

A man with a beard and a woman with glasses are in a meeting. The man is writing on a whiteboard with a blue marker. The whiteboard has several yellow and pink sticky notes on it. The background is a light-colored wall.

Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale

Community Engagement Strategy

July 2020



Shire of
Serpentine
Jarrahdale

What is community engagement?

Engagement is a generic, inclusive term to describe the broad range of interactions between people. It can include a variety of approaches, such as one-way communication or information delivery, consultation, involvement and collaboration in decision-making, and empowered action in informal groups or formal partnerships.

Good community engagement is values based and scaled to best reflect the community it is serving. It could be something as simple as going door to door to engage with community members in relation to plans for a local park.

We know engagement works best when it is part of an ongoing, principled process, which enables relationships of trust to strengthen as we grow together over time. Good community engagement not only improves our representative democracies but also builds community capacity and resilience.

Our engagement in decision making, done in conjunction with the community from the very beginning of a proposal, helps build trust between us as a local government and our community. It results in a greater sense of ownership, greater take-up of services and initiatives and better outcomes for all community members, groups and stakeholders.

Identifying how to best engage diverse communities in a meaningful way is an important step in our community engagement. Good community engagement design allows for socially disadvantaged groups within our community to participate in decision making. This reduces the chances of marginalisation while encouraging unified community outcomes.

Engagement aims

Community engagement provides the opportunity for the community to have a say and contribute to the decisions and actions of Council. This is the essential difference between engagement and communication, marketing or advertising. Community engagement therefore is required when the aim is to make informed decisions and deliver better services.

This strategy outlines what we will do in our approach to community engagement. It sets out a design to focus our actions in building a collaborative partnership with the community. It is supported by a Community Engagement Policy and guidelines for staff reference .

Engagement standards

Council's Community Engagement Policy contains the following standards for community engagement.

1. We will engage with the community and key stakeholders:
 - On strategies, plans, projects and policies that have a direct impact on the community and their quality of life.
 - On changes to services or infrastructure.
 - In line with statutory requirements.
2. Each project or issue will have varying constraints and resource implications, and various levels of potential stakeholder influence, with a need for flexibility to move up and down the IAP2 Spectrum as plans are implemented. When assessing the level of impact of each matter or decision, factors including financial, environmental, reputational, quality of life and alignment to Community Strategic Plan priorities will inform planning for community engagement.
3. Councillors are advised of all engagement activities. Where determined by the CEO, Councillors will be consulted in the planning for the relevant engagement activity.
4. Engagement activities are designed to maximise opportunities for individual community members and/or stakeholder groups with an interest in the matter or decision to participate and contribute their feedback.
5. Engagement activities will seek to ensure a balanced representation relevant to the matter or decision.
6. Each engagement activity will clearly provide:
 - Well-defined objective/s
 - Identified stakeholders
 - Information, which is factual, accessible, and in plain language.
 - A reasonable schedule and range of ways to provide feedback.
 - An explanation of how the input or feedback will be used.
 - A report on the engagement outcomes.
7. Engagement is undertaken at a point in time, as early in the process as reasonably practical, to allow for effective community participation and a range of options and solutions to emerge and be considered.
8. We will review and analyse the feedback received from stakeholders through engagement activities and present the findings to Councillors to inform the decision-making process.
9. We will report to the community on the engagement outcomes and how feedback was considered and/or incorporated into the final decision in a timely manner.
10. Engagement will not occur in circumstances where:
 - A decision has already been made by Council or another agency (other than to communicate that final decision).
 - Council cannot influence a decision by another agency or party.
 - The decision to be made concerns a minor operational matter with minimal impact on the community or stakeholders.
 - Council is implementing a project or decision where engagement has already occurred.
 - Issues relate to internal operational matters, confidential or commercial in confidence information.
 - There is insufficient time due to legislative or legal constraints and Council must make urgent emergency or safety related decisions.

What makes great engagement?

Great community engagement is values based and scaled to best reflect the community it is serving. It could be something as simple as going door to door to engage with community members in relation to plans for a local park.

We asked the community 'what makes great engagement?' We found the community values a high level of transparency and trust within the Shire. Additionally, both the Shire and community appreciate clear communication of the engagement outcomes.

The Serpentine Jarrahdale community identified these qualities and results of great engagement	
Great community engagement is:	Great community engagement leads to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Finding solutions for and with communities.· Provision of timely and accurate information.· Taking an open and honest approach.· Using different tools for different types of conversations and engagements.· Identifying the right technologies for the right sectors of the community.· Leveraging off successful networks, connections, channels and events.· Removing barriers to access.· Maintaining connection with people in a manner which works for them.· Welcoming new people to take up active roles in our Shire community.· Identifying what really matters to people and asking the questions that matter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Better project and service delivery outcomes.· Improving the quality of policy being developed.· Better shared partnerships and networks.· Opportunities for a diversity of voices to be heard.· Building stronger relationships and trust with the community.· Checking we as Council are meeting local needs and enhancing our reputation.· Increased two-way understanding of community issues.· Satisfaction with the process of engagement.· Better ability to address complex and emerging issues.· Communities are able to identify priorities for themselves and own the solutions.

Engagement Principles

To ensure we remain accountable, effective, efficient and sustainable, we have adopted a Community Engagement Policy with the following set of principles.

- ✓ **Right to be involved:** Our communities have a right to be involved in decisions which affect them and we are genuine and responsive in seeking their input for sustainable development when decisions are made.
- ✓ **Accessible and inclusive:** We are inclusive and accessible to all stakeholder groups, incorporating all ages, abilities, genders and cultural backgrounds. We provide a range of engagement activities to ensure the broadest possible range of stakeholders have the opportunity to participate.
- ✓ **Time sensitive:** We respect people's time, ask the questions that matter and provide quality information and sufficient timeframes for people to participate and contribute meaningful input.
- ✓ **Tailored:** We use a range of engagement and communication methods to suit the purpose of engagement and the range of stakeholders involved, including subsets of the community that may be difficult to reach.
- ✓ **Transparent:** We make decisions in the public interest in an open and transparent way and provide feedback to our stakeholders to explain our decisions and how their input has influenced the outcome.
- ✓ **Learning from practice:** We evaluate our engagement, report on and publish our engagement outcomes and are committed to continuous improvement.

These principles, contained within our Community Engagement Policy can be implemented with the support from this document and the accompanying Engagement Plan, which is a template to assist with the 'how to' prepare for and deliver good, and more often great community engagement.

How do we decide to engage?

Currently, we are required as a local government to undertake engagement with our community when we create a ten year Strategic Community Plan. Under various legislations, our community must also be engaged on such matters as local laws, differential rates, planning and other matters and aspirations, which are relevant to the diverse needs of individuals within a community.

Examples of projects where we must engage include:

- Corporate plans including the Strategic Community Plan.
- Any strategic plans and policies that will have a significant impact on residents, community, the environment, business and the economy.
- Land-use and development plans including local environmental plans, and development control plans.
- Where legislation requires community notification or consultation.

Best practice in community engagement goes beyond the requirement to simply consult and can be more impactful when decision making is done in conjunction with the community from the beginning of a project proposal or earlier. For example, when we can see an important decision in the distance, we can get ahead and prepare with our community for the conversation we want to have.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2 International) promotes the following **core values** of engagement which:

- Is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
- Includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
- Promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
- Seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
- Seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
- Provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
- Communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

Levels of Engagement

The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation is an internationally recognised tool, which helps define stakeholder roles in an engagement process. When you are planning engagement for your project, use this tool to determine and communicate the 'level of engagement'. In other words, the level of influence engagement will have on the decision process.

The level of public influence on the decision may be different at each stage of the process. In many instances you will use several methods, for example to inform and involve stakeholders.

Increasing public influence on the decision

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Public participation goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter • Email • Signage • Public display • Social media • Advertising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaire • Online – Have Your Say • Door knocking • Interview • Pop up • Interactive public display • Public open house • Feedback form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group • Working group • Workshop • Pop up at venue or event • Public open house 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group • Working group • Workshop • Public open house 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working group • Workshop

Reference: International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). 2018. IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation.



Resources for community engagement

What are our engagement resources?

The Community Engagement Strategy will be supported by the following resources:

Community Engagement Policy

Outlines Council's legislative responsibility to effectively communicate and consult with stakeholders and engage consultation that is appropriate to each specific circumstance.

A toolkit for community engagement

Provides step-by-step practical advice for staff on how to select and use the most appropriate tools for community engagement.

Engagement plan template

Provides guidance and direction to staff in designing, managing and evaluating successful engagement activities.

Ongoing training

Training will be provided to staff to increase knowledge of our engagement process and to build internal capacity to deliver robust engagement activities across Council.

Engagement planning calendar

An Engagement Planning Calendar will be developed to assist in planning engagement activities to avoid duplication of engagement processes and identify areas where combined community engagements can be carried out to reduce 'consultation fatigue'.

Your Say webpage

This is the Shire's one-stop engagement 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 Shire will investigate contemporary online engagement platforms to support our engagement activities.

Consultation brand

A consultation brand will be explored 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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