

Strategic policy

Community Engagement Policy

Corporate Plan reference:	<p>A strong community</p> <p>An inclusive community, with opportunities for everyone</p> <p>Connected, resilient communities, with the capacity to respond to local issues</p> <p>Service Excellence</p> <p>Regular and relevant engagement with our community</p>
Endorsed by Council on:	25 March 2021 (OM21/22)
Manager responsible for policy:	Manager Community Planning and Development

Policy statement

Council recognises that the Sunshine Coast has a rich diversity within its local communities and that effective and appropriate community engagement is essential in making better informed decisions which are responsive to community needs. Council also recognises its obligations under the *Local Government Act 2009*, the principles that underpin this Act, and the requirements of other relevant Acts and regulations.

Council will position community engagement as an embedded component of its regular business practice, developing and driving a culture of excellence in engagement amongst council employees, partners and contractors. Genuine, inclusive, fit-for-purpose and transparent community engagement activities will be a hallmark of council's approach to serving the community and provide a platform for achieving outcomes that are relevant and responsive to objectives and need.

It is recognised that every strategy, plan, project, service or program that the community is consulted on will have its own unique characteristics and requires a considered and tailored approach. As an organisation which champions best practice and continuous improvement, council will review and evaluate its community engagement practices on a regular basis. Council will work with communities to identify and utilise the most appropriate and effective engagement methods and collaborative approaches to promote equality of opportunity, create an environment for people to have their say and be heard, and to address barriers to participation.

Community engagement must always be fit-for-purpose and reflective of objectives and circumstances, including legislative obligations. It is not appropriate to engage the community on all matters, nor does the practice of engaging replace council's responsibility for decision-making. Where community engagement is incorporated into the decision-making process for a project's development and/or delivery, council will engage with the community in a manner and at a level

that is appropriate to the subject being considered, and with an approach that is transparent and inclusive.

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the Community Engagement: Excellence in Engagement Framework, which directs best practice engagement approaches, as well as council's individual strategies and plans that support and prioritise best practice in community engagement protocol (e.g. Community Strategy 2019-2041, Customer Charter, Reconciliation Action Plan).

Policy scope

This policy guides all Councillors, council employees, partners and contractors employed by council when engaging with the community. This policy applies to all internal and external community engagement initiatives undertaken across all facets of council operations.

Guiding principles

Council's approach to community engagement is premised on integrity and the priority of its relationship with the community. Council's community engagement practices will be based on the following principles, where engagement is:

Inclusive	A range of opportunities and techniques are used to encourage input and address barriers to participation. Opportunities are available for all to have their say on issues that affect them, regardless of age, gender, culture, language, ability, income, location or education.
Innovative	Innovative approaches to engaging with the community are explored and utilised to complement and augment traditional engagement methods in an effort to engender wider interest, participation and broader community views, and which establish an ongoing dialogue with the community, where appropriate.
Well-planned	The planning of community engagement activities is proactive, tailored and coordinated to ensure timely and effective outcomes are achieved.
Collaborative	Collaboration and partnerships are explored and initiated, where appropriate, to assist in delivering better community engagement outcomes and to share skills and knowledge to facilitate ongoing learning and improvement.
Transparent	Community engagement activities are open and clear. Council will carefully consider and accurately represent the community's role and scope for influence in the decision-making process and reflect how community input has influenced decisions or outcomes.

The above principles are further detailed within the Community Engagement: Excellence in Engagement Framework.

International Association for Public Participation Framework and Spectrum

Council's community engagement approach is guided by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) framework, in recognition that IAP2 is a world-class leader in the engagement of communities. This includes the adoption of the IAP2 spectrum for community engagement, which provides a methodology for determining what level of influence a community has over a

decision and therefore what level of engagement is appropriate. The spectrum operates on a scale of involvement from: Inform; Consult; Involve; Collaborate; and Empower.

Policy details

Within its suite of principles, the *Local Government Act 2009* requires council to uphold the principle of “democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement”. To facilitate this outcome, council is committed to engendering and embedding a culture of excellence in the organisation where community engagement is prioritised, built into planning frameworks and is a central tenet to how the organisation conducts its business.

Council is further committed to the vision outlined in the *Sunshine Coast Community Strategy 2019-2041*: Together we thrive. The Strategy aims to encourage vibrant, inclusive, connected, and resilient communities by:

- ensuring the voices and needs of our community are heard using best practice engagement approaches to inform council action and decision making, and
- investigating, implementing and guiding leading practice in innovative approaches to community engagement to address issues of local importance and building social capital and capacity within our community.

The results of effective community engagement not only lead to better informed decision-making and enhanced experiences and outcomes for the community, but also a building of confidence, relationships, trust and mutual respect between communities and council. This is achieved by delivering community engagement that is meaningful, fit for purpose and which is inclusive, innovative, well-planned, collaborative and transparent.

Measurements of success

This policy will be measured on the following basis:

- A coordinated schedule of community engagement activities is planned and delivered
- Multi-modal ways to engage the community are applied
- The proportion of the community who believe they can have a say on community issues
- The level of community satisfaction with their participation in council engagement activities
- Information on how community input has influenced decisions or outcomes is communicated.

Definitions

Community: Refers to Sunshine Coast Council residents, ratepayers and other users of council's services and assets, as well as key agencies and stakeholders holding a vested interest.

Community engagement: Any process that invites the community to contribute to decision-making and uses community input to assist in producing better informed decisions, more responsive services and enhanced outcomes. Supported through an active process of ongoing communication with our community, the sharing of information underpins all community engagement activities.

Communication: Sharing information through a range of channels and tools that seek to get a message across to the target audience. The information sharing process may not, and often does not, involve an opportunity for the information recipient to provide feedback.

Policy breaches

The intent and objectives of this policy reflect the values of the organisation, the fundamental relationship between council and the community, and council's commitment to evidence based decision-making. In that context, compliance with the policy is a core requirement of all employees and contractors of council, unless specifically authorised by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Nothing in this policy requires or authorises an employee of council to act in any way that is contrary to law. All instances of non-compliance with this policy may be dealt with as a breach of the Employee Code of Conduct and managed in accordance with any relevant policies and procedures dealing with disciplinary action.

Related legislation, policies, strategies and documents

All Councillors, employees and contractors are required to fulfil the ethical and behavioural obligations as defined in legislation. In the event of an inconsistency between any provision of this policy and any provision of the following legislation, policies, strategies and documents, the provisions of the related legislation, policies, strategies and documents shall prevail to the extent of the inconsistency. In relation to policies and strategies and other corporate documents, the CEO or Council may authorise non-compliance where there is appropriate justification, and reasons are to be documented. For further assistance please contact the Manager of Corporate Governance.

Local Government Act 2009

Planning Act 2016 and subordinate legislation

Sunshine Coast Community Strategy 2019-2041

Sunshine Coast Council Corporate Plan

Sunshine Coast Council Customer Charter

Sunshine Coast Reconciliation Action Plan

Version control:

Version	Reason/ Trigger	Change (Y/N)	Endorsed/ Reviewed by	Date
1.3	Adoption	N	Council Ordinary Meeting	25/3/2021

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