Attachment T

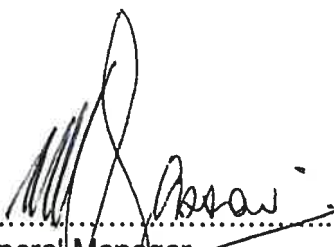## Community Engagement Strategy

GLEN INNES SEVERN COUNCIL
Community Engagement Strategy

RESOLUTION NUMBER:	7.03/12	MEETING:	22 March 2012
	6.03/10		25 March 2010

General Manager

22-5-2012

Date

Reference Number:	Version Number: 2	Review Date:	Responsible Officer:
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Related Documents:			

GLEN INNES SEVERN COUNCIL

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Including

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR THE COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN

| Resolution No: 7.03/12 | Meeting: 22 March 2012 |

Reference Number:	Version Number: 2 Date: 22 March 2012	Review Date: March 2015	Responsible Officer: DCCS

Reference Number:	Version Number: 2 Date: 22 March 2012	Review Date: March 2015	Responsible Officer: DCCS

Contents

Reference Number:	Version Number: 2 Date: 22 March 2012	Review Date: March 2015	Responsible Officer: DCCS

Introduction

Council first adopted this Community Engagement Strategy in April 2010 in preparation for the Community Strategic Plan to ensure that the Community was engaged in line with the social justice principles: *equity, access, participation and rights*. Further, the Strategy was developed to guide Council in Community Engagement for a variety of purposes such as when developing new policy, in relation to significant planning matters, new services or in response to the identification of the sale of major assets.

The Engagement Strategy is set out to clearly communicate the Aims, Benefits, Purpose and Principles of Community Engagement followed by Levels, Methods and Stakeholders, and Evaluation and Feedback. At the end of the document, practical guidelines are provided to assist staff in their roles in facilitating Community Engagement.

The Community is invited to participate in the review of the document on a regular basis with the invitation advertised in the local paper and on Council's web-site.

Definition

Community engagement is *the action that agencies take to enable them to consult, involve, listen and respond to communities through ongoing relationships.*

The NSW Planning System Handbook (2003) defines "community engagement" as:

" .. the public processes in which the general public and other interested parties are invited to contribute to particular proposals or policy changes. Community engagement has the potential to go beyond merely making information available or gathering opinions and attitudes. It entails a more active exchange of information and viewpoints between the sponsoring organisation and the public ..."

Community engagement is a way of including the views of the community in planning and decision making processes and in the development of policies and strategic documents. It can be seen as part of a continuum which includes:

- Information giving (communication);
- Information seeking (data collection/scoping) ;
- Information sharing;
- Participatory decision making;
- Responding to community initiated issues;
- Continuous research into communication methods.

5

Reference Number:	Version Number: 2 Date: 22 March 2012	Review Date: March 2015	Responsible Officer: DCCS

Community engagement is a regular and important part of Council's everyday services and involves the interaction of Council and stakeholders in a variety of settings and circumstances

The process of engagement can extend from a phone call or letter, to a program of major public meetings. It must be tailored to suit the situation, keeping in mind money and time expended in the short term. The initiative to engage may come from inside Glen Innes Severn Council or from outside.

Aims

The aims of the Community Engagement Strategy are to:

- Actively inform the development and review of Council's Community Strategic Plan;

- Establish standard practices and a consistent approach, across Council departments, to consultation and engagement processes;

- Ensure that decision making processes are based on outcomes acquired from the community engagement process, relevant legislative requirements and other Council policies;

- Establish a range of appropriate community engagement methods to maximize involvement, collaboration and empowerment of a cross section of the community, thus ensuring maximum benefit to Council and the community;

- Ensure Council officers understand and apply the principles of effective community engagement;

- Outline methods of proactively and regularly informing the community about the outcomes from the engagement activities;

- Establish how the community engagement strategy relates to legislative requirements and Council's core planning cycles;

- Coordinate community engagement processes across Council to avoid duplication;

- Strengthen the partnership between Council and stakeholders through ongoing engagement.

Benefits

Communities feel more connected with Councils if they are given the opportunity to contribute to the governance of their Local Government Area (LGA). Effective community engagement strengthens trust, goodwill and respect between Councils and their communities. Community engagement also helps Councils to make sure they are providing services that meet residents' interests and needs. Other key benefits include:

- Clear and effective communication to residents and community groups about Council's role, services and activities;

- Increased insight and input by the community into allocation of resources within Council;

- Building local capacity for participative democracy, community leadership, and community wellbeing;

- Offers an opportunity for Council to delegate responsibilities to community organizations and to develop partnerships with these;

- Use of stakeholders' knowledge and expertise to help Council to make sound decisions;

- Identification of the potential impacts of proposals/plans;

- Dealing with controversial or sensitive issues at the planning stage and in a collaborative manner;

- Enhances the opportunity for a variety of perspectives and range of solutions on any particular issue;

- Commits Council to being open and accountable;

- Assists Council to prioritize services and make better use of resources;

- Enables Council and the community to work together to achieve balanced decisions;

- Increases Council's capacity to address fundamental social problems;

- Offers opportunities for residents to contribute to and influence outcomes which directly affect their lives.

Reference Number:	Version Number: 2 Date: 22 March 2012	Review Date: March 2015	Responsible Officer: DCCS

Purpose

Community Engagement forms part or Council's core planning cycles and is particularly important when:

Preparing Strategic Plans – Council's Community Strategic Plan, Land Use Strategic Plans and projects to inform the Delivery Program and the Operational Plan.

Developing Council Policy - where any internal or external policies will have direct impacts on the community.

Considering Changes to Public Sites – where any changes are proposed to a private or public site that may have an impact on the community;

Planning Council Services – when developing or improving or changing a service.

Legislation requires consultation/engagement - such as prescribed plans under the *Local Government Act 1993* and other relevant Acts;

Proposing improvement to facilities and services - when any improvement is proposed to increase the quality of lifestyle for the community eg shopping areas, open spaces, etc.

Developing or planning major projects - projects of such size that they impact on the finances or future of the whole community.

Principles

Community Engagement will be based on the four (4) social justice principles: Equity, Access, Participation and Rights.

Skills required for effective community engagement include:
* **Attentive listening;**
* **Speaking** clearly and concisely;
* **Negotiating;**
* **Consensus building.**

Regardless of the methods used, effective engagement is characterised by:

Clarity of Purpose - Clearly define why the engagement is occurring and its context, in order to plan and resource an effective process.

Openness, Respect and Accountability - Engagement with the local community is approached in an open and respectful manner with clear lines of accountability. Community engagement with minors will adhere to relevant Child Protection legislation, best practice and duty of care guidelines. Council must also recognise the risk management issues and acts on its duty of care to all participants.

Hospitality - Engagement will be carried out in a friendly, welcoming and comfortable environment.

Willingness to Manage Conflict in a Constructive Manner - Effective community engagement does not always lead to agreement. Council should acknowledge that conflict is often part of the engagement process, and work to create an environment where different opinions can be expressed in a mutually respectful and constructive way.

Inclusiveness - Ensure that a cross section of the community is invited at the community engagement activity. A suggested breakdown of a group for engaging on a broad topic is a mix of experts, local agencies and services (1/3); people with strategic or political interests in the issue(1/3); and people representing the general demographic (1/3).

A flexible agenda and process - Establish engagement plans that are flexible during the engagement process e.g. time and venue may change due to natural and/or political environment;

9

Communication – There should be opportunities for all those present to express their opinions. All participants must have access to relevant, accurate, unbiased and clear information, and commit themselves to sharing information. Well communicated information can motivate, increase interest and promote a willingness to be engaged in a specific project.

Timeliness - An adequate period of notice will be given for each community engagement activity. The period may not be less than two weeks for any activity that requires people to attend or get involved in an engagement activity.

Feedback and Reporting – Feedback should be provided to participants which may include information on the impact of their views on decision making.

Evaluation- Reporting system to ensure that Council learns from the community engagement activity and is able to monitor and evaluate for future improvements.

Integration of Community Engagement activities – To ensure that effort and resources are not duplicated, and so residents do not suffer from "consultation fatigue."

Levels of Community Engagement

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has identified five (5) levels of Community Engagement:

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to help them understand a problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on 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 identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

The most appropriate levels of consultation will vary, according to the type of issue under consideration, and its impact on the community. Council may also be required to

Reference Number:	Version Number: 2 Date: 22 March 2012	Review Date: March 2015	Responsible Officer: DCCS

follow a prescribed consultation or engagement process under various *Acts and Regulations*, for example the exhibition of a draft Local Environmental Plans.

Methods of Community Engagement
(including Hard-to-reach target groups)

Methods of engagement should be selected on the basis of:
- Level of engagement required;
- Target group for the information exchange or involvement;
- Composition of the stakeholder groups particularly when engaging on broad topics.

Level 1: Inform
- Written communications in the form of letters, emails, sms to affected parties;
- Letterbox drops/ unaddressed flyers;
- Council Newsletters;
- Weekly *Connecting with your Council columns*;
- Media releases;
- Brochures, community noticeboards and Reports;
- Website information.

Level 2 & 3: Consult and Involve
- Drop-in session at a nominated venue and specified time;
- Interviews;
- Public exhibition and submissions;
- Photography as a tool to articulate and visually share perspectives about the community or issues;
- Public Meetings and Forums;
- Suggestion Box;
- Surveys and questionnaires, reply-paid feedback cards;
- E-Consultations and website interaction;
- Shopfront or shopping centre street stall;
- Community Cultural Development techniques: Street theatre, play back theatre, visual arts;
- Focus groups and workshops usually led by a trained facilitator;
- Meeting by invitation;
- Online comments;
- Meetings with Community Committees of Council or advisory groups;
- Personal briefings;

- Seminars and Conferences;
- Site meeting/tour;
- Informal assessment through networking;
- Review of customer feedback and complaints.

Level 4: Collaborate and Empower
- Community Conversations;
- Focus groups including Community Committees of Council and Advisory Groups;
- Workshops;
- Service Contractor Annual Reviews (Aged and Disability Services).

Strategies that can be used to engage hard-to-reach groups include:

- Ensuring community consultations are promoted through a number of different media e.g. in newspapers, free publications, over the radio, online and through flyers;
- Using Plain English, both to promote community consultations and during community consultations;
- Establishing specific mechanisms to focus on these groups;
- Seeking the support of agencies (including Council) providing services to special needs groups.

Some topics may require multiple approaches. Face to face engagement should be used for generating solutions. Surveys are important to evaluate preferred options.

Face to face engagement should be used for "engaging the disengaged or encouraging the discouraged." [1]

See Appendix A for suggested methods and levels for particular projects.

Stakeholders

As a minimum, the Community Engagement Strategy must *identify relevant stakeholder groups within the community and outline methods of engaging each group*.

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[1] LGMA-DLG Integrated Planning and Reporting Forum (p13).

Reference Number:	Version Number: 2 Date: 22 March 2012	Review Date: March 2015	Responsible Officer: DCCS

Council defines 'Community' as people who live within the Glen Innes Severn Council Local Government Area (LGA) and/or want to live, visit, work and/or invest with the LGA.

On the broadest level the community includes:
- Residents;
- Rate payers;
- State and Federal Government agencies;
- Non government agencies;
- Private Sector.

Specifically, stakeholders in the Glen Innes Severn LGA may be seen in two categories: communities of place, and communities of interest.
Communities of interest may include but are not limited to:

- Industry Groups including Farmers, the Tourist Association, Major business owners, and Country Energy;
- Schools;
- Sporting Groups;
- Clubs;
- Arts and Cultural Groups;
- Youth;
- Children;
- Aboriginal community;
- Older People;
- People with Disabilities;
- People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds;
- Socially Disadvantaged groups;
- Other special interest groups;
- Federal and State and non-government agencies;
- Community Committees of Council;
- Advisory Groups;
- Councilors and Council Staff.

Reference Number:	Version Number: 2 Date: 22 March 2012	Review Date: March 2015	Responsible Officer: DCCS

Communities of place may include but are not limited to:

- Glen Innes residents;
- Village residents, including Emmaville, Deepwater, Red Range, Glencoe and Wytaliba;
- The rural community excluding those in the villages;
- Residents of an identifiable location with interests in particular site-related issues.

See Appendix B Levels and Methods for the various Stakeholder Groups.

Evaluation

Evaluation should be completed after each community engagement activity. The evaluation should assess:
- Community representation;
- Type of communications/ publicity methods most suitable;
- Method used for engaging the community;
- Timing i.e. promotion time and time of the actual activity;
- Qualitative and quantitative information gained and gathered.

The assessment results will be used to improve future engagement plans and processes.

See Appendices C and D for checklists used to evaluate community engagement activities.

Feedback

Providing feedback to those participating in community engagement enhances the process and is essential. The method for feedback will relate to the type of community engagement and may range from individually addressed feedback to press releases/minutes.

14

| Reference Number: | Version Number: 2
Date: 22 March 2012 | Review Date:
March 2015 | Responsible Officer:
DCCS |

Community Engagement for the Glen Innes Community Strategic Plan

Section 406 of the Local Government Act 1993 legislates for the development of Community Strategic Plans in accordance with the Integrated Planning and Reporting Guidelines published by the Department of Local Government.

Accordingly, Council must prepare and implement a Community Engagement Strategy for engagement with the local community in developing and reviewing the Community Strategic Plan.

1. The Community Strategic Plan Engagement Strategy must be based on the four (4) social justice principles: equity, access, participation and rights.

2. All relevant stakeholders within the community should be identified and methods of engaging those groups outlined.

3. Council must be satisfied that it has given the community an opportunity to have their say, consult/engage with all representative groups, consider how to hear from the "hard to reach" groups and consider inter-generational forums for discussion.

4. Due consideration must also be given to *the expected levels of service expressed by the community* when preparing the Community Strategic Plan.

5. The Strategy should allow for public participation at various stages of the planning process.

The Engagement Strategy for the Community Strategic Plan should be asking the Questions "Where are we now?" and "Where do we want to be in 10 years time?"

The Division of Local Government guidelines to Planning and Reporting recommends that Council's Engagement Strategy for the Community Strategic Plan should focus on Involvement and Collaboration as much as possible with the future aim of Empowerment.

15

Reference Number:	Version Number: 2 Date: 22 March 2012	Review Date: March 2015	Responsible Officer: DCCS

Implementation Schedule of Community Engagement for the development and of the Community Strategic Plan.

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Targeted discussions with particular groups, State agencies etc. to help prepare information that will inform the Community Strategic Plan. Identify current Council strategies and plans. Identify regional strategies and plans. Collect relevant feedback from recent engagement activities. (Surveys, forums etc.) Gather information relating to demographics and geography of the local government area. Commence development of asset schedule. Discussions with the community regarding the financial framework applicable to Council and the associated constraints that it has on Council.	A series of engagement activities based on the information gathered in Stage 1. A range of different activities involving various groups at different times. Discussions with the community on levels of service and possible resourcing. A draft Community Strategic Plan will be prepared. Discussions with the community regarding the financial framework applicable to Council and the associated constraints that it has on Council.	Reviewing the Draft Community Strategic Plan, Resourcing Strategy and Delivery Program. The community will collaborate with Council to refine the Community Strategic Plan. Broad range information sessions will ensure that as many community members as possible are aware of the Draft Community Strategic Plan and the Delivery Program. Targeted discussions and focus groups may be appropriate. Discussions with the community regarding the financial framework applicable to Council and the associated constraints that it has on Council.

Reference Number:	Version Number: 2 Date: 22 March 2012	Review Date: March 2015	Responsible Officer: DCCS

Acknowledgements

This Strategy has been widely researched, and source material from several Councils is acknowledged: Moree Plains, Mosman Council, Leichhardt, North Sydney, Maitland, Auburn, Liverpool, and Rockdale Councils. Information has also been obtained from LGMA *NSW –DLG Integrated Planning and Reporting Forum* and *Social Policy & Society*, Vivien Lowndes, Lawrence Pratchett, & Gerry Stoker, 2006, Cambridge University Press.

Reference Number:	Version Number: 2	Review Date:	Responsible Officer:
	Date: 22 March 2012	March 2015	DCCS

Appendix A
Guide for Levels and Methods for which Purpose

Engagement Level	Strategic Planning	Policy	Changes to Public Sites	Service planning	Community Strategic Plan	Methods
INFORM			✔			Addressed letters, emails, flyers
					✔	Unaddressed mail, letterbox drops
	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	CWYC (Connecting with your Council), Press release.
		✔	✔			Reports
	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Website
	✔	✔			✔	Council Newsletter
CONSULT			✔		✔	Individual appointments, interviews
	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Public exhibition and submissions
	✔		✔	✔	✔	Public meetings & forums.
	✔		✔	✔	✔	Surveys, E-surveys, & Consultations
	✔		✔		✔	Shop front or street stall.
	✔		✔	✔	✔	Focus groups & workshops
INVOLVE					✔	Meeting by invitation.
	✔	✔		✔	✔	S355 Committees & Advisory Groups
					✔	Street Theatre
	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Online Comments
			✔		✔	Site meetings tours.
	✔				✔	Photography a tool to visually share ideas.
COLLABORATE EMPOWER			✔		✔	Community Conversations
	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Section 355 Committees
	✔	✔		✔	✔	Workshops with Community Organizations.
	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Network with service agencies.

Reference Number:	Version Number: 2 Date: 22 March 2012	Review Date: March 2015	Responsible Officer: DCCS

Appendix B
Levels and Methods for Stakeholder Groups

Stakeholders	Level of Engagement	Method
Special Interest Group	Involve/Collaborate/Empower Invited community members to be engaged at various levels and over the time of the development of the plan	Organising committee/focus group. Councillors, staff and community representation.
Industry: • Farmers • Tourist association • Major business owners	Involve/Collaborate	Focus Groups – external consultant.
Communities of interest • Schools • Sporting Groups • Clubs • Arts and Cultural Groups • Environmental groups	Involve/Collaborate	Joint focus groups. External consultant.
Rural community excluding villages	Involve	Surveys including on-line comments. Public forum.
Youth	Inform, Involve, Collaborate.	Youth Council; Facebook; Surveys through schools and TAFE; networking with service agencies; photography as tool.
Children	Involve	Teacher to work with groups at school, preschool, childcare.
Aboriginal community	Inform, Involve, Collaborate.	Glen Innes Aboriginal Consultative Group; Glen Innes Local Aboriginal Lands Council. Meeting by invitation.
Aged population	Inform, Involve	Shop front, surveys through services, Consumer Consultation meetings; meeting by invitation, Focus Group, Carer Support Groups.
People with Disabilities	Inform, Involve	Surveys through services, Consumer Consultation meetings; meeting by invitation, Focus Group, Carer Support Groups

Stakeholders	Level of Engagement	Method
CALD population	Inform, Involve	Brochures and flyers in appropriate languages; Focus groups.
Socially Disadvantaged groups	Inform, Involve	Surveys though agencies; Meeting by invitations, shop fronts, face to face contact.
Geographic Localities • Glen Innes • Emmaville • Deepwater • Glencoe • Red Range • Wytaliba	Involve/Collaborate	Social networking, surveys, shop fronts in various locations. Meetings in the villages.
Federal and State and non-government agencies	Involve/Collaborate	Interagency meetings, service network meetings; Forums
Council staff	Inform, Involve, Collaborate	Internal Newsletter, Intranet, Email, Meetings

Appendix C

This checklist can be used for evaluation by participants after evaluation activities. Questions can be adjusted to suit the project.

Community Engagement Evaluation checklist for participants.

Thank you for attending a Glen Innes Severn Council Community Consultation Meeting. Council is committed to providing opportunities for residents to consult with Councillors and Council Staff. Please take a few minutes to fill out this evaluation form. Your feedback will help us to make sure that our Community Consultation Meetings meet your needs.

1. **Access:** Was the venue easy for you to access?   Yes ☐   No ☐

2. **Time:** Did the time of the consultation suit you?   Yes ☐   No ☐

3. **Responsiveness:** Were your questions answered?   Yes ☐   No ☐

4. **Participation:** Were you given opportunities to express your views?
    Yes ☐   No ☐

5. **Chairperson:** Did the chairperson manage the consultation process well?
    Yes ☐   No ☐

6. **Transparency:** Was the consultation conducted openly and honestly?
    Yes ☐   No ☐

7. **Understanding:** Did Council representatives listen to, and understand, the comments made?   Yes ☐   No ☐

8. **Comments:** Please use the space below to make any further comments that you would like to add.

Appendix D:

This checklist can be used to assist in the evaluation of community engagement exercises. You will need appropriate feedback from the participants involved in order to get realistic results. Please adapt the following questions to fit your circumstances.

Community Engagement Evaluation checklist for Council Staff

Objectives
Were the objectives of the Community Engagement exercise clear to all involved?
☐ Yes   ☐ No

Was there any legal requirement to consult with the community?   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

Who was consulted? (Stakeholder groups)

_____

_____

Did you get responses from those you most wished to ask?   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

Were you successful in consulting 'hard to reach' and underrepresented community groups/sectors/members?   ☐ Yes   ☐ No
Comments:

_____

_____

Did you provide feedback to those consulted?   ☐ Yes   ☐ No
How?_____

_____

Did the people you engaged with feel that the consultation was worthwhile?
☐ Yes   ☐ No

How are you aware of this?

_____

_____

22

Reference Number:	Version Number: 2	Review Date:	Responsible Officer:
	Date: 22 March 2012	March 2015	DCCS

Methods

Did different groups respond to the different methods used? ☐Yes ☐No
(Identify methods)

_____

_____

_____

Were the methods used the right ones for your objectives? ☐Yes ☐No
Comments:

_____

_____

Did you get the required:
- Quantitative and/or qualitative information?   ☐Yes ☐No
- No Response rate?   ☐Yes ☐No
- Representative sample? (Each community)   ☐Yes ☐No
- Timeframe   ☐Yes ☐No

Was the timeframe clear?   ☐Yes ☐No
Comments

_____

_____

Was enough time allowed for responses?   ☐Yes ☐No

Was enough information provided?   ☐Yes ☐No

Did you succeed in making information available to those you were targeting?
                                                 ☐Yes ☐No

Did the methods you used attract the right audience? ☐Yes ☐No
Comments

_____

_____

Did you budget adequately? Were there any unexpected expenses?
Comments

_____

_____

Did you have appropriately skilled staff for the exercise? ☐Yes ☐No

How were the results integrated into planning processes?

23