

Sunshine Coast  
Council

# Community Engagement FRAMEWORK



### **Story of the painting:**

Council partnered with Paul Calcott to illustrate the engagement process of the Reconciliation Action Plan with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The artwork depicts council's intention in moving forward with the community towards Reconciliation, the way that we need to listen and learn from each other and most importantly together take the story back.

Below is the description of the painting in Paul's words.

*Depicts the Sunshine Coast with the hinterland in green, the beach sand (yellow and orange) and ocean (blue)*

- *Large circle represents the council as a meeting of predominantly white group of people*
- *Path coming from the council circle is council going out yarning with elders and members of the community*
- *Seeking permission and endorsement and then agreeing to walk together and further yarn with members and community groups*
- *Circle represents yarning circles and gatherings of community groups, the C is the mark left behind after seating – black and white represent black and white community however the yellow represents common life force, we are all living beings, we are one ... mutual respect*
- *Last circle we walk back to council together with the information that has been gathered from community in a way to move forward.*

### **Sunshine Coast Council would like to acknowledge:**

- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) as a best practice framework for community engagement. Council acknowledges that the IAP2 spectrum underpins this document and council commits to striving towards this internationally recognised standard.
- all council staff who contributed their time and expertise to the development of this Framework.
- Engagement Plus for coordinating the project.

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## 1.0 WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

The term 'community engagement' incorporates information sharing, consultation (seeking feedback) and active participation (involvement, collaboration and empowerment) between government and communities.

Council defines community engagement as:

**An ongoing dialogue with our community to identify civic issues and opportunities, to assist with planning and inform decision making.**

Community engagement does not replace council's responsibility for decision making. The purpose of gaining input from the community is to enhance council's decision-making processes.

Community engagement is a key part in the relationship between council staff, councillors and the community. It is the process of working collaboratively with groups of people linked by geographic proximity, special interest or similar situations to address issues affecting their well being.

## 2.0 THE PURPOSE OF THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The Community Engagement Framework provides the context in which to plan and implement a community engagement process for identified projects, strategies and decision making processes. The Framework outlines the relationship between council's Community Engagement Policy, the Eight-Step Process to develop a community engagement plan and other related protocols.

### 2.1 How to use the Community Engagement Framework and associated Toolkit

The community engagement process itself can take many forms. However, it should start in the planning stages of any initiative, be it policy or a project, that impacts on the community. Staff are encouraged to tailor each community engagement process based on:

- Sunshine Coast Council Community Engagement Policy<sup>1</sup>
- The eight steps outlined in this Framework for effective community engagement practices
- Appropriate use of community engagement processes and tools
- Issues and sectors you are working with
- Past experience and current activities
- Management requirements
- Professional judgement

The Community Engagement Framework is complemented by the Community Engagement Toolkit. The Toolkit contains a description of the following:

- Techniques for Information Sharing
- Techniques for Seeking Feedback
- Techniques for e-Engagement
- Techniques for Involving Groups of People
- Techniques for Closing the Loop

Each technique description covers considerations for technique delivery, ideas for evaluation, tips and associated costs. The Toolkit also contains information about available council resources, both personnel and equipment, as well as useful templates to assist with the implementation of a community engagement plan. Together, the documents are a practical guide to plan and implement community engagement processes.

## 3.0 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONTEXT

Every community engagement process is unique. However, efficiency and quality of outcomes can be achieved through adherence to consistent practices. This Framework builds on council's past regional experience in community engagement and draws on best practice standards.

By working through the Community Engagement Framework you will have a thorough understanding of the principles behind good community engagement practice and be able to develop a plan for your own project.

The Community Engagement Toolkit contains additional tools and tips to support you in the implementation of your plan.

### 2.2 Intended users

The Community Engagement Framework has been developed for staff and councillors of the Sunshine Coast Council, and any external consultants working with council, to provide guidelines on how to involve internal stakeholders and the community in council's decision-making processes.

This Framework is an **interactive document** that aims to assist you in planning, implementing and evaluating community engagement as part of your project.

The *Local Government Act 2009*<sup>2</sup> has introduced new measures for councils undertaking and reporting on community engagement activities in local government. The Local Government Act 2009 requires local government to uphold the principle of 'democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement' and now requires councils to develop a community engagement policy, a long-term community plan and provide annual reporting on community engagement activities.

Where in the past it has been best practice for local governments to engage with communities, there is now the legislative direction to ensure it happens across all local government areas.

The *Integrity Act 2009*<sup>3</sup> also applies to the work of council officers and councillors. The relevance of this is that council officers and councillors must act in an ethical way and with integrity in the work they do representing and operating their local government area. There should be no conflict of interest between a person's personal interest and the person's official responsibilities. The explicit roles and responsibilities for officers and elected members is also an important factor.

## 4.0 THE BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There is an increasing expectation that all levels of government are transparent and accountable in the way they do business.

Community engagement provides a valuable link between the councillors, the council organisation and the community they serve by:

- Enabling the community to be better informed
- Reducing the level of misconception or misinformation
- Ensuring commitment and greater ownership of the final decision by the community
- Strengthening relationships between council and the community
- Encouraging the community to put forward ideas
- Assisting council to gain a better understanding of local needs
- Helping to identify issues which may not otherwise have been considered

## 5.0 INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION FRAMEWORK AND SPECTRUM

Sunshine Coast Council has adopted the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) framework in these guidelines and its community engagement policy in recognition that IAP2 is a world-class leader in the engagement of communities. IAP2 has developed a spectrum for community engagement which provides a methodology for determining what level of influence a community has over a decision and therefore what level of engagement is appropriate. The IAP2 Spectrum<sup>4</sup> shows that differing levels of participation are appropriate, depending on the outcomes, timeframes, resources and levels of concern or interest in the decision to be made.

Most importantly, is the realisation that each participation level involves a promise made to the community. If the promise is not defined, or is understood differently by the participants and the decision maker, the process may result in dissatisfaction and/or disillusionment. At all public participation levels, promises should be made clear and upheld.

The IAP2 Spectrum is a tool that enables the user to determine the level of engagement and the most suitable techniques to use during the engagement process.

There are five different levels of engagement within the IAP2 Spectrum, which should be used as a guide in determining the level of community engagement to be considered. For example, if the council has made a decision regarding a project, and it is not actively seeking community input then 'Inform' is the most appropriate category. On the other hand, if the outcome is of high community concern, then you may need to 'Involve' or 'Collaborate' with the community to determine an outcome that meets both the community and council needs.

A summary of the five different levels of public participation and the definition for each is outlined in the table below, along with the suggested decision maker for each level:

IAP2 LEVEL OF INFLUENCE	DESCRIPTION OF INTENT	DECISION MAKER
Inform	To provide information about the problem or project to be addressed.	Council
Consult	To seek an opinion or input to inform a decision.	
Involve	To engage with stakeholders in order to understand and consider their input and feedback.	Community and Council
Collaborate	To work in partnership to come to a decision.	
Empower	To give the decision-making role to the stakeholders.	Community

**Table 1:** Different levels of community engagement, description of intent and identification of the decision maker.



# IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



	<b>Inform</b>	<b>Consult</b>	<b>Involve</b>	<b>Collaborate</b>	<b>Empower</b>
<b>Public participation goal</b>	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities 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.
<b>Promise to the public</b>	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for 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.
<b>Example techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fact sheets</li> <li>Web sites</li> <li>Open houses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public comment</li> <li>Focus groups</li> <li>Surveys</li> <li>Public meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshops</li> <li>Deliberative polling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Citizen advisory committees</li> <li>Consensus-building</li> <li>Participatory decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Citizen juries</li> <li>Ballots</li> <li>Delegated decision</li> </ul>

## 6.0 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND THE SUNSHINE COAST CONTEXT

### 6.1 Vision

The Sunshine Coast Region is made up of many different and diverse communities. As such, there are many communities of interest. This diversity is also reflected in the councillors who are elected to represent the different council divisions.

The Sunshine Coast Council is striving to achieve a vision of becoming **Australia's most sustainable region – green, vibrant, diverse.**

To achieve this vision council and the community will need to develop capacity and capability to co-create sustainable communities. This will be supported by a robust community engagement framework that can be used consistently across council.

Community engagement is identified as a priority in council's Corporate Plan 2009 – 2014<sup>5</sup> under the Great Governance theme.

Emerging priority *8.1 Ethical, accountable and transparent decision-making* identifies three key strategies which aim to make council decision-making processes more open. These strategies are:

- 8.1.1 Develop and implement a governance framework that provides transparent and accountable processes and enhances council's reputation
- 8.1.2 Ensure legislative compliance and awareness
- 8.1.3 Councillors and employees are aware of the importance of ethical behaviour, compliance with codes of conduct and providing complete information and advice

Emerging priority *8.6 An informed and engaged community* identifies three key strategies which aim to improve council's community engagement approach and better align council's business activities with community expectations. These strategies are:

- 8.6.1 Develop a community plan that sets long term directions and aspirations for the future of the region
- 8.6.2 Establish a community engagement framework to gather community feedback, build relationships and allow input into council decision making
- 8.6.3 Keep the community informed about council's activities through a wide range of communication tools

### 6.2 Council's Community Engagement Policy

Council adopted its Community Engagement Policy in August 2009 with the purpose of providing direction for its community engagement activities. The scope of the policy applies to all facets of council's operations including council's corporate, land use and financial planning and its day-to-day business activities.

The Community Engagement Policy encourages a principle-based approach to community engagement activities. Each principle seeks to clarify the purpose of why council engages with the community and guide how that engagement occurs.

#### 6.2.1 Engagement Principles

Key to building consistency in the practice of community engagement is the use of a principle-based approach. Principles guide us by providing direction to commence engagement, and can help resolve challenging issues during an engagement process. In this way principles can also act as an effective evaluation tool at the end of an engagement process. Council's Community Engagement Policy identifies the following principles:

- **Timeliness**

*Council will engage with its community in ways that are timely, open to all, easily understood and not overly bureaucratic or resource intensive.* To uphold this principle it is necessary to thoroughly and comprehensively plan for the community engagement elements of a project prior to commencement so that engagement is given genuine attention, appropriate resourcing and realistic timeframes.

- **Information and Feedback**

*The community has the right to be well informed on issues and receive feedback from council on how its input has been used to inform council decisions.* Communication with the community is critical to the success and ownership of projects. A well-informed community makes for well-informed decision making. The practice of providing feedback to the community on how their input has been used to influence the project or issues makes explicit the value in participating in engagement activities.

- **Mutual Respect**

*Council's goal is one of inclusive involvement. All voices matter, all opinions are valued and considered.* Everyone has a right to have a say in matters that impact on them. Opportunities for the diverse communities of the Sunshine

Coast to participate need to be created with special consideration given to those communities that traditionally do not have a strong voice or that it may be more challenging to engage.

- **Action Learning**

*Council is committed to the development of innovative engagement approaches, learning from each engagement experience, and using such learning to improve our approaches to engagement.* Strategies in place to support this principle include the Community Engagement Calendar and Register, training and access to in-house Community Engagement Champions. Using thorough evaluation approaches assists in continuous improvements.

- **Foresight**

*Council engages with its community not only to learn about and respond to present needs, but also to gain a better understanding of our community's perspective on emerging issues that may affect our preferred future.* The Sunshine Coast Community Plan is in essence the foresight principle, capturing the vision and aspirations for the long-term future of the region. The Sunshine Coast Community Plan will guide all other planning processes for council.

The Community Engagement Policy and the Sunshine Coast Community Plan are available on council's website.



## 7.0 KEY PROTOCOLS

### 7.1 Internal engagement

Community engagement is something most of us carry out within our daily work. Liaison with members of the community, suppliers, contractors, internal staff and councillors, and daily communication with your colleagues are all elements of community engagement.

There are many benefits of internal engagement including improvements to project management. By involving other relevant branches in your project early in the planning stage, you can become aware of potential issues, possible new solutions and potential flow-on impacts affecting the delivery of your project.

The implications of not engaging well with internal stakeholders can include:

- Lack of ownership of project or strategy
- Project delays costing time and money
- The perception by the community that different departments within council are operating in silos
- Potential to miss innovative and sustainable project outcomes

**Internal engagement in the planning phase of your project is CRITICAL. Engage widely.**

### 7.2 Councillors and community engagement

Engagement occurs at all levels of local government. Councillors play an important role in representing the interests of residents and ratepayers. This requires a solid understanding of community needs and the ability to set objectives to meet these needs. Providing community leadership, guidance and facilitating communication between the community and council is the core business of a councillor.

Often councillors are required to establish priorities between competing demands for limited resources. This means that councillors need to be able to access many and varied views that will enable them to make balanced decisions based on a whole-of-community view. Community engagement is therefore critical to the success of the relationship between the councillor, the community they represent and Sunshine Coast Council.

Any engagement process being undertaken by council needs the involvement of the relevant divisional and portfolio councillor/s. Councillors have a mandate to lead and identify opportunities for change and their role is one of influence. Close collaboration between a project team and councillor presents a partnership that is consistent, collaborative and focused on outcomes.

When staff and consultants are working with councillors they should consider:

- Councillors' wealth of information about the community they represent including valuable networks, issues and opportunities
- Councillors' obligations under the Local Government and Integrity Acts to disclose conflicts of interest
- The demands on councillors' time, their availability and the limited resources at their disposal
- The protocols for interaction between staff and councillors
- Current advisory groups that councillors may participate in, in an official or unofficial capacity
- Final decision making rests with the whole of council rather than an individual councillor.

## 7.3 Community Engagement Calendar and Register

Council has developed a Community Engagement Calendar. With a whole range of projects going on throughout the organisation, it is very easy to begin planning your community engagement program dates only to find someone else within council is already going out to the community with a project at the same time. It's important not to allow the community to suffer 'engagement fatigue'. Clashing community engagement programs can mean a range of things for council including:

- Not receiving the result you were looking for because your communication plan is in competition with other plans
- Community feelings of being over-consulted and a perception that "council keeps asking questions but not delivering" or "the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing"
- Wasting time and resources

A simple check of the Community Engagement Calendar will help you plan your community engagement program to receive maximum outcomes. This may mean changing your dates or even working with another area of council to piggy-back engagement programs. Some projects can complement others, saving time and resources and potentially resulting in better outcomes for the community. Make sure that once you have your community engagement dates in place, you include them and all the details in the calendar.

### **The calendar is found on the intranet under 'Services' Community Engagement.**

The Community Engagement Register is a record of present and past engagement activities. The register is a starting point to review information about previous consultations that may be able to assist with planning engagement for your project. You may find the information you are looking for already available and avoid the need to plan for an engagement activity. The register will also provide information about what worked and what didn't in different engagement scenarios. By collaborating internally it's possible to achieve increased efficiencies and optimal results in accordance with council's Engagement Principles.

### **The register is found on the intranet under 'Services' Community Engagement.**

## 7.4 Role of Customer Relations Branch – Media and Public Relations team

### 7.4.1 Communication Planning

The Media and Public Relations team in council's Customer Relations Branch provides communication, public relations and media advice and guidance as part of its communication planning service. Project Managers must always advise the team of any planned community engagement activities and to access the team's services. A minimum of two weeks' notice must be provided to allow time to formulate this component of your plan. The team provides access to a number of corporate communication tools and channels with individual timeframes and deadlines. These will be discussed during the development of your communication plan.

This communication planning stage is also the time to discuss your graphic design requirements. Please be reminded that sub-brands are not allowed to be developed as per council's Brand Policy and Guidelines. This is to ensure that the community engagement program can be clearly identified as a council program.

Council does not offer a centralised booking and placement service for print ads. This is the role of the Project Manager (or your Branch/Department's nominated staff member) leading the project. The Media and Public Relations team does provide advice on where to best place your ads to get value and offers a centralised advertising service for all broadcast advertising (radio/television).

Information and guidelines on correct advertising processes can be found on the intranet under 'Services'. This includes:

- Brand manual – Advertising templates have been distributed to all media outlets and provide examples of council's advertising style. It is also a great guide to use when proofing your ads.
- Advertising Process – Step-by-step, easy-to-follow instructions for placing all print advertisements.
- Advertising contacts and rates – This includes rates and who to contact at each publication.

### 7.4.2 Our Place Our Future

Council has developed the branding Our Place Our Future for all strategic planning projects so that these activities are easily recognisable by the community. No additional sub-branding for particular projects is therefore allowed.

### 7.4.3 e-Engagement

There are a number of opportunities for engaging with the community using online platforms. The in-house online engagement opportunities currently available to council include:

- Council's website ([www.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au](http://www.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au)) offers dedicated project webpages. Discuss how to access these with the Media and Public Relations team.
- Online questionnaires/surveys and analysis. Council is currently using a tool called Survey Monkey [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com). Discuss how to access these with the Media and Public Relations team.
- Live Chat – customer inquiry responded to by the Customer Contact Centre. This requires extensive briefing of the Customer Service Centre officers by the Project Manager.
- Council's Facebook page. Discuss how to access these with the Media and Public Relations team. Also refer to the *Social Media – guidelines for management and use*<sup>6</sup> on the intranet for further information about council's Facebook activities.

There are a number of other external online engagement applications available to council projects for a fee. Your engagement planning process will need to allow for the setup and expense of these applications. The name of the application and a short description is provided below.

If you are considering using one of these tools it is important you contact Information Technology Services to ensure their compatibility with council's systems.



#### Survey Monkey

Design, collect and analyse online surveys

[www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)



#### Bang the Table

Interactive forum linking discussion topics to library items, project team members, key dates, surveys and external websites, analysis and reporting capabilities.

[www.bangthetable.com](http://www.bangthetable.com)



#### Darzin

Data analysis and stakeholder management

[www.darzin.com](http://www.darzin.com)



#### Consultation Manager

Stakeholder Relationship Management

[www.consultationmanager.com](http://www.consultationmanager.com)



#### Objective - uEngage

uEngage is a multi-channel, web-based consultation platform for consultation management, analysis and reporting.

[www.objective.com](http://www.objective.com)

#### 7.4.4 Social Media

The rise in popularity and proven effectiveness of social media as a powerful tool in communicating to the wider public has resulted in the development of council's Facebook page.

Responsibility for the management of council's Facebook page is shared between Customer Relations Branch and the Customer Contact Centre. Facebook will be used to communicate to 'friends' to:

- Promote and market council events, projects and programs
- Provide news updates on significant ongoing projects
- Respond to community issues with up-to-date council information on the issue
- Receive and respond to inquiries and comments such as Customer Requests
- Provide up-to-the-minute advice and guidance regarding disasters and crises

Please refer to the *Social Media – guidelines for management and use* on the intranet for further information about council's Facebook activities.



#### 7.4.5 SMS Notification System

Emergency alert including SMS will be used by the Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) in the case of an emergency to inform communities of a potential major threat.

At present, SMS facility is available only for the purposes of disaster communication and is not available for community engagement projects.

#### 7.5 Taskforces and advisory groups

From time to time council may establish taskforces and advisory panels to provide council with advice on key strategic issues or major projects. Council's Community Engagement Policy states that these taskforces will:

- Be established by council resolution
- Have specific terms of reference
- Explore a major strategic or regional issue
- Have a defined timeframe
- Report to council at least once every six months
- Be chaired by a suitably qualified external person or councillor (with no councillor chairing more than two panels or taskforces)
- Identify staff resources to act as project officer and secretary to the taskforce or panel.

Examples of taskforces and advisory groups established by resolution of council are:

- Energy Transition Reference Group
- Housing Affordability Taskforce
- Sustainability Advisory Panel
- Urban Design Advisory Panel
- Cycling Reference Group
- Community Transport Group
- Tourism Advisory Group
- Maleny Community Precinct Advisory Group

## 7.6 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People protocols

For cultural heritage purposes, council recognises the Gubbi Gubbi and Jinibara peoples as the traditional land owners of the Sunshine Coast. Council's position is based on the best current information. There is, however, ongoing discussion within the local Aboriginal community regarding native title and council may change its position, if and when the Federal Court determines native title claims in the region. Traditionally, the Gubbi Gubbi people lived on the coast and on the adjacent ranges while the Jinibara people lived in the south-western parts of the region.

In recent years government departments and agencies, as well as private and public organisations, have put in place protocols that recognise and pay due respects to the first people of Australia. This has occurred within the national context of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and an international movement that acknowledges the special and important role Indigenous communities play in the development of a country's cultural identity.

In Australia, there are two traditional protocols that are in widespread use:

- A Welcome to Country protocol – a direct descendant of the original Indigenous inhabitants, usually an Elder, welcomes visitors to his/her traditional lands ("country")
- An Acknowledgement protocol – used by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous speakers to pay due respect to the traditional Indigenous inhabitants'

### 7.6.1 Welcome to Country

Welcome to Country, also known as the Traditional Welcome, allows the Traditional Custodians of the region to give their blessing for the event to take place on their land. It must be done by a representative of the Traditional Custodians of the location at which the event is taking place.

A Welcome to Country is usually used only for significant public events and openings. It can include a speech and/or performance. Generally speaking, there is a small fee associated with a traditional custodian performing a Welcome to Country and this should be arranged prior to the event.

### 7.6.2 Acknowledgement

An Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners is part of, and should precede, any acknowledgement of VIPs and special guests at civic occasions, functions and smaller public events. Council recommends the following for use as its Acknowledgement:

*"I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is being held on Aboriginal land and recognise the strength, resilience and capacity of Aboriginal people in this land".*

In addition, council recommends the following wording as a longer Acknowledgement, which could be used for publications, and where a more comprehensive version is warranted:

*'We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands from across Queensland and pay our respects to the leaders both past, present and future for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Indigenous people across the state.'*

For more information and resources assistance regarding Indigenous protocols, please contact council's Community Development Branch.

For more information and resources regarding engagement with Indigenous people, go to:

Sunshine Coast Libraries – <http://sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/library/sitePage.cfm?code=indigenous-history>

Sunshine Coast Indigenous Network Group – <http://community.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au>

## 7.7 Engaging with specific community groups

Some community groups within the Sunshine Coast have particular needs that should be considered when planning for engagement activities. Below is a list of relevant external stakeholder groups and some considerations when engaging with them.

When undertaking widespread community engagement, consideration needs to be given to how your process will accommodate the particular needs of community groups within the region.

### 7.7.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

*At the time of the 2006 Census, there were 3,354 persons in Sunshine Coast Regional Council Local Government Area who stated they were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. These persons made up 1.2 per cent of the total population (compared with 3.3 per cent in Queensland).<sup>8</sup>*

Through preliminary work towards council's Reconciliation Action Plan, a number of positive ways for engaging with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community have been identified: These include:

- Acknowledging the traditional custodians of the region
- Recognising the valuable contribution Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make to the community
- Celebrating the culture, heritage and history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Being aware of and complying with relevant legislation
- Using culturally innovative methods of capturing ideas
- Building relationships through talking and listening
- Using appropriate cultural tools of engagement
- Recognising the process may at times be challenging
- Needing to be flexible in learning new ways to engage.

For more information and assistance regarding engaging with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community please contact Community Development Branch.



### 7.7.2 Seniors

The Sunshine Coast region has a large community of Seniors. They contribute valuable life skills and draw upon a range of experiences when participating in community engagement processes. Sunshine Coast Council values Seniors' participation in community life and acknowledges the significant number of support volunteers from this group.

One of the biggest challenges faced when engaging Seniors on the Sunshine Coast is letting them know about your project. Traditional marketing methods such as articles in local papers work well with Seniors. However, also consider the opportunity for online engagement to complement the more traditional approaches. Success can be achieved by utilising a combination of the following communication methods:

- *The Seniors Newspaper*  
(over 52,000 copies distributed monthly)
- Libraries
- Customer Contact centres
- Individual engagement with local organisations working with seniors
- Council's *Encompass Magazine*
- Advertising in the local paper and on local radio

For more information and assistance regarding engaging Seniors please contact Community Development Branch.

### 7.7.3 Young people

Council's Speak Up Engage<sup>9</sup> program involved a two-year action-based research project on how young people engage. One of the major program outcomes is the development of the Sunshine Coast Youth Strategy 2010 – 2015. The strategy has a focus on youth engagement and commits council to engaging with young people, in all aspects of the organisation and community life, not just those that are traditionally associated with young people e.g. skate parks. Council departments that are planning to undertake youth-specific consultation should consider utilising the Speak Up Engage youth engagement process, which involves:

- Council and young people working in partnership
- Youth-friendly media and promotion
- Social media
- Interpersonal, peer-based communication

Speak Up Engage is a recognisable brand within the Sunshine Coast region and young people acknowledge that it represents an authentic and credible youth engagement process. It was developed and designed by young people and therefore they have a connection and sense of ownership over Speak Up Engage which encourages ongoing interest and ultimately engagement and participation.

Council can also utilise the Speak Up Engage Facebook page to connect with young people in the community. This Facebook page, which was established in 2009, is used to:

- Communicate information about youth programs to young people in the community.
- Create and maintain regular contact with young people in the community on youth-specific matters, including activities, events, workshops and opportunities for youth engagement.
- Share information on council's strategies, programs and opportunities for young people to engage with council.

For further information on engaging young people or the Speak Up Engage program contact Community Development Branch.

### 7.7.4 People with a disability

People living with a disability in the Sunshine Coast region are often unable to participate in community engagement processes because of specific barriers to participation that are unintentionally not addressed (either online or in person). Sometimes, it is as simple as choosing a venue that has appropriate access (disability parking, toilets, public transport) or providing consultation documents in a variety of formats (audio, Braille). Sometimes, the needs are more complex and require hearing loops or sign language for people with hearing impairments (in the case of techniques involving groups of people).

If your participants are asked before the engagement activity what their individual barriers to participation or requirements are, options can be identified and planned for.

General tips for engaging with members of the community with a disability:

- Acknowledgement/awareness of differences in abilities
- Always respect human rights of individuals (identify risk of discrimination)
- Avoid community engagement processes that may exclude people with limited sight/vision, hearing and mobility access.
- Choose multiple consultation and promotional methods (web-based and non-web-based; for people who don't have access to computers)
- Explore public spaces for consultation and promotional activities (not all people with disabilities have access to computers) e.g. shopping centres, libraries, community markets, community 'free' newspapers.

When producing written communication the following should be considered:

- Adapt text and designs for people with visual impairments
- Print material needs to be multiple formats (MS Word, pdfs and audio formats (and consideration of Braille)

When engaging with members of community with a disability during face-to-face engagement activities such as conversations, community forums, information sessions, discussion groups:

- Ask participants to identify if they have any mobility or other requirements to participate (e.g. hearing loops).
- Observe non-verbal behaviour (respect cultural differences in greetings, acknowledgement, agreement – nodding of the head and other such cues).
- **Choose venues that are accessible i.e. accessible walkways, lighting on pathways at night and facilities** (parking and toilets for people with disabilities). Meetings need to be on the ground level of buildings for emergency access.
- Equipment for workshops etc. needs to be adapted to accommodate people with disabilities (e.g. tables, chairs, microphones, lecterns).

### 7.7.5 People from diverse cultural backgrounds

Those people for whom English is not their primary language or who were born into a different culture can often experience barriers to participation. Spending some time planning for this prior to the commencement of an engagement process can ensure you reach the diverse population of the Sunshine Coast.

General tips for engaging people from diverse cultural backgrounds:

- Acknowledgement/awareness of differences in languages/body language and customs
- Always respect human rights of individuals (identify risk of discrimination)
- Avoid community engagement processes that may exclude people with limited English language skills (verbal or non-verbal).
- Choose multiple consultation and promotional methods (web-based and non-web-based for people who may not have access to computers).
- Explore public spaces for consultation and promotional activities (not all people from different cultural communities access council or other government services) e.g. shopping centres, libraries, community markets, community 'free' newspapers.

When producing written communication the following should be considered:

- Use simple language, avoid acronyms or jargon
- Use symbols and pictures
- Consider if materials need to be developed in other languages.

When engaging with members of the community from diverse cultural backgrounds during face-to-face engagement activities such as conversations, community forums, information sessions or discussion groups:

- Speak clearly and simply without being patronising
- Observe non-verbal behaviour (respect cultural differences in greetings, acknowledgement, agreement – nodding of the head and other such cues)
- Avoid questions with a 'yes' or 'no' response
- Clarify if the person requires translation. The Translating and Interpreting Service is available for use.

### Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) National

All council staff can use the TIS National (free to council and easy to use). To access an interpreter immediately via conference call:

**STEP 1** – Ascertain the language or dialect required e.g. Italian, Turkish, Harari. Check if council's language bank has an officer available of that language who may be able to help with these next few steps.

**STEP 2** – Call the TIS National on **131 450** – provide the following information:

- Council's client code – C667243
- The name of the client (person requiring assistance) and their contact details
- The language or dialect required.

**STEP 3** – Commence call

Pre-booking a telephone interpreter in advance will ensure that any special requirements can be catered for, and that the services of the highest qualified interpreter available can be secured for the time you nominate. This may be important if your interview is likely to be of long duration, or in a new and emerging or high-demand language. Other options are also available including Automated Telephone Interpreting Service (ATIS) and on-site interpreting.

Written translation requires an accredited language translator especially if there is the possibility of legal implications.

For further information, go to:

[http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/help-with-english/help\\_with\\_translating/how-use-tis/english-speakers.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/help-with-english/help_with_translating/how-use-tis/english-speakers.htm)

## 8.0 TECHNIQUES

There are a number of techniques or methods you can select to engage with stakeholders. It is important to note that there is not one single technique which will be the most suitable in every instance, nor will it be likely that only one technique will be utilised. Selecting techniques which are appropriate to the purpose of the engagement and the specific project or issue requires you to make some judgement in relation to:

- Scope of project
- Identified internal and external stakeholders
- Project parameters – the decisions to be made, the negotiable aspects, the non-negotiable aspects
- Inherent issues and risks of the project.

This section provides you with a snapshot of possible techniques that you could use to engage the community. It is important to remember that the techniques you select meet your engagement objectives and the level of influence the community will have over the decision.

For more detailed information about specific techniques and how to organise and implement them, please refer to the Community Engagement Toolkit.

**Community engagement objectives determine which techniques are suitable.**

### Techniques for Information Sharing

Newsletter / Media Release / Poster / Email / Facebook / Site Signage

### Techniques for Seeking Feedback

Comment form / One-on-one Interview / Survey / Voting

### Techniques for e-Engagement

Blog / Online Forum / Online Survey / Facebook / File Sharing / Webpage

### Techniques for Involving Groups of People

Focus Group / World Café / Fishbowl Process / Charrettes or Enquiry by Design / Study Circles / Open Space Meetings / Advisory Groups / Citizen Jury

### Techniques for Closing the Loop

Written Report / Celebratory Event / Mayoral Reception / DVD Production

## 8.1 Techniques for Information Sharing

Example Community Engagement Objectives	Example Techniques
<p>To provide stakeholders with balanced and objective information about the project.</p> <p>To develop widespread understanding and recognition of the project.</p>	<p><b>Newsletter</b> A newsletter provides information about the background to and updates for the project, timing and a point of contact for further information.</p> <p><b>Media Release</b> An announcement to media outlets (newspaper, radio) about an event, project or position including basic information and a point of contact.</p> <p><b>Poster</b> A highly visual way of conveying information about a project that contains basic information and a point of contact for further information.</p> <p><b>Email</b> A written advice to internal and/or external stakeholders informing them of the project.</p> <p><b>Site Signage</b> Visual signage that gives the public information about a project relevant to that particular site. Site signage contains basic information and a point of contact for further information.</p>

## 8.2 Techniques for Seeking Feedback

Example Community Engagement Objectives	Example Techniques
<p>To obtain feedback from the stakeholders on the proposal/ options.</p> <p>To communicate to stakeholders how their input has been considered in the project.</p>	<p><b>Comment Form</b> Formal display of a plan or document is available and the community is invited to make comment or provide feedback on the proposal.</p> <p><b>One-on-one Interview</b> Structured discussion with stakeholders to enable information exchange and deeper exploration of issues and concerns. Interviews can assist in building rapport early on in a project.</p> <p><b>Survey</b> A structured tool to gather data and information, e.g. a questionnaire used to assess needs, gain feedback or gauge community opinion. Can obtain both quantitative (demographics, numbers, discrete answers) and qualitative (ideas, comments, feedback) data.</p> <p><b>Voting</b> Once options have been worked through, decision makers present these options to the community for preferential voting. The decision makers may commit to implementing the most preferred option.</p>

### 8.3 Techniques for e-Engagement

Example Community Engagement Objectives	Example Techniques
To develop widespread understanding and recognition of the project.	<p><b>Facebook</b> The use of social networking website Facebook to share information with the community about an event, program, project or issue. Only 'friends' will receive postings.</p>
To obtain feedback from the stakeholders on the proposal/ options.	<p><b>Blogs</b> An online journal-like entry providing regular commentary regarding an issue or description of events. Blogs are usually maintained daily with most recent posts displayed first.</p>
To identify and enhance opportunities for partnerships in the development and implementation of the project.	<p><b>Online Forum</b> A group discussion about a topic or issue whereby people can participate and contribute over an extended period of time. Participants can respond to other people's comments and follow the 'thread' of conversation.</p>
To provide an opportunity for stakeholders to access information and provide input at a time and location convenient to them.	<p><b>File Sharing</b> The distribution or provision of access to a range of electronically stored documents including text-based documents, video, photos and images.</p> <p><b>Webpage</b> A repository of information displayed via the World Wide Web and accessible through a web browser.</p> <p><b>Online Survey</b> A structured tool to gather data and information, e.g. a questionnaire used to assess needs, gain feedback or gauge community opinion. Can obtain both quantitative (demographics, numbers, discrete answers) and qualitative (ideas, comments, feedback) data. The survey is distributed, completed and collated via an online environment.</p>

## 8.4 Techniques for Involving Groups of People

Example Community Engagement Objectives	Example Techniques
To seek community input into design considerations of the master plan options.	<p><b>Focus Group</b> Semi-structured interview with a small group of invited representative participants. Can be useful for determining how to engage on large-scale, long-term projects.</p>
To determine community expectations for continued use of a site.	<p><b>Public Meeting</b> Formal presentation of information to the public usually involving large numbers of people. The community are then given the opportunity to provide feedback.</p>
To assist stakeholders to develop a sense of ownership of the project and process.	<p><b>World Café</b> World Café is an informal discussion between groups of 4–6 people using a host/table facilitator and predetermined questions as a starting point. In-depth discussion occurs as participants move to different tables to add their responses.</p>
To work with stakeholders to confirm the scope of the project.	<p><b>Fishbowl Process</b> A process where the public is invited to view decision maker deliberations as if in a fishbowl.</p>
To identify and enhance opportunities for partnerships in the development and implementation of the project.	<p><b>Charrettes or Enquiry by Design</b> Intensive workshop/s involving stakeholders and decision makers to brainstorm ideas, create options and develop criteria for decision making.</p>
To support the stakeholders to make a decision.	<p><b>Study Circles</b> A study circle is a series of small groups of people who work on behalf of the wider community on a particular issue or project. Each study circle is facilitated by a person trained in delivery of the technique.</p>
To implement the decision reached by the stakeholders.	<p><b>Open Space Meetings</b> Open Space meetings are impromptu meetings whose agendas are decided upon by the people in attendance. Topics of discussion are determined by participants according to their personal interests.</p>
	<p><b>Advisory Groups</b> Advisory groups are a formalised process to bring representatives of the community together for a specific purpose. Their role is to provide feedback and advice to decision makers. Advisory groups are usually assembled following an expression of interest process and require the development of clear terms of reference.</p>
	<p><b>Revolving Conversations</b> The Revolving Conversation is a meeting without a leader. Only those seated within the inner circle are allowed to contribute to the discussion. When participants no longer wish to add to the conversation they can move to the outer circle, allowing space for a new person to join the conversation.</p>

### 8.5 Techniques for Closing the Loop

Example Community Engagement Objectives	Example Techniques
<p>To communicate to stakeholders how their input has been considered in the project.</p> <p>To celebrate the opening of a facility.</p> <p>To announce the launch of an endorsed strategy.</p>	<p>Techniques listed under Techniques for Information Sharing may be applicable to “Closing the Loop”.</p> <p><b>Written Report</b> A summary report detailing the project background, methodology, results of an engagement process and recommendations or considerations for the progression of the project. The audience may be internal or external stakeholders.</p> <p><b>Celebratory Event</b> An event held to celebrate the conclusion of a project (usually the opening of a facility) which may include site tours, experiential activities and special guests.</p> <p><b>Civic Reception</b> A function held by council and hosted by the mayor and councillors.</p> <p><b>DVD Production</b> A multimedia production to capture the progress and story of a project. These can often be used to showcase the project and council or be used as case studies for action learning.</p>



## 9.0 THE EIGHT-STEP PROCESS



**STEP 1**  
Deciding  
to engage



**STEP 5**  
Confirming  
your community  
engagement plan



**STEP 2**  
Determining  
the purpose  
for engaging



**STEP 6**  
Starting your  
community  
engagement



**STEP 3**  
Identifying  
who to  
engage with



**STEP 7**  
Analysing and  
evaluating  
community  
engagement



**STEP 4**  
Choosing  
how to  
engage



**STEP 8**  
Closing  
the loop



### 9.1 Step 1 – Deciding to engage

This step assists you to determine whether there is a need to engage. This step is essential to avoid wasted council resources and the disappointment of the community from participation in an engagement process that will not influence an outcome or decision.

A series of prompt questions have been provided to help you. A key has been developed to be a visual prompt and is based on a traffic light system. The lights system is to be complemented by your professional judgement and knowledge of the project.



**Must engage**



**May choose to engage**



**Don't engage**



**Seek more information**

Question	Answer	Deciding to Engage	Comments
Has the decision already been made?	Yes		Inform the community only.
	Unsure		You may choose to engage.
	No		Unsure – find out what in the project is negotiable.
Is there a statutory requirement to engage?	Yes		Engage.
	No		You may choose to engage.
Has the community already provided feedback on this issue?	Yes		You may choose to engage.
	No		Engage.
	Unsure		Unsure – refer to the Community Engagement Register
Can the community's involvement in the project contribute to or enhance the outcome to be achieved?	Yes		Engage.
	No		Inform the community only.
	Unsure		You may choose to engage.
Are there benefits to the community from being involved (i.e. education, improved relations, capacity building and networks)?	Yes		Engage.
	No		You may choose to engage.
	Unsure		You may choose to engage.
Is there benefit or value of engaging internally?	Yes		Engage.
	No		Inform internal stakeholders only.
	Unsure		You may choose to engage.

If your responses have given you a  then you are ready to begin working on clarifying the purpose for engaging. If you have received a  then you might like to talk through your project with a Community Engagement Champion.

 Now that you have decided to engage with the community you need to determine, using the IAP2 Spectrum, what level of influence or level of decision making the community will have in relation to decisions being made about the project. This is now the stage to be in contact with the divisional councillor to jointly establish to what extent the community can influence the decision-making process and what level of engagement council is agreeable to.

Remember, if you feel “Inform” is the level you are likely to be working at for your project, you still need to reach this decision through discussion with the project team and with the appropriate divisional councillor.

To assist you in determining the appropriate level of community influence, the following prompts can be used. In considering your responses your professional judgement and discussion with colleagues will be necessary. As you become more experienced in engagement practice, determining the appropriate level of influence will be easier to establish.

Prompt	Anticipated Impact/Value		
	Low	Moderate	High
How would you rate the current or anticipated level of community interest in the project?			
What level of influence will the community have on the project?			
How would you rate the need for additional information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To progress the project</li> <li>To understand community values and aspirations</li> <li>To assist the development of policy</li> </ul>			
How would you rate the risk to council if the community is not engaged from the following aspects? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social</li> <li>Environmental</li> <li>Economic</li> </ul>			
If council did not involve the community in the project, what level of response would you anticipate from the community? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Political</li> <li>Media coverage</li> <li>Complaints</li> </ul>			
How would you rate the project's impact on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Region</li> <li>District</li> <li>Suburb</li> <li>Neighbourhood</li> </ul>			
How would you rate the potential financial impact of your project on the overall council financial operations?			
How would you rate the complexity of the project?			
How would you rate your need for specialised skill sets or input from specialists or external stakeholders?			

Considering the responses to the above prompts, use your professional assessment of the table together with the IAP2 Spectrum (goal and promise) to determine the best fit for the level of influence the community could have on the project or the decision to be made.

**If after working through this step you are still having difficulty, contact a Community Engagement Champion or the Partnerships and Engagement Branch for assistance.**



### 9.2 Step 2 – Determining the purpose for engaging

This step has been designed to assist you to clarify why you are engaging with the community and to identify community engagement objectives relevant to your project.

**In all projects some decisions are non-negotiable, others may be negotiable. Thinking about your project, what decisions may be negotiable?**

Non-negotiable	Negotiable

**For both negotiable and non-negotiable items you will need to determine community engagement objectives.**

Community engagement objectives describe what needs to be achieved with your stakeholders in the delivery of your project. Some of the objectives will be about actions or activities and some will be about the relationships with stakeholders. In other words, community engagement objectives describe:

- Why you need to involve internal and external stakeholders
- What you are seeking from them
- What internal and external stakeholders may be seeking from the project team.

Some sample generic community engagement objectives are listed below:

Community Engagement Objectives	
Actions and activities	To provide the stakeholders with balanced and objective information. To obtain feedback from the stakeholders on the proposal/options. To understand the issues, concerns and hopes of the stakeholders. To support the stakeholders to make the decision. Create multiple ways for stakeholders to provide input to the project. Ensure stakeholders are aware of how their input has been considered in the project. For the engagement process to be open and transparent. To work with stakeholders to confirm the scope of the project. To develop shared understanding of the local issues and factors impacting on the project.
Relationships	To partner with the stakeholders. Assist stakeholders to develop a sense of ownership of the project and the process. To develop mutual trust with key stakeholders.

The following prompts may help you to determine what you want to achieve by engaging the community.

- Information gathering only; location or interest-specific?
- Identification of needs
- Obtaining local knowledge or location-specific information
- Obtaining feedback on proposed activity
- Validation of research findings or raw data sets
- Seeking guidance or direction. (e.g. comments on a draft)
- Generating ideas
- Partnering with community for delivery of project
- Other



### 9.3 Step 3 – Identifying who to engage with

This step explores the appropriate and relevant stakeholders who should be involved in the engagement process. Identification of key stakeholders is vital to the success of the project and can involve members of the community (external stakeholders) and staff and councillors (internal stakeholders).

The following resources may be useful in developing a stakeholder list:

- Community Web Portal  
<http://community.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au>
- My Community Directory  
[www.mycommunitydirectory.com.au](http://www.mycommunitydirectory.com.au)
- Community Engagement Register
- Divisional Councillors
- Council officers

When considering stakeholders there is value in undertaking a Stakeholder Analysis to better understand expectations, how each stakeholder can add value to the project and communication needs that the stakeholder may have. Please refer to the Community Engagement Toolkit Templates section for a Stakeholder Analysis template.

The tables below are designed as prompts to help you identify internal and external stakeholders.

Who are the INTERNAL stakeholders to involve or be responsible for a role in the engagement process?	
CEO and Executive Office	Customer Contact
Mayor	Libraries
Divisional Councillor	Assets and Infrastructure
Portfolio Councillor	Information Technology
Community Services Department	Marketing and Communication
Finance and Business Department	Other
Infrastructure Services Department	
Regional Strategy and Planning Department	

Who are the members of the Project Team associated with this engagement process?	
Project Team Member	Role

Who are the EXTERNAL stakeholders to involve in the engagement process?	
General community	State and federal government
Community organisations/groups	Peak bodies
Existing advisory groups	
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders	Industry groups
Seniors	Private enterprise
People from diverse cultural backgrounds	Local business
Youth sector including young people	Unitywater
Disability sector	Other

Other considerations relating to stakeholders:

- What level of information do stakeholders need to make an informed decision about the project?
- What level of information are stakeholders likely to seek?
- Will all stakeholders' contributions influence the project equally?
- Is a community leader available to assist with the community engagement process?
- Will everyone interested in or potentially impacted on by the project have an opportunity to become involved?
- Have efforts been made to include under-represented communities in all community engagement processes?
- Are there any anticipated barriers preventing stakeholder participation such as physical, communication, economic, language, cultural and social barriers?





## 9.4 Step 4 – Choosing how to engage

This step enables you to identify and develop the appropriate methods to engage with the community. It gives you the tools to select engagement processes or techniques to meet your community engagement objectives and the needs of your stakeholders. Remember that the techniques you choose to include in your community engagement plan will also be influenced by the IAP2 spectrum level of influence the community will have, as determined in step 2.

### List possible techniques

A number of different techniques may be suitable depending on your objectives.

Community Engagement Objective	Possible Techniques

### Considerations to refine choices

Once you have identified several options that meet these objectives it is important to evaluate these options in terms of their suitability in relation to:

- Stakeholders' needs
- How many participants might be involved in the process? A workshop for 40 people will require different locations and resources than a workshop for 400 people.
- What scale is the project – regional, coastal, hinterland, neighbourhood or issue-specific?
- Are you hoping to inspire and motivate volunteers or potential partners?
- Will the technique achieve one or more of the community engagement objectives?
- How well does the technique fit the target audience?
- Is the technique appropriate to the nature of the project or issue?
- Will the technique meet legal requirements?
- Are there any special circumstances which may affect the use of the technique?
- How well will the technique address other factors?
- Special circumstances related to technique
- Level of risk associated with delivery of technique
- Previous success of technique
- Need for complementary techniques

- Knowledge and experience with technique
- Adequacy for technique or combination of techniques to meet stakeholders' needs, decision makers' needs, and process objectives.

### Resources for implementing techniques

- Do you require a venue to implement the technique? If so, where will be suitable?
- Can the technique be implemented within the team's capability or will you require the services of an external consultant?
- What is the cost involved in implementing the technique and do you have adequate resources to pay for this technique?
- Do you require any special equipment to implement this technique?

### Communication strategies to support implementation

- What time period is required to notify stakeholders, allow for response, analyse contributions and use the input to influence the decision or outcome?
- How effective will the technique be in reaching the right audience?
- How will you record and incorporate community contribution received as a result of the technique?
- How will you evaluate the effectiveness of the technique?



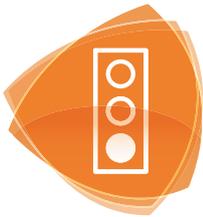
### 9.5 Step 5 – Confirming your community engagement plan

This step enables you to develop a Community Engagement Plan suitable to your project's purpose, and considering your audience. It will become part of your Project Brief and Communication Plan. Please use the Community Engagement Plan template to develop your plan, using this Framework as a guide to complete relevant sections.

Your completed Community Engagement Plan is to be signed off by the relevant councillor(s), manager(s) and/or supervisor(s) prior to the commencement of the community engagement process.

Refer to council's community engagement intranet page to access example plans and the current Community Engagement Plan template.





**9.6 Step 6 – Starting your community engagement**

This step relates to carrying out the activities contained in the Community Engagement Plan. Tracking and reporting on progress of the project and reporting to the project team and decision makers will be necessary. Ensure the councillors and project team members (if applicable) understand their role in the implementation of the plan and are kept informed as to the progress of the engagement.

For reporting purposes you should take note of the following:

Community engagement commenced	Date
Community engagement concluded	Date
Number of participants	
Number of submissions	
Project News releases	Date/s



## 9.7 Step 7 – Analysing and evaluating community engagement

This step involves analysing and interpreting feedback received from the techniques carried out in Step 6.

### Compilation of information and analysis

All data collected during an engagement process must be analysed, summarised and presented in a useful way to inform decision makers, whether the decision-making responsibility rests with internal stakeholders or is a shared undertaking between council and stakeholders. Once analysis and interpretation has been conducted, recommendations can be made to progress the overall project.

Engagement includes the commitment that the community's contribution will be used and they will be informed about how their contribution was used.

The following list provides a guide to some of the things you may need to consider when analysing and summarising information that will inform decision makers.

- How many people participated in the engagement process?
- What areas were represented by stakeholders?
  - Specific interest
  - Residents
  - Sectors
  - Geographic specific
- The differences in views/ideas from each are of interest, e.g. residents had one view and organised groups had another
- The degree of agreement/disagreement/tension over the matter of consideration
- Include the raw data of the community engagement as appendices in your final report to council
- Use the data gained from community engagement in a timely and meaningful way.

### Evaluating a community engagement process

It is important to review the engagement activities or techniques used as well as the Eight-Step Process and how effective the community engagement was by the extent to which it led to a more informed decision. Evaluation can help keep a project on track, improve project delivery for the future and improve officers' practical skills.

When evaluating the effectiveness of engagement activities or techniques you may like to consider the following:

- Did stakeholders perceive that the process fairly considered their input?
- Did stakeholders perceive that decision makers were sincere in their desire to obtain public input?
- Did participants understand the objectives and process?
- Did the participants perceive that the process was sufficiently flexible to address issues as they arose?
- Did participants believe that they had the information they needed to contribute to the level they desired?
- Was the process implemented as planned? If not, what was changed and why?

It is important to note that evaluation of a community engagement process does not need to wait until the end of a project. It can be particularly useful if you are facing challenges within your engagement or it is not progressing according to your initial plan. The following prompt questions may help you to redirect your engagement back towards your objectives.

- Is this input from the stakeholders useful to the process?
- Did the stakeholders get the information they needed to provide meaningful input?
- How were the stakeholders' expectations met by this activity?
- Do the stakeholders believe the organisation is sincere in its community engagement efforts?
- Were the goals of the activity met?
- Have the community engagement objectives for this step been met?
- Has anything occurred to warrant changes to the existing plan?
- Is the internal commitment of all parties still in place?

Process evaluation includes reviewing each of the eight steps and making a judgement as to whether you would do things differently next time you are engaging with the community. It also means reflecting on and celebrating the things that worked well in your engagement process and sharing this with your colleagues. Consider both the short and long-term outcomes associated with the project and include intangible benefits such as educating the public and building goodwill and trust. A lot of evaluation occurs intuitively and is learning by experience; however, by recording your experience in the Project Report and on the Community Engagement Register, this experience can be stored, shared and accessed for future projects.

Some prompts to guide the evaluation of the process of engagement are included below:

- Was it clear to the stakeholders how their input was used?
- Was the final decision generally acceptable to the public?
- Are participants satisfied overall with the process that was used to complete the project?
- Was the level of community engagement adequate to represent the concerns of those impacted by the project?
- Did the input from the stakeholders contribute to a better overall outcome?
- Did decision makers believe that stakeholder input helped to make a better outcome?

Finally, when considering the effectiveness of your Community Engagement Plan it is useful to refer to the five engagement principles discussed in the Community Engagement Policy – of timeliness, information and feedback, mutual respect, action learning and foresight.

#### **Timeliness**

- Did council engage with the community in a timely manner?
- Was the engagement open to all interested stakeholders?
- Was the project and process easily understood?
- How resource-intensive was the process? What would be required in future?

#### **Information and Feedback**

- Did the community receive regular updates regarding the project?
- Has the community received feedback on how their input has been used to influence the project?

#### **Mutual Respect**

- Have under-represented groups of the Sunshine Coast been given the opportunity to contribute?
- Is the engagement process regarded as respectful by the community and by council staff?
- Can council and the community celebrate a positive interaction and positive outcome?

#### **Action Learning**

- What can be considered innovative in the engagement process?
- How has past engagement practice enhanced or improved this experience?

#### **Foresight**

- Has council gained a better understanding of the community's perspective on emerging issues that may affect our preferred future?



### 9.8 Step 8 – Closing the loop

This step guides you in ensuring that all stakeholders know how their contribution informed the decision that was made or the project outcome.

By 'Closing the loop' with participants they will know how their input has been considered and are more likely to participate in future engagement activities. Everybody wants to know that the time they have given towards a project has made a difference and is valued. If stakeholders receive information throughout the process on the progress to date and how others involved in the process view the issues, they are more likely to accept the final decision and help, if required, to implement it.

Considerations for Closing the loop effectively:

- Set communication outcomes as part of your overall project plan.
- Focus the information on what people need to know to be informed participants.
- Deliver your communication through appropriate methods and channels in a timely and credible way.

**Closing the loop also applies to internal stakeholders. Make sure you meet your project reporting requirements.**



## 10.0 TEMPLATES

### 10.1 Community Engagement Plan

Refer to council's community engagement intranet page for current templates.

## 11.0 REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Sunshine Coast Council, 2009. *Community Engagement Policy*.

<sup>2</sup> *Local Government Act 2009* (Qld).

<sup>3</sup> *Integrity Act 2009* (Qld).

<sup>4</sup> International Association for Public Participation, 2007. *IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum*. [http://www.iap2.org/associations/4748/files/IAP2%20Spectrum\\_vertical.pdf](http://www.iap2.org/associations/4748/files/IAP2%20Spectrum_vertical.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Sunshine Coast Regional Council, *Corporate Plan 2009 – 2014*.

<sup>6</sup> Sunshine Coast Council, 2011. *Social Media – guidelines for management and use*.

<sup>7</sup> Gold Coast City Council, *Indigenous Protocol*. [http://cultural.goldcoast.qld.gov.au/t\\_cultural.aspx?pid=7885](http://cultural.goldcoast.qld.gov.au/t_cultural.aspx?pid=7885)

<sup>8</sup> Office of Economic and Statistical Research, 2011. *Queensland Regional Profile; Sunshine Coast Regional Council*, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Sunshine Coast Council, 2010. *Speak Up Engage: Sunshine Coast Council's Youth Engagement Program Report*.





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