

Community Engagement Strategy



**COBAR SHIRE
COUNCIL**
outback nsw

2011

Strategic Planning Framework

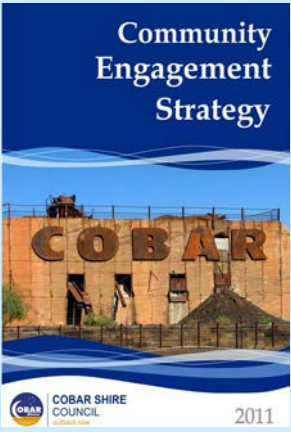
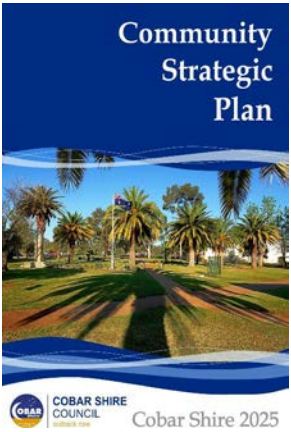
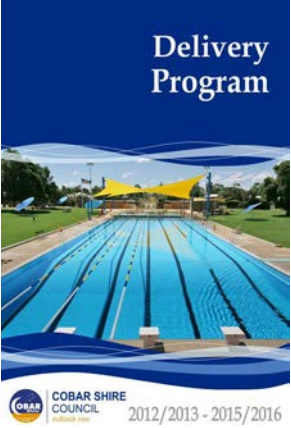
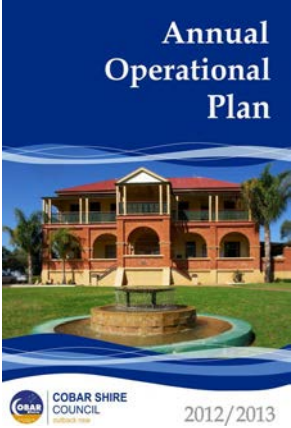
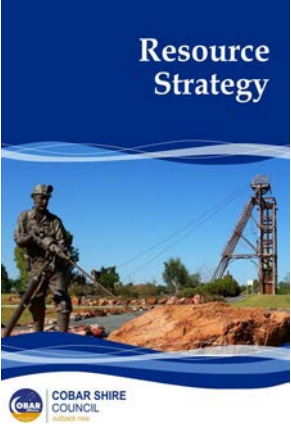
	<p>The Community Engagement Strategy outlines how Council will engage with its community and relevant stakeholders in developing and finalising the Community Strategic Plan. Over time it will be reviewed to outline how Council will ensure regular engagement and discussion with our community about their needs and aspirations for the town.</p>		<p>The Community Strategic Plan identifies the long term aspirations for our community. The Strategic Plan stretches beyond the next ten years, identifying the outcomes and long term strategic responses needed to achieve the agreed directions and meet the community's values. It demands strong leadership from Council in working with others to grow our Shire into the future.</p>
	<p>The 4 Year Delivery Program links the 'planning' in the long term Strategic Plan with the 'implementing' in the Annual Operational Plan. It is the strategic document that guides the organisation's work program over the Councillor's four year elected term. The Delivery Program sets out clear priorities, ongoing activities and specific actions Council will undertake, within its responsibilities and capacity, towards achieving the community's outcomes.</p>		<p>The Annual Operational Plan is the 'implementing' part of Council's key strategic documents, and outlines all of Council's services and infrastructure activities and tasks for the year. Both ongoing activities and specific tasks contribute to the implementation of Council's Delivery Program.</p>
	<p>The Resource Strategy outlines Council's capacity to manage assets and deliver services over the next ten years. The Resource Strategy includes three key elements – a Long Term Financial Plan, a Workforce Plan and Asset Management Plans. To prepare the Resource Strategy, Council determines its capacity and how to effectively manage its finances, the sustainability of its workforce, and the overall costs of its community assets.</p>		

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Aims of this Strategy	4
Goals of this Strategy	5
Inform.....	5
Consult	5
Involve.....	5
Partnership	5
Consistency.....	5
Principles	5
Commitments	6
Leadership	6
Advocacy	6
Continuous Improvements	6
Encourage Engagement	6
Communication.....	7
Methods	7
Resources	7
Planning.....	7
Partnership	7
What Level of Engagement is Used When?	8
Identified Audiences	8
Review.....	8

Introduction

Community consultation and engagement are integral aspects of Council's every day activities. Engagement is not an 'add-on' activity. When Council has a good relationship with its community, it is more likely to understand the range of needs and aspirations of the community and to ultimately make better informed decisions.

The Engagement Strategy encourages the community to be informed and to participate in the decision-making processes that guide the development of shire-wide service provision.

Aims of this Strategy

The aim of the Community Engagement Strategy is to strengthen and formalise Council's relationship with the community by establishing goals and principles for community engagement.

Community engagement is important for a number of reasons.

- Consultation with the community keeps Councillors informed of the ongoing issues within the community.
- Community engagement means keeping the community informed and involved so that Council can make better decisions that more closely match the needs and aspirations of the community.
- Closer relationships between the community and Council can lead to increased opportunity for cooperation and coordination of projects and services to improve the community.
- The community is more likely to trust and have confidence in Council if members are engaged and involved in Council's governance.
- Council is better able to advocate for its community.



Goals of this Strategy

Inform

Council will provide to the community balanced and objective information to assist them to understand the problems, alternatives, opportunities or solutions.

Consult

Council will gather community feedback on issues, analysis, alternatives and decisions.

Involve

Council will work directly with the community to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

Partnership

Council will partner with the community in decision making including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. The partnership between Council, government stakeholders, services providers, local organisations and the local community will be strengthened through ongoing engagement and encourage these partners to be well informed and proactive about the issues that affect them.

Consistency

This strategy will provide a consistent approach across Council to all consultation processes and community engagement activities conducted by Council.

Principles

Council's community engagement will be underpinned by the following principles:

- Council will communicate and consult with the community in ways that are sensitive to the needs of particular individuals or groups to maximise their ability to contribute.
- Council will encourage mutual respect for the needs, aspirations and opinions of all within the community.
- Council will keep the community informed about issues that are relevant to them and inform them of the results and actions taken from their input into decision making.
- Council will continuously look at the engagement undertaken to determine what could be done differently to improve the process next time.
- Council will listen to what the community has to say, valuing and respecting all ideas.
- Council will present information in a way that is easy to understand and appropriate for all sectors of the community.

Learning is central – engagement processes are opportunities to learn more about our community and the things that affect the Shire. Engagement skills are also built within Council and the community.

Commitments

Council will achieve the goals and principles of community engagement through the following commitments:

Leadership

- A strong organisational culture to support community engagement will be developed and this will be led by the senior management of Cobar Shire Council.
- Provision of clear leadership by explaining Council's decisions.
- Understand local issues and engage with the community in a proactive way.

Advocacy

- Develop good positive relationships with other Councils, State and Federal Governments and other related agencies and stakeholders to provide an effective advocacy role for the community resulting in improved outcomes.
- Foster processes within the community to encourage and support the community to advocate on behalf of themselves.
- Assist the community to engage both State and Federal Governments about issues that are relevant to those governments.
- Have a willingness to act on behalf of the community when they cannot act for themselves.

Continuous Improvements

- Share ideas, techniques, knowledge and experience about community engagement across the organisation and with other organisations.
- Create effective and timely feedback mechanisms so that the community is aware of how information gathered during consultations is used by Council.

Encourage Engagement

- Develop specific strategies for effective communication and consultation and make stronger links with those members of the community that are often not engaged.
- Different processes and mediums are used to engage different groups in the community to participate.

Communication

- Develop effective ways of communicating with the community about complex issues.
- Increase community awareness of Council's legislated responsibilities and related financial commitments.
- Inform the community the limits of what Council can do prior to and during consultation with the community.
- Improve the communities awareness of the role of Council including the range of services provided.
- The purpose of the engagement is clearly stated and expectations are agreed.
- Flexibly use technology and other forms of communication that are appropriate to the message and the audience.
- Ensure transparency in the way Council consults and its impact on service delivery through effective communication.
- Ensure all communication is plain and easy to read and understand.
- Provide timelines for response to Council activities that are appropriate to the community's needs and driven by community expectation.

Methods

- Use a variety of methods that are appropriate to the issues and to the audience being engaged. These can include (but are not limited to), community forums, surveys, newsletters, mailouts, Council's website and focus groups.
- The audience should be heard, not just listened to.

Resources

- Acknowledge the importance of engaging the community and provide adequate resources to do so.

Planning

- Improve networks and synergies with plans with other agencies to provide better outcomes for the community.
- Create long term plans for effective engagement with the community.

Partnership

- Create collaborative relationships with community organisations, private enterprises and public agencies to identify mutual interests and undertake joint ventures.

What Level of Engagement is Used When?

The level of engagement is directly related to the complexity of the information needed and the degree of impact an action could have on the community. The higher the impact, the more complex the information, the greater the potential risk, and therefore the more engagement is needed.

Identified Audiences

The following groups could be included in Council's consultation processes:

- Miners
- Progress Associations
- Youth, including schools
- Farmers
- Community and sporting organisations
- Aboriginal groups
- Council staff
- Councillors
- Aged persons
- The Cobar Liquor Accord
- NSW and Federal government departments and Regional Development Australia (RDA) - Orana
- The Cobar Interagency
- Business and tourism groups
- Utility providers
- Health organisations
- Neighbouring councils and Orana Regional Organisation of Councils (OROC)
- Rural Roads Advisory Committee

Review

This strategy will be reviewed at least every two years from adoption.



Version Control

No.	Date Adopted	Minute No.	Date Commenced	Date notified in Local Paper
1	22.09.2011	176.9.2011	23.09.2011	N/A