2016/17

PORT MACQUARIE-HASTINGS COUNCIL

Community Engagement

STRATEGY

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Purpose

Community engagement is a 'process' that can include a wide range of methods and activities to effectively engage with a wide range of community members from various demographics and key stakeholders.

Council is committed to building partnerships with the community and a range of stakeholders, and seeking greater community involvement in the activities and decision making processes of Council. Council believes that quality engagement with the community and various stakeholders are essential foundations of good governance.

This Community Engagement Strategy is designed to form the foundation for the way in which Council's community engagement is undertaken and to bring Council closer to the community.

Under the revised Local Government Act Council must prepare and implement a Community Engagement Strategy based on social justice principles for engagement with the local community in developing and renewing the Community Strategic Plan.

Introduction

Ensuring Council's activities are underpinned by appropriate engagement with our community is essential in ensuring fit, sustainable local government.

Port Macquarie-Hastings Council is committed to an inclusive approach to engagement that acknowledges the shared responsibility between Council and the community in creating a local vision and identifying priorities to realise this vision.

Council is committed to identifying, prioritising and responding to community priorities. We will continue to actively engage with our community to develop key strategies, plans and service delivery that align with our ability to deliver on such plans and strategies.

This engagement strategy has been developed to guide all engagement that will be undertaken by Council. The goal is to establish a continuing conversation, informing not only the development and review of the community strategic plan, delivery plan and operational plan but also other activities undertaken by Council.

This Engagement Strategy outlines Council's commitment and intent for engagement across the organisation. We will embed engagement as part of our regular business practices at all levels of the organisation, fostering best practice through the deployment of engagement plans as part of decision-making processes and using engagement outcomes to inform what we do.

Legislative Requirements

The Local Government Act was amended in I993 to include proposals for Integrated Planning and Reporting.

Each local government area must have a community strategic plan that has been developed and endorsed by the council. A community strategic plan is a plan that identifies the main

priorities and aspirations for the future of the local government area covering a period of at least I0 years from when the plan is endorsed.

A community strategic plan is to establish strategic objectives together with strategies for achieving those objectives.

The Council must ensure that the community strategic plan:

a) Addresses civic leadership, social, environmental and economic issues in an integrated manner;
b) Is based on social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights;
c) Is adequately informed by relevant information relating to civic leadership, social, environmental and economic issues;
d) Is developed having due regard to the State Government's State Plan and other relevant State and regional plans of the State Government;
e) Establishes and implements a strategy ("community engagement strategy"), based on social justice principles, for engagement with the local community when developing the community strategic plan;
f) Is following an ordinary election of councillors, the council must review the community strategic plan before 30 June following the election. The council may endorse the existing;
g) Must plan, endorse amendments to the existing plan or develop and endorse a new community strategic plan, as appropriate to ensure that the area has a Community Strategic Plan covering at least the next I0 years; and
h) Must be placed on public exhibition for a period of at least 28 days and submissions received must be considered by the council before the plan or amendment is endorsed by the council.

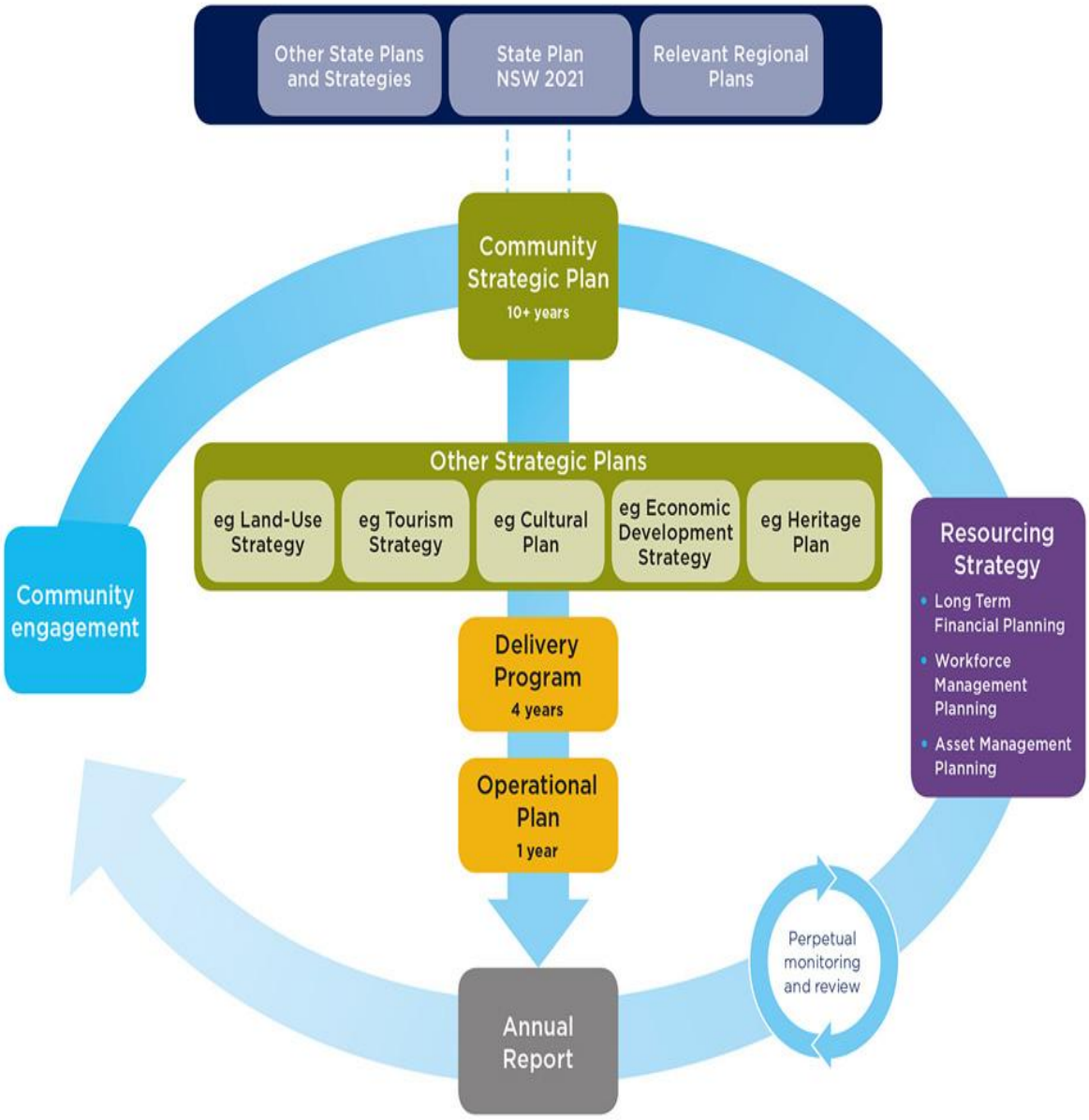
The Integrated Planning and Reporting legislation has also been added to the role of Councillor - 'to provide a civic leadership role in guiding the development of the Community Strategic Plan for the area and to be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Council's delivery program.'

From 2012, each newly elected council must review the Community Strategic Plan within nine months of the local government elections and roll the planning period forward by at least 4 years (so that it is always a 10 year minimum plan).

The review must include the following:

- A report from the outgoing council on the implementation and effectiveness of the Community Strategic Plan in achieving its objectives;
- A review of the information that informed the original Community Strategic Plan;
- A community engagement strategy prepared and implemented by Council which, at least, must identify relevant stakeholder groups within the community and outline methods that will be used to engage each group;
- Development of a 4 year Delivery program; and
- Development of the one year Operational Program.

Integrated Planning and Reporting framework



This strategy will align and support other key Strategic Plans including;

- Urban Growth Management Strategy
- Project Management Framework
- Economic Development Strategy
- Cultural Plan and
- Others.

What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement is the process of involving the public in problem solving or decision making. This participation is based on the belief that those affected by a decision have a right to be involved.

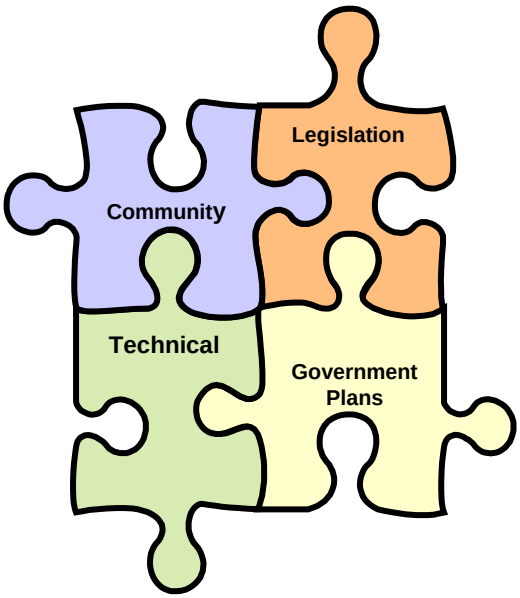
When making decisions, local governments are influenced by a range of factors including:

Legislation - Local government is required to comply with state and federal Legislation and a number of Acts outline specific requirements of local government.

Technical knowledge - Assessment and forecasting based upon theoretical and experiential knowledge, sound data and research. This includes assessments by qualified staff, outsourcing to accredited contractors and the use of data from recognised sources such as Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Plans and Strategies - formal plans and strategies developed by the State and Federal Government including the NSW State Plan and relevant regional plans.

Effective community engagement provides the link between local knowledge and lived experience which is critical to planning and implementing many projects. Through community engagement, Council is able to work with communities in exploring options and reaching solutions that seek to maximise the benefit and reduce negative impacts to a minimum.



Community engagement covers the broad and ongoing range of two-way interactions between Council and the community. We carry out a variety of engagement activities including:

- Informing our community of a new policy direction or change in services;
- Seeking feedback as part of the process to develop a strategic plan or design a facility;

- Involving our community through a range of techniques to ensure that their ideas and concerns about a project or initiative are understood and considered as part of a decision making process; and
- Working in partnership with our community to formulate options and provide their views to Council.

Ongoing communication is essential to effective engagement as it builds awareness and understanding of the projects, services and initiatives of Council. It is not possible to effectively engage the community in decision making process until they are first adequately informed.

Engagement is about:

- *Gaining Insight;*

  Engagement provides a forum for Council to gain insight into local knowledge, skills and experiences of the community.

- *Making Better Decisions;*

  Gaining insight and information sharing assists Council to make better decisions. The engagement process must seek opinions, not simply agreement for a position that has been already been predetermined.

- *Having an informed Community;*

  Consistent communication, information sharing and feedback to the community demonstrate that Council takes views and opinions of the community seriously. It also assists in managing positive stakeholder relationships.

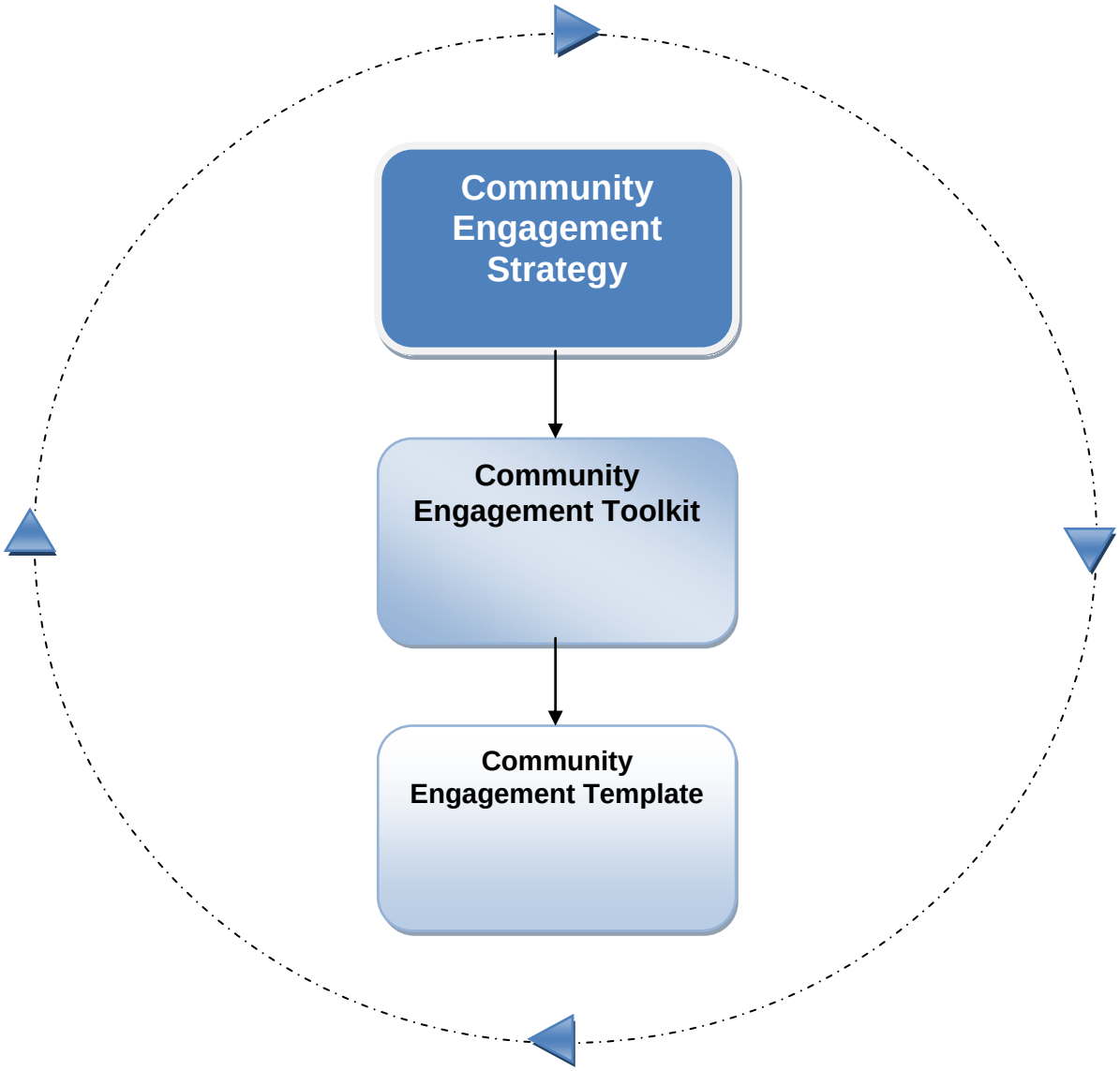
The strategy is to provide a process that assists Council in achieving its commitment to engage the community in a manner that is transparent and inclusive. It also provides a framework that respects community knowledge about the local area and ideas for continuing to enhance assets, services and opportunities for local residents, businesses and visitors alike.

The Engagement Framework integrates with this strategy to provide a structure and tools that will assist staff when planning to engage with the community. This document sits as the overarching strategy guiding engagement planning and delivery while demonstrating Council's commitment to actively engage the community. It is supported by an Engagement Guide and Toolkit and a suite of engagement templates to be used operationally as a 'how to' when engaging.

The Community Engagement Strategy includes:

- Community Engagement Policy;
- Community Engagement Toolkit; and
- Community Engagement Plan Template.

Community Engagement Framework



Our engagement aims

Port Macquarie-Hastings Council recognises that community engagement and participation processes are a vital part of local democracy. Through this strategy we aim to ensure meaningful, informed and genuine community participation is active in Council's decision-making. We also aim to:

- Make certain that contemporary tools of community engagement will be explored and utilised to ensure local decision-making processes are in keeping with community expectations;
- Establish an environment in which Council and the local community can exchange views, ideas and information;
- Provide a consistent approach across Council and ensure that all engagement processes and activities are focused and effective;
- Strengthen partnerships between Council, the local community, local organizations, government stakeholders and service providers; and
- Be proactive and open to new and innovative ways to engage and maintain ongoing engagement with the whole of the community.

Principles

While the Community Engagement Strategy demonstrates Council's commitment to actively engage the local community, it also sets out Council's approach by identifying a set of principles that shape how we effectively engage.

Inclusiveness and Diversity – recognising and valuing the diversity of our community and the different strengths people and groups bring. Working to promote equality of opportunities and empower people to have their voices heard.

Openness, Respect and Accountability –a better understanding of issues, a respect for different points of view and finding workable solutions with clear lines of accountability. A Community Engagement Plan will be prepared prior to the commencement of each participatory process to outline the extent, purpose and process for each engagement activity. Community engagement processes will be evaluated by seeking feedback from the stakeholders involved.

Leadership – supporting and facilitating discussion, actively seeking support and partnerships and building leadership capacity across the community. Engagement processes will include the definition of and gathering information about the issue, an assessment of the likely impact, identification of stakeholders, the establishment of decision criteria and the development of alternatives.

Purpose – establishing a clear purpose for engagement that provides direction and guidance, creating realistic expectations, understanding and transparency of the engagement process.

Information Sharing- providing clear and accurate information in a timely manner.

Feedback and Evaluation – letting participants know how their opinions and information have contributed to decisions. Timely and meaningful feedback about the results of the engagement process will be provided to those who participated.

Resourcing and Timing – taking the time to build relationships and providing the necessary resources to undertake the engagement process. Considering the time commitments and resourcing of our citizens to participate in engagement opportunities.

When is Community Engagement Required?

Council projects, developments and decisions will be assessed in relation to their level of impact on the community. A Community Engagement Plan will be developed subject to the level of impact and capacity for input. To ensure consistency across Council, all plans will be developed in accordance with this strategy.

It is important to note, that community engagement is closely linked to Council's communication function. Engagement is not limited to formally seeking input into projects, developments and decisions with major community impact. It is also necessary for informing the community of day-to-day business and standard operating tasks.

Outcomes of Engagement

Port Macquarie-Hasting Council will continue its community engagement strategy to support the implementation of integrated planning outcomes, identifying key service levels and project outcomes that meet the needs of their community. A continued focus on embedding the culture of engagement into the organisation and the community will continue to improve the capacity for ongoing engagement and partnerships that will bring Council and the community closer together. Through effective engagement the LGA will see;

- Authentic conversations with the community;
- Gaining insight and understanding into the needs of the community;
- Improving the profile of Council within the community;
- Community appreciation of the opportunity to be heard;
- Greater community satisfaction with council decisions ;
- Finding local solutions to local problems;
- Improving the delivery of services and allocation of resources ;
- A more informed community; and
- Informed Council decision making.

Level of Community Engagement

Council undertakes a diverse range of activities where community engagement can contribute to better outcomes, from small playground upgrades to the development of a Community Strategic Plan to the construction of major infrastructure.

Council has developed this strategy based on the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum. The spectrum defines the role of the community in the decision making process and it outlines five levels of engagement based on the level of involvement of the community; Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower (See IAP2 Spectrum below).

There are times during the planning and implementation of larger projects where it is necessary to undertake engagement more than once and in these instances it is likely that secondary engagement will occur at a different level. An example of this is engagement that has occurred at 'Involve' level to develop a concept for significant upgrades to road infrastructure, with secondary engagement occurring at an 'inform' level at a later time to reduce the impact of construction.

IAP2 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM

INCREASING LEVEL OF PUBLIC IMPACT

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Public Participation Goal:	**Public Participation Goal:**	**Public Participation Goal:**	**Public Participation Goal:**	**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 decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

Note: It is worth noting that the inclusion of Empower at a local government is often omitted due to the infrequency of this occurring. Council has over the past few years worked with a number of key community and volunteer groups to move closer to true empowerment on the spectrum.

In addition to scope and size, there is also varying levels of influence the community is able to have in the decision making process, ranging from significant to minimal. When seeking community input, clear statements need to be made about how the community can be involved and the level of influence the community is able to have on the decision.

'Engagement' is used as 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, communication, education, public participation, involvement and collaboration in decision-making, and empowered action in informal groups or formal partnerships.

Consultation for the purposes of this strategy is encompasses informing and public exhibitions phases of Councils projects and programs.

Assessing Level of Impact

A number of factors may influence the level of impact including the complexity of the issue and the perceived sense of loss or gain held within the community. Council has developed the following four (4) criteria as a general guide to determine the level of impact based on the scope of the project or activity.

Level of Impact Description

Level of Impact	Level of engagement generally required	Criteria (one or more of the following)
Level 1 High level of impact on the whole or a large part of Port Macquarie-Hastings Local Government Area	Inform Consult Involve Collaborate	High level of real or perceived impact or risk across Port Macquarie-Hastings LGA Any significant impact on attributes that are considered to be of high value to the whole of the LGA such as the natural environment or heritage. Any impact on the health, safety or well being of the Port Macquarie-Hastings community. Potential high degree of controversy / conflict Likely high level of interest across the LGA. Potential high impact on State or regional strategies or directions.
Level 2 High level of impact of a local nature, e.g. a local area, specific community or user group	Inform Consult Involve Collaborate	High level of real or perceived impact on a local area, small community or user group/s of a specific facility or service. The loss of or significant change to any facility or service to a local community. Potential high degree of controversy or conflict at the local level.
Level 3 Lower level of impact on the whole or a large part of Port Macquarie-Hastings	Inform Consult Involve Collaborate	Lower, although still some real or perceived impact or risk across Port Macquarie-Hastings. Potential for some controversy or conflict. Potential for some, although not significant impact on State or Regional strategies or directions.
Level 4 Lower level of impact of a local nature, e.g. a local area, specific community or user group	Inform Consult Involve	Lower level of real or perceived impact or risk on a local area, small community or user group/s of a specific facility or service. Only a small change or improvement to a facility or service at the local level. Low or no risk of controversy or conflict at the local level.

Stakeholders

In planning and undertaking community engagement, stakeholders are those individuals and groups who have an interest or who may be affected either directly or indirectly by the outcome or process. This may include local residents, businesses and visitors.

Irrespective of how positive or essential a project or initiative may be deemed, it is likely that the community will experience a range of viewpoints ranging from strong opposition to strong support. This may be influenced by a range of factors including attitudes to change, competing aspirations and perceptions of risk or hazard.

Council is committed to seeking out representative involvement that include a diverse range of viewpoints and desires. When planning community engagement, consideration is given to seeking input from all interested stakeholders including:

- Demographic representation including young people, families, older people, those with a disability, our Aboriginal community and our culturally diverse community.
- Geographical representation from individuals and groups across the local government area.
- Representative groups including progress associations, business chambers, sporting clubs, environmental groups, churches etc.

Representative engagement will sometimes require undertaking both qualitative and quantitative types of engagement, particularly where an issue is of higher priority or relates to the whole of area.

Qualitative Engagement

Qualitative engagement refers to the 'quality' involvement of people through personal meetings and workshops, where the input may not be statistically valid but will provide a better understanding of the views and expectations of the community.

Qualitative engagement is valuable for gaining a range of views and ideas. It can be representative by involving a range of people who reflect the characteristics of the broader community or the target group.

Quantitative Engagement

Quantitative engagement refers to obtaining data to 'measure' the response of the community regarding an issue, need or view. This is generally undertaken through community and user surveys (by mail, telephone or face to face).

Methods of engagement

There is no 'one size fits all' method to community engagement. The methods and techniques utilised vary dependent upon the size and scope of the project, the identified key stakeholders and the skills and resources available.

When planning community engagement methods, consideration is given to utilising a range of mediums including: face to face, online and written to maximise opportunities for all those who wish to be involved there are a number of elements to be considered including:

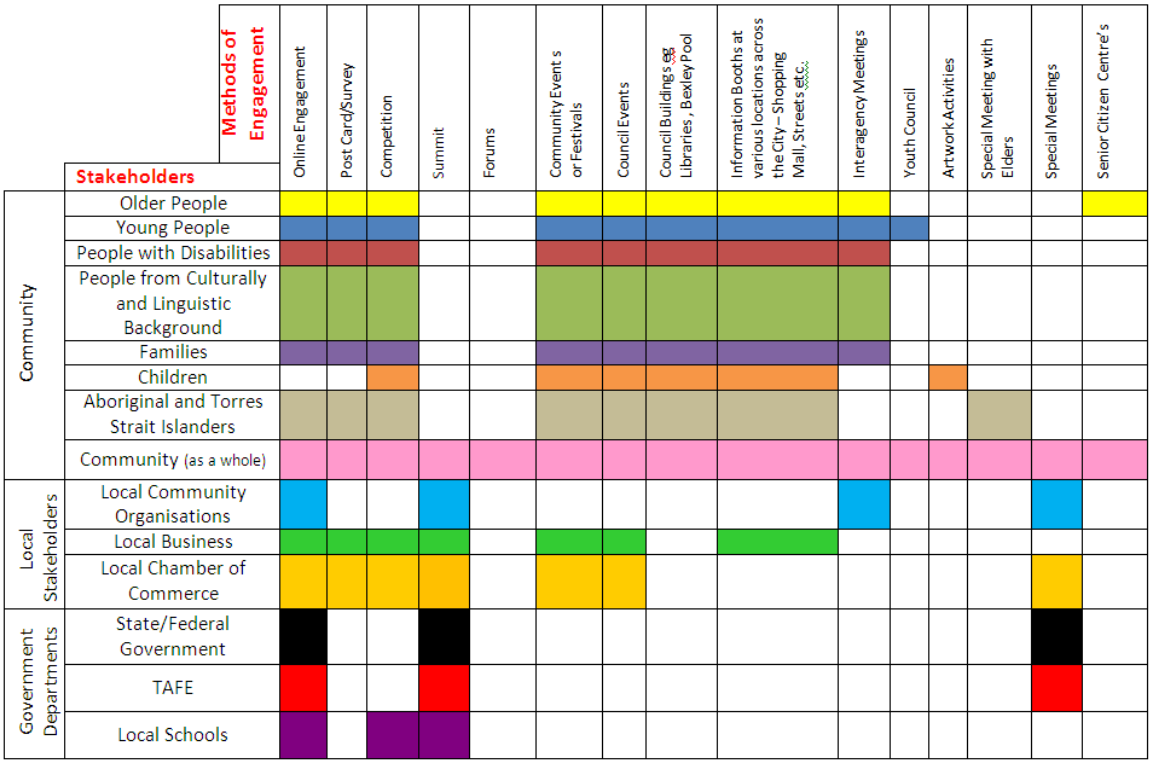
- Timing of engagement

- Venues
- Visual needs
- Hearing needs
- Language

Examples of methods and techniques

The table below outline some of the tools and methods that can be used in engagement and it not a finite list of what should be done. All projects will have a planned engagement approach with the suitable methods used to meet the needs of the project and the community and these may include:

- Inform - newsletters, emails, media releases, fact sheets;
- Consult - surveys, public exhibition;
- Involve - workshops, meetings, site tours community forums; and
- Collaborate - committees, working parties, panels.



Monitoring and Evaluation

Evaluation is a way of looking at the engagement activities in order to monitor progress and effectiveness, consider costs and efficiency. This would then be used to show where changes are needed and help to plan more effectively for the future engagement.

Evaluation is concerned with four key areas:

- Efficiency
- Effectiveness
- Appropriateness
- Impact

EFFICIENCY	EFFECTIVENESS
• What was the cost against the benefits? • How well were the activities performed? • Was the activity on time and on budget?	• Was useful information collected? • Were people engaged in the process of feedback? • Was the performance of the facilitator satisfactory? •
APPROPRIATENESS	**IMPACT**
• Were the community engagement methods matched to the level of engagement? • Were the correct stakeholders identified? • Was the communication accessible to all stakeholders?	• Did a better decision result from the engagement? • Was trust built between the public and Council? • Has commitment to the implementation process been established?

Process Evaluation

Process evaluation is concerned with the efficiency and effectiveness with which activities and processes were performed.

A process evaluation will be useful for many projects because:

- It concentrates on the activities conducted and their effectiveness;
- It is about the process used against the plan; and
- It is about reviewing those matters that are clearly within the control of the project manager, ie the conduct of the activities and their effectiveness.

Outcomes Evaluation

Outcomes Evaluation asks questions about the changes or results or sustainable legacy that has occurred.

Questions that might be asked for an Outcome Evaluation include:

- What difference did the community engagement project make?
- Who really benefits from the community engagement project?
- What gains were made through holding the public engagement project? E.g. A decision that is more informed, greater social capital, community involvement in solving a problem.

Lessons Learnt

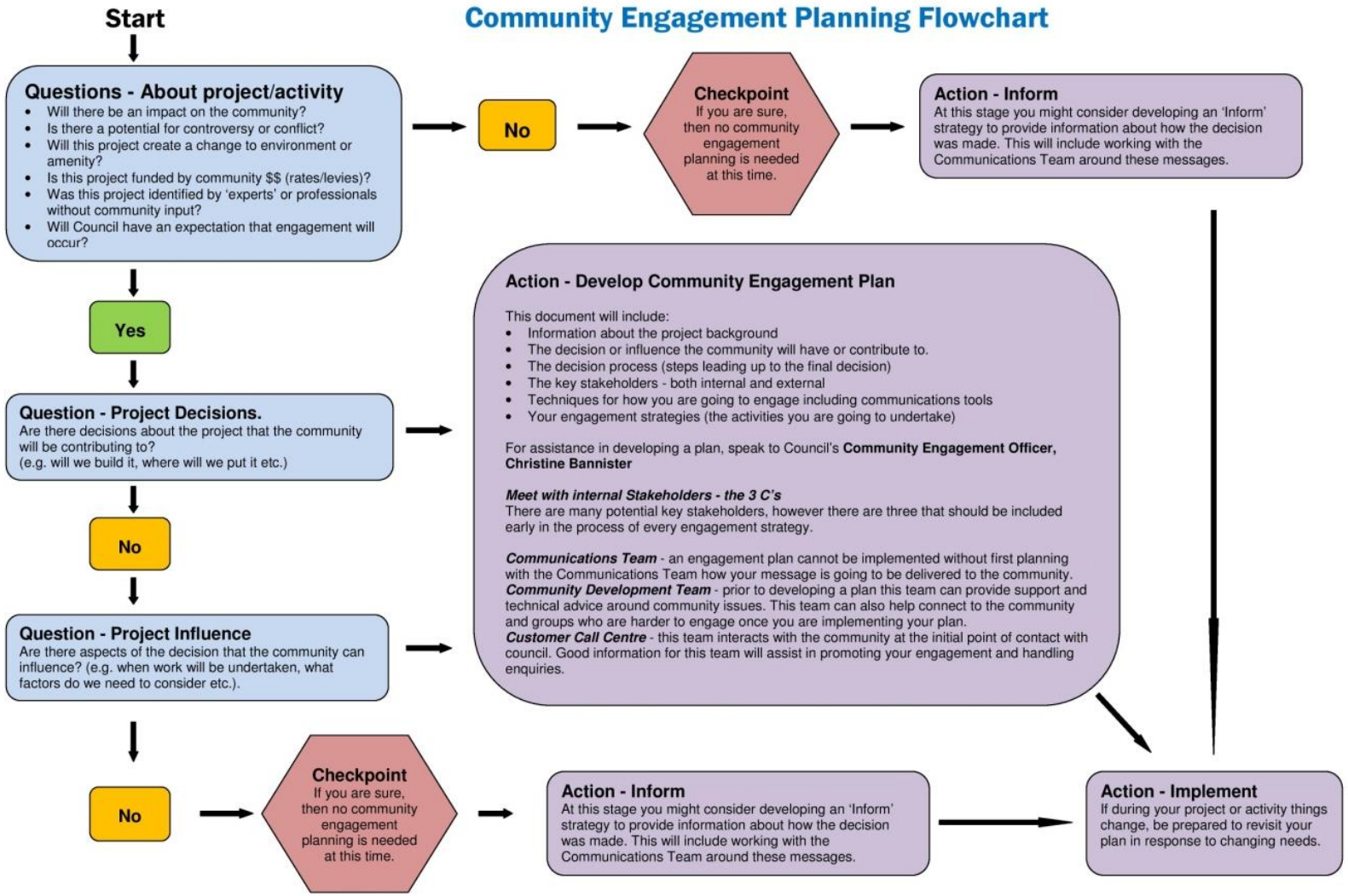
Through the engagement process there will me opportunities to develop a suite of lessons learnt and should be included as part of the project close.

Questions that might be asked may include:

- Did the methods of engagement work?
- Did the process gather the intended information?
- What impact did the engagement have on the overall decision?
- Was the decision statement correct?

The Engagement Process

Engagement process flowchart



Councillors' role in community engagement

The Councillors' play a key role in engagement through there designated function and their day to day interaction. They also have a role to be an advocate of the engagement process. Councillors will be informed of the engagement activities including the consultation period, the engagement methods, and how community participation will be used to inform the project, plan or initiative.

It is the role of Engagement Strategy and its outcomes to assist in informing the Councillors of engagement activities and opportunities. It is the responsibility of each project sponsor to ensure that Councillors and the organisation are made aware of any engagement activities or opportunities in advance via the completion of engagement planning documentation as per the community Engagement Framework.

At times Councillors will be invited to take part in relevant engagement processes. Councillor involvement will be coordinated and this will be clearly informed of their role and expectations for involvement. Generally, Councillors will be involved in consultation at a strategic or significant project level, rather than in operational engagement activities.

Relevant legislation

Relevant legislation for citizen engagement includes:

- NSW Local Government Act 1993
- Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979
- NSW Public Health Act 1991
- NSW Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009
- NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998
- The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998

References

International Association for Public Participation (2004) 'IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum' www.iap2.org Accessed 9 February 2016

Glossary and terms of abbreviations

Community Engagement	Community engagement is involving the community in a decision making process
Community	The term 'community' refers to all residents, interest groups, community organisations, business persons and those who have a vested interest in the future direction of the Port Macquarie LGA.
Partnership	The process whereby parties work collectively towards an agreed objective or aim. This might include the community, government and non-government organisations.
Framework	A framework is a broad overview, outline or skeleton of interlinked items which support a particular approach to a specific objective.
Model	Something that a copy can be based on because it is an extremely good example of its type
LGA	Local Government Area
IAP2	International Association of Public Participation