



**have  
your  
say**

Shellharbour City Council  
**Community  
Engagement  
Toolkit**



# Message from the General Manager

Shellharbour City Council makes decisions on behalf of more than 66,000 residents, so it's vital that the Council takes into account the views of the community when making decisions and choosing a direction on particular issues.



Shellharbour City Council is committed to building partnerships with a range of stakeholders, and seeking greater community involvement in the activities and decision making process of Council; and adheres to democratic processes, legislative requirements and the Council's values.

This document is designed to provide a framework for the Council, our employees and the community.

The toolkit is supported by the Community Engagement Policy, designed to provide direction for Shellharbour City Council's community engagement.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Willis'.

Michael Willis  
General Manager

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# What is Community engagement?

Our definition has been adapted from the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) model;

“ Engagement is involving the community in a decision making process ”

The IAP2 defines community engagement as: ‘Any process that involves the community in problem solving or decision making and uses community input to make better decisions.’

Community engagement is a two-way process that seeks to inform, identify issues and seek resolutions by engaging with the community using a range of techniques.

Engagement does not replace the final decision making power of Councillors or the General Manager, but is considered invaluable in the Council’s capacity to make well-informed, acceptable and sustainable decisions.

Shellharbour City Council’s engagement framework consists of the Community Engagement Policy and Community Engagement Toolkit.

## Definition

Community Engagement is referred to in various terms some of the common terms are; community consultation, community participation, public participation and community engagement. This toolkit will use the term community engagement.

**Community** – refers to the people who live, work, visit and/or own property or businesses in the Shellharbour LGA.

**Community engagement** - refers to the processes and practices that Council uses to:-

- inform the community
- gather feedback from the community; and
- works with the community to implement a range of projects/programs/services

**Stakeholder** – is a person or group that has an interest or stake in an issue or project

# Aim of Toolkit

The toolkit aims to provide a best practice approach for community engagement. The toolkit will provide a comprehensive overview of processes that are informed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) engagement model and includes information planning and reporting activities.

The toolkit aims to:

- Deliver a variety of community engagement opportunities that meet the principles of social justice and according to the requirements of Council's Community Engagement Policy.
- Undertake a range of engagement activities that build upon previous engagement and that recognise the diversity of the Shellharbour Community
- Meet the requirements of the Local Government Act, 1993

The toolkit is supported by Councils online presence, community engagement branding, staff and councillor training and a range of resources.

## Community engagement principles

**Inclusive participation** - Council believes the community has a right to be informed and involved in key decisions affecting their area, lifestyles and particular interests.

Council adheres to the social justice principles and believes that the rights of all people in our community are considered in a fair and equitable manner.

**Open and transparent disclosure** - Council is committed to ensuring the community will have all relevant information to participate in community engagement activities in a meaningful way.

**Committed to communicating regularly with the community** - the Council's engagement processes will provide genuine opportunities for the community to influence decisions and strategic planning. Please refer to the Community Engagement Schedule of Activity.

**Consideration of engagement outcomes and provision for feedback** Council will consider all contributions and relevant information prior to making decisions that impact local community interests. The Council is committed to providing open and honest feedback to the community on activities and how the community contributions have influenced final decisions.



# Why we engage

The purpose of Council's community engagement is to ensure that the Council:

- has improved decision making
- improves relationships with our community
- increases participation amongst the community in the activities and decision making processes of Council
- enables the community to work together on issues that matter to them
- builds on the community's understanding of the Council's role and responsibilities as well as our financial and legislative requirements.
- Provide engagement opportunities that are inclusive and accessible.

The development of a community engagement strategy is required when the following triggers exist:



# Who we engage

Who is the community? **Refers to the people who live, work, visit and/or own property or businesses in the Shellharbour LGA.**

Who are stakeholders? **A person or group that has an interest or stake in an issue or project**

Shellharbour City Council has identified key stakeholders within our community. These stakeholders' include individuals or representatives of groups. The table below identifies some of the stakeholders within our community.

Category	Example
Residents (Owner/ occupier)	For community wide-issues, providing general information eg. Rates and property matters.
Other Government Agencies	Council has a large advocacy role to play in advising other levels of Government of the needs and expectations of the community.
Elected Representatives	Local, State and Federal representatives act as advocates for the people in a wide variety of matters. Councillors are an important connection with the community.
Groups and committees Community/Social Groups	Relevant groups or committees comprising local residents should be consulted in relation to their particular interest areas and needs.
Specific Target Groups	Specific groups may be targeted for their expertise in certain areas; these could include age specific, cultural, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, disability, environmental and sporting groups.
Local business community	In matters where a Chamber of Commerce or other Local Business representative is active and can provide information regarding the needs of the business community.
Service users	School parents, park and recreational users, travelling public, contractors or suppliers, tourists, library and museum.
Cultural and religious communities	There is a mix of cultural and religious beliefs in the Shellharbour City Council area. These groups will be consulted on matters of cultural and religious significance.
Targeted community panels	Panel populated from existing Community Panel and various stakeholder groups for specific issues or projects with a specific time frame.

# When we engage

Community engagement can take place at any time of the year (excluding the Christmas period) and is dependent on Council's program of work.

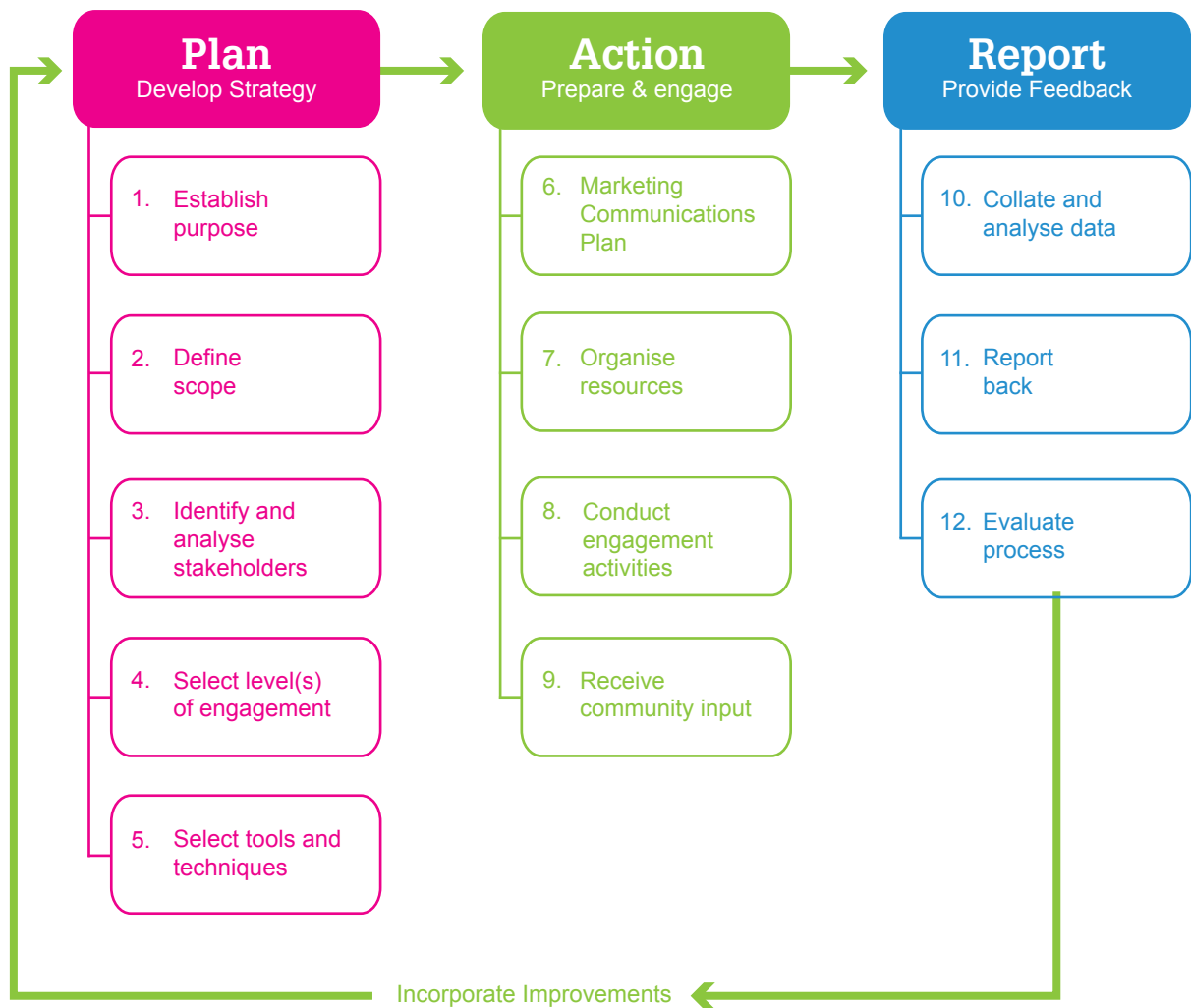
Each time there is a project to be developed or a decision to be made there is an opportunity for a community engagement process. Early notice of emerging issues puts Council in a better position to respond in a proactive way.

In the engagement planning process, consideration is given to the complexity of the decision and the optimal time needed for people to respond. Whilst the Local Government Act 1999 sets out minimum requirements for some specific consultations, each engagement process is considered on its individual basis and merit. To ensure a successful consultation, careful consideration is given to the appropriate tools and timing for the project or decision.

*Choosing not to engage...* The community is engaged about a range of issues and by a range of people. It is important to recognise this and not to over-engage. To avoid this Council will utilise existing research and findings of other engagement activities to inform their requirements where possible.

# How we engage

The Engagement Process outlines three stages (Plan, Action, and Report) to ensure Council delivers a consistent and robust approach to engagement activities.
























## Levels of Engagement

The levels of engagement are determined by the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum - Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower. An important part of this process is to understand the scope of the community's input and the role those consulted will have in relation to the decision making process. Council will commonly conduct formal community engagement processes at the 'inform, consult, involve and collaborate' stages as defined below:

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate
<b>Goal</b>	One way communication to provide balanced and objective information to assist understanding about something that is going to happen or has already happened	Two way communications designed to obtain feedback on ideas, alternatives and proposals to inform our decision making	Participatory process designed to help identify issues and views to ensure	Working together to develop an understanding of all issues and interests to work out alternatives and identify preferred solutions for joint decision making
<b>Council's Approach</b>	We will share information about a decision or direction	We will explore options, gain feedback and an understanding of your concerns and preferences	We will involve you in the process so your ideas, concerns and aspirations are reflected in the alternatives developed or the final decision	We will collaborate with you so your advice, innovation and recommendations are included in the final decision that we make together
<b>Role of Stakeholder/Community</b>	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner

## Engagement Techniques

The table below has been developed as a checklist to assist staff in designing community engagement strategies. These are just a number of methods outlined in the Community Engagement Toolkit. Staff will need to be flexible and always keep in mind the individual requirements of the project to decide on the appropriate community engagement technique and methods used. Below is a table of suggested techniques and methods with examples of each.

Technique	Method	Level 1 High	Level 2 Medium	Level 3 Low
<b>Inform</b>  The role of the community is to receive information to gain a better understanding of an issue or understand why a decision has been made.	<b>Website</b> Project page, council meeting webcast, documents on public exhibition, on-line comment and submissions			
	<b>Social Media</b>			
	<b>Publications</b> Flyers, fact sheets, newsletters, reports			
	<b>Direct communication</b> Phone, letter, email			
	<b>Media</b> Press release			
	Advertisement			
	<b>Displays/Exhibits</b> Customer service, libraries			



























**Essential**



**Desirable**



**Optional**

Method		Level 1 High	Level 2 Medium	Level 3 Low
<b>Consult</b>  The role of the community is to contribute. The input, views or feedback is sought from the community better inform a decision-making process or to help inform the direction of a proposed plan or project.	<b>Council Hosted Meetings</b> Public meetings, stakeholder meetings, existing committees of Council			
	<b>Feedback/submission forms</b>			
	<b>Surveys</b> Phone, on-line, paper			
	<b>Community Panel / Groups</b> Established community groups, online community panel & specific focus groups			
	<b>Community BBQ / Site Event</b>			
<b>Involve</b>  The role of the community is to participate, to ensure that concerns and aspirations are both heard and understood to shape the future decisions on issue/project.	<b>Workshops / Kiosks</b>			
	<b>Project specific activities</b> eg. Photo competitions, Story competitions, dotmocracy, online gaming, hashtagging			
<b>Collaborate</b>  Collaboration is used where Council mutually share the decision-making with various stakeholders including levels of government. Council works with equal power and partnership to find solutions that lead to an agreed outcome.	All previously used methods may apply			



**Essential**



**Desirable**



**Optional**

# Encouraging participation for all community members

Council recognises that views gathered through engagement should be representative of a broad cross section of the community. Some specific target groups have been identified as requiring additional considerations when undertaking engagement. See the table below.

Target Group	Consider
<b>Children</b>	Use clear and simple language Avoid potentially intimidating techniques and venues Inform young people about what Council does Emphasise informality
<b>Youth</b>	Consider incentives Choose venues accessible to public transport Emphasise informality Utilise existing relationships (eg. Youth Centre)
<b>Women</b>	Conduct activities at a time that takes into account work and family responsibilities Consider child care needs Decide on venues perceived to be safe
<b>Older people</b>	Use large print Choose accessible venues Consider transport options Utilise existing relationships (eg. HACC)
<b>People with a disability</b>	Use clear and simple language Avoid activities that require long periods of concentration Encourage participants to bring support person Consider information format (large print, black text, Arial font preferred, do not underline words, reading out information) - magnifiers can be useful  <b>Vision impaired</b> Ensure adequate lighting - minimise glare Colour consideration - black text on white for documents, use plain paper not patterned. Gain attention first Be on the same level  <b>Hearing impaired</b> Have clear lighting on the speaker's face Avoid background noise whenever possible Speak slowly and clearly but don't shout Use simple language Be understanding Repeat and rephrase as required

<b>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders</b>	<p>Invite and encourage involvement of respected elder Organise suitable venue Aboriginal cultural awareness training for all council employees and councillors provides the opportunity to understand issues of importance, clarify myths and adjust council policies and procedures as required.</p> <p>Council written material needs to be simple, concise, unambiguous and free from jargon and acronyms</p> <p>Utilise existing relationships (eg. Aboriginal Liaison Officer)</p>
<b>Culturally Diverse Community</b>	<p>Use clear and simple language Consider use of interpreters Translate printed material Avoid techniques that do not consider cultural difference Invite respected community leader Consider dietary requirements</p>
<b>Working Families</b>	<p>Consider timing (eg. Before or after school hours) Child care School newsletters</p>

# Community engagement Resources

Council has developed this toolkit to support an organisational approach to improve engagement activities.

The **Community Engagement Policy** outlines Council's legislative responsibilities to effectively engage with stakeholders.

The **Community Engagement Toolkit** provides practical advice for staff on how to select and implement the most appropriate tools for engagement.

**Staff Worksheet** provides guidance and direction to staff in designing, managing and evaluating successful engagement activities.

Ongoing **training** is provided to staff to increase knowledge of our engagement process and build internal capacity to deliver robust engagement activities across Council. Additional training is provided to senior staff that will provide advice and support within their teams.

**Corporate Calendar** will assist in planning engagement activities to avoid duplication of engagement processes and identify areas where combined community engagement can be carried out to reduce 'over engaging'.

'**Have your Say**' is a dedicated webpage which provides a range of online engagement tools allowing our community and stakeholders to provide feedback and contribute online to Council's decision-making processes. The website increases the transparency of our engagement processes by providing information on the final outcome of each project or decision.

An **engagement brand** has been developed to provide a consistent look and feel across all promotional and communication material inviting our community to participate in Council's engagement activities.





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