

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

STRATEGIC POLICY

Responsible Department: Office of the General Manager

Responsible Section: Community & Economy

Responsible Officer: Department Leader - Community & Economy

Objective

The purpose of Cabonne Council's Community Engagement Policy is to ensure that Council conducts appropriate community engagement which, at a minimum, meets legislative requirements and encourages community participation in Council's decision making.

This policy clarifies an open and transparent processes for informing, involving, and engaging the community and the role of the Community and Economy Team and other Council staff.

Introduction

This policy applies to all Council operations and functions. This extends to all Council representatives and staff involved in the process of community engagement and communications relating to community engagement.

For particular guidance on rules around communication, reference should be made to Council's adopted Communications and Social Media Protocols Policy.

Policy

Cabonne Council recognises that effective community engagement has benefits for both Council and the community.

Such benefits include:

- Better outcomes through understanding needs and views of the community and customers
- Outcomes that are broadly supported by the community
- Increased satisfaction with Council services, operations, staff and elected officials
- Increased awareness, understanding and acceptance of decisions made
- Development of solutions to local issues through Council/community partnerships
- Increased community understanding of Council processes and responsibilities

Council will consider the level of impact and complexity of a project prior to conducting a community engagement process and prepare a community engagement plan and determine appropriate methods for engagement that align with the determined level of impact. Council will utilise Council owned channels and platforms to inform the community of opportunities for community engagement and to communicate Council services, programs and decisions.

Community engagement planning will be informed by four key social justice principles that inform all of Council's work. These principles are based on a commitment that everyone should have a fair opportunity to participate in the future of the community, and that planning processes should take particular care to involve and protect the interests of people in vulnerable circumstances. The social justice principles are:

- Access
- Equity
- Participation
- Rights

Cabonne Council acknowledges its obligations under the Local Government Act 1993 as they relate to consultation, participation and engagement. Council's community engagement is based on the five-point framework developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2):

- Inform** To provide the community with balanced and objective information to assist community members in understanding the issues, alternatives, benefits and/or solutions.
- Consult** To obtain community feedback on options, projects and/or designs.
- Involve** To work directly with the community throughout the decision-making process to ensure that community concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.
- Collaborate** To partner with community members in some or all aspects of the decision-making process, including the development of options and the identification of the preferred solution.
- Empower** Where Council works in partnership with the community to implement actions and build community capacity.

(Note: in the local government context elected representatives are responsible for making the final decision, but this decision is informed based on the outcomes of the community engagement activities).

Principals

The following principles will underpin Cabonne Council's approach to community engagement and communication.

The following 'rules of engagement' will guide and inform how Council designs, implements and provides feedback on the outputs and outcomes of our engagement activities:

- **Engage with purpose, communicate progress and provide feedback** - Engagement activities should be for a clear purpose, with the purpose clearly stated to avoid confusion and manage expectations. It should be clear how engagement inputs will be used in the final outcome. Reporting progress and the end result is part of the engagement cycle.
- **All who have an interest in the issue should have the opportunity to engage** - Council will make every effort to enable communities of interest and a representative cross-section of the community (reflecting our demographic, cultural and geographic diversity) to participate in our community engagement activities.
- **Create a safe space and a positive atmosphere**- Engagement is part of community life where people come together or individually contribute (physically or virtually) to discuss issues, opportunities and challenges. To enable robust discussion, the atmosphere created needs to be positive and welcoming, not combative and disrespectful.

Council will actively listen to understand different points of view and help to create a safe space for everyone who participates, giving sufficient time for discussion, capturing comments, agreeing desired outcomes and determining actions.

Cabonne Council will:

- inform the community about Council's decision-making processes about long term planning, asset management and service delivery;
- ensure that participation processes are clear about the decision to be made and the level of influence the community can have on the decision;
- communicate clearly the context and objectives of community engagement processes;
- provide community members with all appropriate and relevant information about the background to the issue, including existing policies, legislative requirements, opportunities and constraints;
- use community engagement methods appropriate for the targeted community groups;
- ensure allocation of adequate resources, including time and skills as well as funding, to participation processes;
- be respectfully curious about community views and perspectives, free from bias; and
- where appropriate, report on, consider, respond to and act on community input received as part of Council decision-making processes.

When should council engage?

Different issues under consideration by Council will have varying requirements for community engagement. Council representatives and staff are responsible for determining if, and to what extent community engagement is required as appropriate to their role and function.

Council will undertake a formal community engagement process in the following circumstances:

- Where there is a legislative/statutory requirement
- When Council resolves to undertake community consultation
- On issues that have the potential to affect the delivery of services or facilities that contribute to community well-being, growth and prosperity
- When identifying and understanding the needs and priorities of the community for the purposes of strategic planning
- To monitor and evaluate community satisfaction with Council or Council services .

Under the Local Government Act 1993 Council is required to publicly exhibit certain information for a set period of time. Notification in respect to Development Applications is governed by the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979. Any statutory obligation must be adhered to.

Preparing a Community Engagement Plan

Council staff will ensure the following steps are followed when planning and undertaking community engagement.

Council's Community and Economy Team is to be informed of new community engagement programs and will provide advice on preparing and implementing engagement plans.

1. Establish the level of impact and complexity of the proposed project, program or action
2. Identify who in the community is likely to have an interest in or the ability to influence the issue
3. Plan the engagement process and gather or develop relevant information and resources
4. Engage the relevant identified communities of interest
5. Feedback the results of engagement and decision making
6. Evaluate the process

Compliance with Council Policy and Respective Legislation

Section 2.21(2) of the EP&A Act details the types of proposals that must be exhibited Schedule 1 sets a minimum exhibition timeframe for most of these proposals. Council will always exhibit a proposal for this minimum timeframe and will consider an extended timeframe for exhibition based on the scale and nature of the proposal.

To comply with Council Policy and respective legislation the following special considerations apply:

- Council is not required to make available for public inspection any part of an application whose publication would, in its opinion, be contrary to the public interest because of its confidential nature or for any other reason.
- Timeframes are in calendar days and include weekends.
- If the exhibition period is due to close on a weekend or a public holiday, Council may extend the exhibition to finish on the next working day.
- The annual period between 20 December and 10 January (inclusive) is excluded from the calculation of a period of public exhibition.
- The timeframes described in the table above are a minimum requirement and may be extended at the discretion of Council officers.
- There may be proposals not subject to the mandatory exhibition timeframes for which Council has the option to exhibit for at least 28 days and engage with the community in line with our community participation objectives.
- Additionally, there may be some occasions where a Council priority or administrative requirement demands immediate action on proposals that prevents the implementation of our usual community participation process

For more information on exhibition timeframes, please see Council’s Community Engagement and Participation Guidelines.

Responsibilities

General Manager: is responsible for approving those engagement activities that have an organisation-wide impact, and/or where councillors will be utilised in the engagement activities.

Deputy General Managers: are responsible for approving engagement project plans developed by their Leaders in advance of the commencement of engagement activities.

Leader Community and Economy: is responsible for oversight of community engagement activities of Council, and to provide support and advice to staff undertaking community engagement on behalf of Council. Staff will be required to advise the Leader Community and Economy of their proposed engagement activities to enable coordination of activities.

Leaders: are responsible for identifying those decisions, planning activities and processes which will have community impacts and therefore require a community engagement activity. The Leader will prepare an engagement project plan to identify how the community engagement activity will be rolled out, what question/s the engagement is seeking to answer, and when it will be undertaken.

Leaders will ensure that planned engagement activities are discussed in advance with the Leader Community and Economy, so that all the engagement activities of Council can be undertaken in a coordinated fashion, and engagement support can be planned for team members who will be undertaking the engagement.

Employees: are responsible for familiarising themselves with this Policy and Council’s Community Engagement Guidelines before participating in any community engagement activities on behalf of Council.

Employees are responsible for discussing with their Leader programs, planning processes or other activities they are undertaking which are likely to have community impacts, and therefore require a community engagement element.

Others: Council contractors and consultants who undertake projects or programs on behalf of Council which have community impacts must liaise with the designated Council Officer to ensure that community engagement requirements are met.

All Council staff undertaking community engagement and communication: are responsible for:

- Informing Council’s Community and Economy Team in respect of information being communicated to the community or undertaking community engagement
- Prepare communications plans as part of planning processes for projects which impact the community
- Undertake training and development in community engagement to build capability
- Advise all relevant internal stakeholders (such as customer service, executive staff, etc) before commencing community engagement, communication plan or campaign
- Comply with Council’s relevant policies including Use of Council Logo Policy, and Media and Social Media Protocols Policy.

References

NSW *Local Government Act 1993*

NSW *Local Government Amendment (Governance and Planning) Act 2016*

NSW *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*

NSW *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998*

Community Engagement and Participation Guidelines – located on council’s website

Use of Council Logo Policy – located on council’s website

Media and Social Media Protocols Policy – located on council’s website

History

Minute No.	Summary of Changes	New Version Date
21/02/10	Adopted by Council	23 February 2021
22/10/05	Complete edit of policy, to reflect adopted Community Engagement and Participation Guidelines. Update of terms, job titles, and positions within the organisational structure.	05 October 2022
22/10/11	Readopted as per s165(4)	27 October 2022

