

Helpful Hints:

- The services of a data collation/market research company are likely to be required for a larger survey (100 or more responses).

Protocols

- Community surveys that relate to the Gunnedah Shire region or a priority issue should be endorsed by a the General Manager.
- Councillors should be provided with a copy of community surveys prior to distribution.

Things to Consider

- If collecting personal details, be aware of the provisions of the *Information Privacy Act (2009)*.
- Have you considered possible language barriers?
- Is there potential to link with other work areas in council, to reduce the number of surveys undertaken and / or to reduce costs?
- Have you undertaken or planned other methods of engagement, to complement the survey?
- Have you considered how the results will be communicated?

Associated Costs

- For all surveys, allow for data collation costs, analysis costs and staff time costs.

File Sharing

The distribution or provision of access to a range of electronically stored documents including text-based documents, video, photos and images.

The Purpose

- To provide access to electronic copies of project-specific documents to ensure consistency of information and avoid misinformation.

Preparation

- Gather all relevant electronic documents in one location. The project webpage is often the best place for making electronic documents available.
- Ensure all documents are made available in pdf or un-editable versions only.
- Ensure all documents meet Gunnedah Shire Council Branding Guidelines.

Feedback

- Give participants the opportunity to be further involved in future meetings and other engagement processes.
- Take contact details of all those who wish to be involved in the project / issue. Ensure that contact details are in the correct format for inclusion in Dataworks.

Associated Costs

- Only internal costs are associated with the establishment of a project webpage and the uploading of resources to it.
- Costs may be associated with the development of materials to be made available electronically.

Techniques for Collaborating

These techniques are intended for use when council is seeking to engage the community – particularly when:

- The issue is complex
- There is a great disparity of views or a number of possible options/outcomes
- There is the opportunity for the community to learn from each other by participating in group processes.

Public Meetings, Information Sessions or Briefings

An informal or formal gathering of the community to provide information regarding an issue or matter, generally involving larger numbers of people. An information session is an opportunity to clarify questions the community may have.

The Purpose

- To inform the general public of a proposal, action or issue.
- To seek feedback from the community.
- To gain a deeper understanding of the project or issue.

Preparation

- Determine the venue and timing.
- Develop an invitation list.
- Prepare materials, including displays, summary information etc.
- Promote the information session.

Helpful Hints:

- Consider having information displays, maps etc. for people to view.
- Include notices in local newspapers, and also consider other methods, e.g. school newsletters, posters in community centres, libraries and shopping centres etc.
- Consider if you need to provide handout material or information.

Meeting Approach

- Setup the room to create a relaxed environment – round tables work well rather than lecture-style seating.
- Have displays/stands setup for people to view.
- Staff should be on hand to answer queries.

Helpful Hints:

- Clarify meeting ground rules and conduct.
- Encourage consideration of ideas and solutions rather than focusing on negative issues, i.e. very quickly identify the issues and then move on.
- Try not to take agitated criticism personally.
- Consider whether you need to engage an independent consultant to facilitate the meeting.

Feedback

- Obtain contact details so that a summary of the meeting can be forwarded to each participant.
- Highlight how the participants can be further involved.

Protocols

- Councillors should be made aware of all meetings in their division and workshops that involve the broader community or relate to a project of council significance. Advice is to be via a memo to all Councillors and Executive and Managers.
- Councillor diaries should be checked when arranging a relevant meeting/workshop. Meetings and workshops should not clash with council meetings or key council events.

Things to Consider

- Is the chosen venue physically accessible and well located?
- Have you provided sufficient refreshments (especially near lunch / dinner time)?
- Is an information session the best approach, i.e. would a workshop approach be better to enable informed discussion and involvement?
- Target audience needs, accessibility issues and timing of the event to ensure fair and reasonable access.

Associated Costs

- Allow for venue and refreshment costs.
- Allow for staff costs to deal with individual discussions.
- Allow for material preparation costs, e.g. displays, information.
- Promotion costs.

Focus Group Session

Semi-structured interview with a small group of invited representative participants.

The Purpose

- To obtain the opinion of a representative group of people on a topic, to assist in planning for an extended target group or the wider community.

Preparation

- Determine the number of focus group sessions to hold.
- Select and invite the participants.
- Select and book the venue.
- Send any background information to the participants so they have the ability to be prepared.

Helpful Hints:

- Participants should represent the target group, e.g. young people who have been unemployed for six months, older adults who have been retired for at least five years or are over a certain age, or young parents who are not employed with children less than five years.
- Participants can be identified through community contacts, e.g. community centres, child care centres, playgroups, libraries, youth centres or through random contact using resident listings.
- Contact prospective participants by phone and then send a formal letter of invitation.
- The number of people should be eight to ten to enable quality involvement by all participants.
- There should be a mix of genders unless the target group is one gender.
- The questions will depend on the topic. However, in general, they should be relatively simple and of relevance to the focus group.

Session Approach

- Prepare questions and the session approach, including the materials required.
- Hold the focus group session.

Helpful Hints:

- A more participatory approach could include presenting photographs, sketches or objects to generate thoughts or seek a response.
- Set the 'ground rules' at the beginning of the session, e.g. all thoughts/ comments are valid, debate is not appropriate although consensus is not expected etc.
- Provide refreshments to 'keep people going' and create a more relaxed atmosphere.
- A focus group session requires the ability to generate open comments and interpret values and ideas.
- The involvement of a specialist facilitator might be appropriate in some circumstances.

Feedback

- Determine what data you want from the focus group session and the best way to record that.

Things to Consider

- Have you carefully chosen your venue? it should be accessible and also be small, warm and have a pleasant ambience (due to the smaller number of participants and the need for open and honest input).
- Have you chosen the appropriate time for the group, e.g. early afternoon for older adults, after school for young people etc.? Ask prospective participants what is the best time.
- Have you provided support where needed, e.g. child care for young parents, transport for young people?

Associated Costs

- Some focus group sessions involve a small payment to the participants (consider 'market rates' at the time). Alternatively, a service, activity or gift could be offered.
- Allow for venue and refreshment costs.
- Allow for other material costs, e.g. sketches, photos, other 'prompts'.
- Allow for the cost of an independent facilitator if required.

Meeting with Stakeholders

Face-to-face meeting with a selected group, which has a specific interest in an issue, activity, facility, service etc.

The Purpose

- To inform and / or obtain feedback on a proposed action, project, strategic direction or policy.
- To ensure the issues, needs and ideas of a user or stakeholder group are considered.
- To involve a user or stakeholder group in planning for a facility or service.

Preparation

- Determine which groups or individuals should be consulted.
- Determine the appropriate timing and venue.
- Arrange the meeting (suggest make contact by telephone and then confirm in writing).
- Prepare for the meeting.
- Determine the key points for discussion.
- Prepare notes, presentation slides, maps, photographs, displays etc.
- Determine materials required, e.g. chairs and tables, data projectors, kitchen appliances / utensils, refreshments.
- Take notes and provide summary to participants.
- Take contact details for follow-up.

Helpful Hints:

- User groups could include sporting groups, parents of children and participants of a program.
- Stakeholder groups could include Chambers of Commerce, community service providers and advocacy groups, other government bodies.
- 'Near the site' meetings can 'set the scene' for relevant ideas and discussion.
- Give at least two to three weeks' notice for meetings.
- Clearly set the boundaries regarding the number of people invited from each group.
- Provide all meeting details in correspondence, i.e. date, time, venue, purpose of meeting.
- Follow up personal contact with formal correspondence and details.

Meeting Approach

- The meeting approach and the level of formality will vary with the group involved and the issue or item being discussed. Some ideas are provided below.

Helpful Hints:

- The preparation and distribution of an agenda before the meeting will enable people to think about their response and ideas.
- The context of the meeting should be clearly stated, i.e. key topics to discuss, why meeting is being held, other groups that will be consulted, desired outputs.
- Smaller user groups can often be less formal, i.e. a round table discussion.
- A more organised approach, with information, maps, sketches and notes for presentation will ensure a more informed discussion (especially for larger groups).
- For larger groups, record key points made on a whiteboard or butchers paper, so that people can see what has been said.

Feedback

- Highlight ways in which the meeting participants can be further involved in planning or directions if appropriate.
- Take contact details of all those who wish to be involved in the project / issue. Ensure that contact details are in the correct format for inclusion in Dataworks.
- Seek feedback on the meeting approach.
- Forward a summary of the meeting notes to the participants.

Things to Consider

- Is your venue accessible and have you considered other special needs?
- Have you identified all user groups and stakeholders who could be affected by or have a key interest in an action, issue, policy etc.?
- Is it possible or appropriate to combine meetings, i.e. two or three user groups at the same facility?

Associated Costs

- Allow for cost of materials/ displays.
- Allow for venue and refreshment costs.

Attending an Existing Community Group Meeting

This involves linking to an existing meeting or arranging a special meeting with a community group, e.g. school committees, school children, parents at playgroup, youth groups, senior citizens, people with disabilities, local craft groups, business groups, service groups. It is a positive way to engage the community on their terms.

The Purpose

- To gain an understanding of the needs, issues and ideas of various groups in the community.
- To obtain input in planning from the broad community and achieve representative engagement.
- To further create networks and links across the community.

Preparation

- Make contact with a key representative of the group, e.g. principal of a school, coordinator of an activity, president of a club etc., to arrange the meeting.
- Prepare notes, displays, information as appropriate. It may be advisable to send some information in advance to prepare meeting participants.

Helpful Hints:

- Ensure there is some interest in the topic when arranging the meeting.
- Personal contact is best to arrange the meeting. This can be followed up by a formal letter of confirmation, with details.
- It is generally best to meet in the group's normal meeting place, even if holding a special session. People know where to go and feel comfortable.
- Do not overload people with information. Make any presentation interesting and visually appealing.

Meeting Approach (Link to Existing Meeting)

- If joining an existing meeting, you generally need to be concise and quickly generate interest and discussion. Plan on a presentation of a maximum 15 minutes.

Helpful Hints:

- Do not join an existing meeting if they are unable to allow you at least 30 minutes (check the availability of time). Try to arrange a separate session if there is an issue with time.
- Endeavour to be placed on the agenda as the only or main speaker for the meeting.
- Give a brief outline of the topic and why you are seeking people's views, to create interest and awareness. However, spend most of the time listening.
- A more informal approach can often generate greater discussion, e.g. inviting people to talk about particular needs, issues or values.

Meeting Approach (Arrange Special Session)

- If holding a special session, such as with school children or parents, develop a more structured approach that aims to increase involvement.

Helpful Hints:

- Provide information at the beginning of the session to enable informed discussion, including displays and photos where appropriate.
- Consider using art as a form of expression, e.g. young children drawing or painting their ideas or values.
- Consider working in small groups (in a workshop style) to discuss and record ideas.
- Record discussion points on butchers paper or whiteboard, so that people can see what is said.

Feedback

- Give contact and project process details to enable further involvement if desired.
- Take contact details of all those who wish to be involved in the project / issue. Ensure that contact details are in the correct format for inclusion on the contact register.
- Forward any summaries or relevant outcomes of the meeting to the group contact person for distribution.
- Encourage any general feedback on the approach or project process.

Things to Consider

- Would the group reflect the characteristics and views of others in the community?

Associated Costs

- Allow for the cost of any materials, e.g. plans, maps etc.

Workshop Session

Structured approach to involving meeting participants in working through an issue and / or developing solutions.

The Purpose

- To generate discussion and broader thinking regarding an issue or topic.
- To genuinely involve people in identifying and solving issues.

Preparation

- Determine the general size, focus and desired outcome and objectives of the workshop. Consider whether you wish to use the workshop to involve the wider community or to obtain the ideas and input of a particular group.
- Determine the venue, time, length of session and program (activities to achieve your objectives).
- Promote the workshop.
- Prepare notes, displays and other material.

Helpful Hints:

- Facilitate a workshop only when you are confident in your ability to remain neutral.
- A workshop can involve a small number of people (say 10–12) or a larger number (30–40). Much larger than 40 could become unmanageable unless you have a number of facilitators and an experienced facilitator acting as master of ceremonies.
- The involvement of specific groups will require a more targeted approach to promotion, e.g. invitation by letter to stakeholders, residents in an area, representative bodies, users of a service etc.
- In promotions, inform people of the workshop approach and include some questions to generate pre-workshop thinking.

Workshop Approach

- Setup the room to be conducive to small or larger group discussion.
- Provide relevant material at each table, e.g. maps, plans, summary reports, workshop guidelines.
- Setup displays and whiteboards, data projector and / or butchers paper for recording group comments.
- Facilitate / guide the discussions with specific questions or topics.
- Arrange a scribe and facilitator within each small group where possible.

Helpful Hints:

- The use of small tables with four to five chairs at each, all with a view of the front of the room, can work well.
- Allow time for group members to introduce themselves and feel comfortable before commencing workshop activities.
- Switch from large to small group discussions to make the session more interesting, e.g. the whole group talking about general needs or issues and small groups working on solutions.
- Rather than each group presenting their findings (which takes considerable time), consider placing points (written on butchers paper by small groups) on a wall for viewing during a break. The whole group can then return to discuss the points made.
- Be flexible in the approach (recognising when people are ready to move on or need more time or whether an approach should be completely changed).
- Ideally, for large groups, two facilitators should be used. Allow for one facilitator to be free to move around the room to talk to individual groups and deter any conflicts.

Feedback

- Give participants the opportunity to be further involved in planning through further meetings or comment on an output.
- Take contact details of all those who wish to be involved in the project / issue. Ensure that contact details are in the correct format for inclusion in Dataworks.
- Seek feedback on the workshop approach through a feedback form.
- Forward a summary of the workshop findings to participants.

Helpful Hints:

- Ask participants to record their name and address on a registration sheet on arrival.

Protocols

- Councillors should be made aware of all meetings and workshops that involve the broad community or relate to a project of division or council significance. Advice is to be via a memo to all councillors and the Executive via the Executive PA.
- Councillor diaries should be checked when arranging a relevant meeting/ workshop. Meetings and workshops should not clash with council meetings or key council events.
- A summary of meeting notes should be sent to participants and councillors within seven days (received within 10 days of the meeting), to maintain the interest and to show a professional approach.

Things to Consider

- Is your venue accessible and comfortable (including a central or easily accessible location)?
- Have you provided for refreshments?
- Do you need to obtain a skilled independent facilitator, particularly if there will be large numbers (i.e. do you have the skills and confidence)?
- Have you sought advice from other council staff who are skilled in facilitating workshops?

Associated Costs

- Allow for the venue and refreshment costs.
- Allow for facilitator costs if required.
- Allow for promotion (mailing and advertising) costs.

Community Forum

The use of speakers to provide information and facilitate informed discussion on a topic.

The Purpose

- To generate interest regarding a topic and enable community participation in discussion.

Preparation

- Define the topic of the forum.
- Arrange speakers with experience or expertise on topical items. Contact potential speakers by telephone and then confirm arrangements in writing. Include all relevant details in the written correspondence, including the purpose of the forum, the speakers' role, the time allowed for the presentation etc.
- Develop a framework for questions and discussion, in engagement with the speakers.
- Arrange the venue and materials, e.g. displays.
- Promote the forum.

Helpful Hints:

- Ensure speakers are entertaining and able to present informally, i.e. without reading notes.
- Involve well-known speakers (household names) if possible.
- Target promotion to interest groups (e.g. personal invitation), in addition to broad promotion, for greater participation.

Forum Approach

- Determine the best approach, taking into consideration the type of speakers, the venue and the target audience.

Site / Tour Meeting

Tour or site visit with members of the community or key groups.

The Purpose

- To enable informed discussion of needs or proposals relating to a specific site.
- For participants to gain first-hand experience of the site and surrounds.

Preparation

- Prepare a tour outline and determine the desired outcomes.
- Determine time and meeting place.
- Promote the tour to interested parties, including the broad community if appropriate.
- Prepare display material and other information such as handouts.

Helpful Hints:

- Saturday afternoon after junior sport often works well when people are not working and families participate as an 'outing'.

Meeting Approach

- Present the proposal and/ or issues at the commencement of the tour (particularly for larger community group gatherings).
- Facilitate discussion and the recording of ideas and comments, at various key points on the tour.

Helpful Hints:

- A small user or interest group tour can be more informal, although it should have a broad agenda to guide discussions.
- A larger community group gathering requires more structure and could include a walk around the site and opportunities for discussion and questions at various places on the site.
- Some refreshments after the walk around the site are generally appreciated and provide an opportunity for community interaction (e.g. sausage sizzle).

Feedback

- Give participants the opportunity to be further involved in future meetings or comment on an output.
- Take contact details of all those who wish to be involved in the project / issue. Ensure that contact details are in the correct format for inclusion on the contact register.
- Seek feedback on the meeting.
- Forward a summary of any meeting notes taken to participants.

Things to Consider

- Is the site accessible for people with a disability, older adults, young parents with prams etc.?
- Consider what arrangements can be put in place for wet weather such as temporary cover, umbrellas and suitable footwear.

Associated Costs

- Allow for refreshments, especially water.
- Allow for display and information costs.
- Allow for the cost of promotion, e.g. advertisement/ letter box drop.

Community Debate / Hypothetical

Organised speakers and debating panels used to discuss and explore an issue.

The Purpose

- To enable debate and encourage consideration of all points of view.

Preparation

- Arrange debate teams or speakers.
- In engagement with the debate teams/speakers, determine the topic.
- Arrange venue and timing.
- Promote the debate.

Helpful Hints:

- Schools could be involved as part of an education and development activity.
- Ensure the item is topical and relevant.

Debate Approach

- Setup the venue to encourage amicable debate, e.g. teams seated near each other.
- Outline the debate/hypothetical process and rules at the commencement.
- Include question and discussion times to enable audience participation.

Helpful Hints:

- A pre-debate meeting involving the debate teams would be advisable to set the ground rules.
- An experienced debate moderator will be required.
- The 'friendly nature' of the debate should be stated.
- Provide refreshments to encourage informal discussion.

Feedback

- Give participants the opportunity to be involved in further meetings or comment on an output.
- Take contact details of all those who wish to be involved in the project / issue. Ensure that contact details are in the correct format for inclusion on the contact register,
- Seek feedback on the debate.
- Forward a summary of any meeting notes taken to participants.

Things to Consider

- Does the debate/hypothetical contribute to exploring or addressing issues that exist within the community?
- Is the venue appropriate, e.g. accessible and supportive of active discussion?

Community Art

Using community art as part of the engagement process and art as a tool to encourage people to express their ideas, views and values.

The Purpose

- To make an engagement process more interesting and creative.
- To enable the expression of people's values and ideas that may otherwise be difficult to verbalise.

Preparation

- Determine the participants / target group.
- Determine the medium to use, e.g. painting, drawing, mosaic, patchwork. Consider the characteristics and interest of the target group in doing so.
- Obtain materials, e.g. paints, canvas, tools.
- Engage a facilitator / artist if required.
- Promote the activity to the target group.

Helpful Hints:

- Consider linking to existing groups such as a youth group, senior citizens group or children in a school, so that people are comfortable to discuss ideas and values with each other.
- Talk to potential participants (in advance) about the art medium to use and the desired products.
- An artist can be used to encourage creativity and guide skills (not to determine the product or ideas).

Activity Approach

- Consider which art form is most appropriate e.g. photography, oral history, mural.
- Hold the activity at a venue that is conducive to art creation, e.g. art workshop, outdoors.
- Participants should be encouraged to provide explanatory notes to support their art work.
- Set a broad framework for the presentation of ideas, e.g. how to incorporate ideas within art works.

Helpful Hints:

- The approach should be informal to encourage creativity.
- There should be an opportunity for people to explain their ideas and values and how they have depicted these within the art work.
- Provide refreshments to 'keep people going'.
- Consider whether to publish the outcomes separately.

Feedback

- Give people the opportunity to be further involved and comment on final proposals if desired.
- Use a public place to present the art work, and seek general community feedback on its meaning.

Things to Consider

- Are people aware of the activity that they will participate in, so that they can dress accordingly?
- Is the venue suitable for the activity?
- Is the time commitment required by the participants reasonable and/ or agreed to?
- Have you checked that people are happy to donate their art work for display (or inclusion in a publication)?

Associated Costs

- Allow for the cost of materials.
- Allow for the venue and refreshment costs.
- Allow for the cost of a facilitator/ artist if required

Feedback

- Give participants the opportunity to be further involved in future meetings or comment on an output.
- Take contact details of all those who wish to be involved in the project / issue. Ensure that contact details are in the correct format for inclusion in Dataworks.
- Seek feedback on the forum through a feedback form.
- Forward a summary of any meeting notes taken to participants.

Things to Consider

- Is the venue accessible, particularly for people with disabilities?
- Is the topic relevant to the community and can it generate further interest or action?

Associated Costs

- Some speakers will request a fee. If people are travelling, offer to meet travel or accommodation costs.
- Allow for the cost of the venue and refreshments.

Community Conference or Summit

A large-scale representative community event (up to 500 participants) – to educate and inform participants to make considered input into council decision making.

The Purpose

- To provide a robust forum to debate and discuss strategic topics to gain informed and representative community input into council decision making.

Preparation

- Define the topic.
- Develop an agenda based on outcomes required.
- Determine format for event and length of time required.
- Arrange for specialist facilitator(s), speakers and required resources.
- Develop a framework for questions and discussion, in engagement with the speakers.
- Arrange the venue and materials, e.g. displays.
- Organise resources to invite attendees and facilitate table discussion.
- Promote the conference or summit.
- Collect demographic details from interested participants to enable representative profiling of attendees.

Helpful Hints:

- Target promotion to interest groups (e.g. personal invitation), in addition to broad promotion, for greater participation.
- Consider using external consultants to assist in developing the event program and format.
- Ensure that a broad range of representative participants are recruited.
- There should be opportunities for formal and informal discussion between the participants on facilitated tables.
- Refreshments should be provided.
- The conference may run over one or two days, so consider timing carefully.

Feedback

- Give participants the opportunity to be involved in further meetings or to provide comments on output.
- Take contact details of all those who wish to be involved in the project / issue. Ensure that contact details are in the correct format for inclusion in Dataworks.
- Seek feedback on the summit through a feedback form.
- Forward a summary of any results from the summit to participants.

Things to Consider

- Is the venue accessible, particularly for people with disabilities?
- Is the topic relevant to the community and can it generate further interest or action?

Associated Costs

- Running a community conference will require a significant budget and involves considerable planning time.

Protocols

- Any community conference or summit needs to be approved by council.
- The Mayor and councillors should be invited to the conference or summit along with the Executive Leadership Team.

Advisory Group / Taskforce

An Advisory Group established by council to advise on specific issues, projects and policy that involve joint responsibility with stakeholders.

The Purpose

- To involve community and stakeholder representatives in providing ongoing advice on complex or significant issues / matters and input to decision making in a joint relationship with stakeholders outside of the Gunnedah Shire Council area.
- Examples include: Savings Project Team, Transformation Taskforce.

Committee Initiation

- Determine the role of the group.
- Develop charter and terms of reference for the group.
- Review Council's advisory Group guidelines and determine if any amendments are required.
- Determine the membership selection process and criteria.
- Prepare a report to council for approval of the group establishment including the draft charter and guidelines.
- Advertise for expressions of interest for the group where appropriate.

Helpful Hints:

- Expressions of interest need to be called for community representatives on a council Advisory Group.
- Selection of key stakeholders' representatives nominated by the interested group or targeted by council may be made.
- Check that any statutory requirements are included in the terms of reference.

Group Operation

- Meet in accordance with the charter and guidelines.
- Determine responsibilities and outcomes.
- Establish working parties to undertake specific projects and tasks accordingly.
- Report on outcomes and recommendations.

Protocols

- Proposals for advisory Groups must be reported to council for endorsement.

Things to Consider

- Is the group representative for the issue, project or task (ie, does it include appropriate stakeholders and community representatives)?
- Has the life of the committee been determined and stated?

Associated Costs

- Allow for meeting costs, e.g. venue, refreshment, materials.

Working Group / Committee

A group of people selected to work with council to complete a specific project / task.

The Purpose

- To involve the community and other stakeholders in planning for and the delivery of a project or activity within a timeframe.
- To achieve project objectives and desired outcomes through the formalised input of community members and other staff.

Group Initiation

- Determine the role and terms of reference of the group.
- Determine the timeframe and required outcomes.
- Determine the membership of the group and invite participants accordingly.

Helpful Hints:

- Target people who have a proven interest in the project, issue and task.
- Contain the group to 10–12 people, involving community and council representatives.

Operation of the Group

- Select a chairperson and nominate specific roles and tasks.
- Agree on the timeframes (meetings and term of the group).
- Set clear objectives and milestones.

Things to Consider

- Has the establishment of the group been authorised by senior management/council?
- If the involvement of other staff is required, has approval been obtained from their Manager?
- Has the local councillor been informed / involved?
- Ensure you have a definite end point / exit strategy.

Associated Costs

- Allow for meeting costs, e.g. venue, refreshment and materials.
- Allow for a final celebratory wrap-up event.

Protocols

- Any proposals that involve establishing a working group must be approved by the relevant Executive Director and / or council and the relevant divisional or portfolio councillor must be consulted.

Techniques for Empowering

Joint Venture

A formal arrangement with community members, stakeholders or organisations to plan for and implement a project or service.

The Purpose

- To achieve initiatives in partnership with the community or other stakeholders.
- To involve the community in decision making and strategic directions through projects.
- To formalise a financial or resource contribution from the community or other stakeholders.

Develop the Venture

- Identify opportunities for joint ventures based on needs and issues to be addressed.
- Determine the benefits to council and the community.
- In engagement with potential 'partners', define the specific project and roles.
- Determine the formal arrangements, e.g. timeframes and agreed arrangements, recognition of contributions.

Venture Operations

- Establish and formalise the framework for the venture (who will do or contribute what and when).
- Develop formal communication processes.
- Provide administrative support for projects and programs.

Protocols

- Any proposal for a joint venture (financial or otherwise) must be reported to council for endorsement before proceeding.
- All joint venture agreements must be referred to legal services for review.

Things to Consider

- Does the joint venture have council's support?
- Does the joint venture benefit the broader community?
- Is the joint venture of financial or resource value to council?

Associated Costs

- Allow for administration and material costs.
- Allow for program resource costs.

Written Report

A document prepared to capture the engagement processes and the outcomes from the consultation.

The Purpose

- To share the outcomes of the project with participants in the consultation process.
- To formally advise council of the outcomes of an engagement process.

Preparation

- Determine the structure of the report.

Helpful Hints:

- Plan how you will report on an engagement process prior to undertaking activities. This may prompt you to consider another way of gathering the information that meets your reporting requirement.

Protocols

- All reports have to be prepared according to corporate template.

Things to Consider

- How will the report be distributed or made available? If you intend to distribute the report electronically, you will need participants' email addresses.

Associated Costs

- If printed copies of the report are to be made available, consider printing costs.

Event – Celebration

An event held to celebrate the conclusion of a project (e.g. the launch of a strategy, opening of a facility) which may include site tours, experiential activities and special guests and generally involves larger numbers of people.

The Purpose

- To share with the general public the successful completion of a major project.
- To thank the community for their support.

Preparation

- Determine the venue and timing.
- Prepare targeted invitations.
- Prepare materials, including displays, schedule of activities, summary information etc.
- Consider whether media coverage would be advantageous and prepare media release accordingly.
- Promote the event.

Helpful Hints:

- A weekend event will be more attractive to families.
- Include notices in local newspapers, and also consider other methods, e.g. school newsletters, posters in community centres, libraries and shopping centres, radio announcements.
- There is likely to be more interest generated in the event if there is a 'hook' for the audience – entertainment, food, give-aways etc.

Feedback

- Prepare a summary of the highlights of the event for inclusion in the Shire Flyer. Include photographs if possible.

Protocols

- Councillors should be made aware of events that involve the broad community or relate to a project of divisional or council significance. Advice is to be via a memo to all councillors and the Executive Leadership Team.
- Councillor diaries should be checked when arranging a relevant meeting / workshop. Events should not clash with council meetings or key council events.
- Close liaison with Customer Service and Communications team.

Things to Consider

- Is the chosen venue physically accessible and well located?
- Do you need to provide refreshments?
- Is the project high-profile enough to justify celebration?

Associated Costs

- Allow for venue, refreshment and entertainment costs.
- Allow for facilitator costs and master of ceremonies if required (and a level of staff involvement will be required regardless).
- Allow for material preparation costs, e.g. displays, information.
- Allow for promotion costs.

Civic Reception

A formal function held by council and hosted by the Mayor and councillors.

The Purpose

- To celebrate a formal event.
- To thank the community for their support.
- To mark an important civic occasion.

Preparation

- Determine the venue and timing (ensure the Mayor is available).
- Prepare materials, including displays, run sheet of address, summary information etc.
- Prepare Mayor's speech / address if required.
- Prepare an invitation list.
- Develop and distribute invitations.
- Liaise with the Executive PA to arrange a media release and coverage of the event.

Helpful Hints:

- Consider the timing of your event – weekend or weekday? During the day or evening?

Feedback

- Prepare a summary of the highlights of the event for inclusion in council's Shire Flyer. Include photographs if possible.

Protocols

- Elected members should be made aware of events that involve the broad community or relate to a project of divisional or council significance. advice is to be via a memo to all councillors and the Executive Leadership Team.
- Councillor diaries should be checked when arranging a relevant meeting / workshop. Events should not clash with council meetings or key council events.

Things to Consider

- The style of the event?
- Other key people to be involved?
- Presentation of the project and achievements?
- Is the chosen venue physically accessible and well located?
- Have you provided sufficient refreshments?

Associated Costs

- Allow for venue, refreshment and entertainment costs.
- Allow for facilitator costs if required (and a level of staff involvement will be required regardless).
- Allow for material preparation costs, e.g. displays, information.
- Promotion costs.

Using Multimedia tools to aid reporting

A range of multimedia tools can be used to capture the progress and story of a project. These can be used to showcase the project and council or be used as case studies for action learning. A multimedia production can be developed as part of the final report on a project. This can include production of a DVD, interviews or PowerPoint montage.

The Purpose

- To showcase the project or council.
- To create a thorough and permanent record of a project.
- To use as an evaluative, reflective tool / case study.

Preparation

- Determine whether your project will use this approach prior to commencement to allow for adequate planning.
- Develop a detailed brief for production companies to respond to.
- Seek several quotations and consider these in relation to price competitiveness, experience and responsiveness.
- Identify key milestones, stakeholders that you would like filmed and obtain necessary permissions.

Helpful Hints:

- Consider the timing of your project.

Things to Consider

- Provide a copy of the DVD / report / CD / PowerPoint to people who have participated.

Associated Costs

- Allow for filming and editing.
- Allow for voice-over and backing music.
- Allow for graphic design of packaging covers (label and case).
- Allow for duplication and distribution.

Evaluating the Success of Community Engagement

Each engagement activity and the overall engagement process should be evaluated in relation to the initial community engagement objectives, the outcome or decision that was made and the effectiveness of the techniques to engage stakeholders. Each group of techniques has some suggested prompts for evaluating the engagement activity. A separate section has been included to prompt the evaluation of the community engagement process. Evaluation of your project should be shared via the Community Engagement Register.

There is also the option to seek community feedback regarding engagement processes they have participated in. Sample evaluation questions have been provided for this purpose. It is recommended that this approach to evaluation be used in moderation and to complement internal evaluation processes. Above all else, in evaluating the effectiveness of an engagement process be honest, maintain a factual and neutral stance and avoid political spin.

Evaluating Techniques for Information Sharing

- Did the project receive any negative response from the community or media? Why?
- Have you received phone calls or other correspondence in response to the information you have distributed?
- Did you feel adequate time was given to notify the community regarding the project?
- How would you rate the technique in terms of value for money?
- Would another technique have met the same community engagement objective?
- How did you use the community input?
- How did you provide feedback to the community?

Evaluating Other Techniques

- Have you received phone calls or other correspondence in response to the information you have distributed?
- What level of interest was generated by the workshops / questionnaires / site visits?
- How many participants attended any engagement processes involving groups of people?
- Did the activity meet the engagement objectives?
- What value would you place on the comments or inquiries received during the engagement?
- How would you rate the technique in terms of value for money?
- Would another technique have met the same community engagement objective?
- How was the community input used? Did it influence the outcome or decision to be made?

Evaluating the Overall Community Engagement Process

- Was the final decision generally acceptable to the public?
- Was the level of community engagement adequate to represent the concerns of those impacted by the project?
- Did the input from stakeholders contribute to a better overall outcome?
- Did decision makers believe that stakeholders' input helped to create a better outcome?
- Was the process implemented as planned? if not, what was changed and why?
- How were the stakeholders' expectations met by this process?
- Was there any change to the internal commitment to the community engagement plan?

Participant Evaluation of the Engagement Process

- Do you consider the process fairly considered your input?
- Do you consider that decision makers were sincere in their desire to obtain public input?
- Did you understand the objectives and process?
- Was the process sufficiently flexible to address issues as they arose?
- Did you feel you had the information you required to contribute to the level you desired?
- Is it clear how your input has been used or considered?
- How satisfied are participants with the overall process that was used to complete the project?