

Community Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement Policy

Corporate and Community Services

June 2023



This policy sets the governing principles for Community Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement that align with the Shire of Augusta Margaret River's (the Shire's) Strategic Community Plan 2040: Focus Area Performance: Outcome PF.2: Community and customer focus.

Objectives

This policy provides guiding principles to ensure consistent, inclusive, meaningful, and effective community and stakeholder engagement is conducted by the Shire.

Application

This policy applies to all Shire employees and Councillors who undertake projects or deliver services that impact the community. Depending on the nature of a project or service, a variety of methods can be applied to engage with diverse stakeholders in accordance with the Shire's Community Engagement Guide and Framework.

This policy facilitates community involvement in Shire projects, plans, strategies and policy development, and ensures inclusivity within informal, statutory and legislative consultation processes.

Definitions

Engagement – The practice of actively bringing community voices into decisions that affect or interest them, using a range of methods.

Consultation – Seeking and receiving feedback or opinion, usually on a proposed plan or decision, e.g. seeking comment on a draft policy or concept.

Community – A general term for individuals and groups of people not part of an organised structure or group. They may be a community based on location, or interest, or both, e.g. residents of Augusta, people impacted by proposed traffic management measures, young people interested in art.

Level of engagement – Refers to any one of five levels of engagement (inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower) defined by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum to describe the community's role in any engagement program.

Place-based approaches – a contemporary philosophy and framework for engagement that targets the specific circumstances of a place and engages local people as active participants in development and implementation, requiring government to share decision-making.

Stakeholders – People who are organised under the banner of a defined group or organisation, often providing representation to a broader group, e.g. Chambers of Commerce, a local school or precinct group.

Human Centred Design – Is an approach that leads to the creation of government services that align with people’s needs and desires. Involving end users in the overall design process leads to greater buy-in and impact.

Policy

The Shire is committed to providing opportunities for all members of the community to participate in and contribute to local decision-making processes. We recognise that our community is a source of knowledge and expertise, and this is harnessed to help find solutions to local issues as well as complex shire challenges.

Community engagement is a key part of the Shire’s commitment to be a transparent and responsive organisation, delivering high quality and appropriate facilities and services and the best possible customer experience through every interaction. By bringing the voices of communities and stakeholders into the topics that are important to them, we lead a culture that respects and welcomes community input.

This policy is centred on:

- The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) ‘Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement’ that promotes five context dependent levels of engagement: *Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower*.
- Following principles of place-based approaches; including citizen-led, asset based and strength focused engagement responsive to diverse townsites.
- Following a human centred design approach; seeking to create and adjust services to align with the needs and desires of the community;
- The Local Government Act (1995) which requires all Councils to actively engage with their local communities.

The Shire’s engagement approach is guided by the following principal statements:

1. We carefully plan engagement design and whom to involve

Before beginning to engage, we identify the local places and stakeholders who are directly involved in or are likely to be affected by the project. The Shire will adopt a four stage approach to ensure a consistent approach to engagement activities, consisting of:

- Planning; developing an engagement plan;
- Doing; preparing and engaging;
- Reporting; analysing information, providing updates on the engagement and providing feedback to stakeholders; and
- Evaluating; both the process and outcomes of the engagement.

2. We are committed to working with Traditional Land Owners

The Shire acknowledges and is committed to regularly engaging and working collaboratively with the Wadandi and Pibelmen leaders to provide input and guidance for ongoing stewardship of the environment with Boodja (country).

3. We prioritise accessible, diverse and inclusive engagement

Quality community engagement is well planned and executed, inclusive and accessible to all members of the community. We recognise people engage with the Shire in different ways. We aim to be responsive to our community’s broad spectrum of needs, by ensuring our processes, venues and information are accessible. We strive to deliver information that is clear and in easy to understand formats, or that it is available in alternative formats on request. Our engagement events and venues are designed to be accessible whenever practical and achievable.

We are responsive to community needs for engagement and are supportive of projects that are citizen-led.

4. We consult early and clearly communicate the community’s role throughout engagement

We aim to be transparent and make our decision-making process clear. We do this by explaining upfront the process to be undertaken, identifying where there are opportunities for the community and stakeholders to have input, and where the decision points are. We provide clear, comprehensive and accessible information, written in plain English, to stakeholders throughout the engagement process.

From the outset, we articulate the purpose or outcome of our engagement and what will happen with the information gathered. We explain what level of influence the community, stakeholders and Council have on the decision to be made, and any associated limitations or constraints. We consider the requirements for each project and its level of potential impact on the community to determine the required level and timing of engagement.

We acknowledge contributions made during the engagement process and let participants know how their feedback was used in our decision-making. Where possible, we build on the outcomes of previous engagements. If the engagement crosses over with a previous engagement process, we explain the outcomes, identify how they relate to the current process and why a new process is required.

5. We deliver engagement methods that are relevant to context and place

The level of engagement will vary depending on the nature and complexity of the project or decision and is overall guided by the Shire’s community engagement principles as detailed in this policy and associated procedures and guidelines.

The level of community participation that is appropriate depends on the level and scale of impact. This is determined with consideration of:

- The urgency of the issue and the time available for deliberation and decision making;
- The availability of resources (including staff, facilitation skills, venues, technology and financial resources);
- The need to involve local community groups, specific local places and stakeholders in matters that will affect them;
- Complexity of the issues, the history of a project or the extent of stakeholders and avoiding consultation fatigue in the community;
- Degree that issues are of importance across the Shire;
- Need to build trust and respect;
- Desire to be community-led and make space for communities to develop local initiatives and solutions;
- Reviewing the risk impacts and consequent implications on timeframes and approvals for the consultation;
- Legislative requirements.

The level of engagement with the community or local government area (LGA) will be determined according to the scope of the issue or project:

Level of impact	Definition	Level	Project examples	Engagement method examples
High impact on LGA	High level of impact or interest on all or a large part of the Shire. Potential high impact on state or regional strategies or directions.	Consult Involve Collaborate Empower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Strategic Plan • Coastal Management Plan • Decisions that could have a major 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large group/stakeholder collaboration • Meetings by invitation • Meetings with Council

			environmental impact	committees/advisory groups
Low impact on LGA*	Lower level of impact or interest across the whole Shire. Level of interest among various communities or stakeholder groups.	Inform Consult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes to opening times for a facility Street signage strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online discussion forums or webinars Citizens jury or panel Appreciative Inquiry Conversation cafes Action research and co-design
High impact on local area or group	High level of impact on a local area, small community or user group(s) of a specific facility or service. Potential for a high degree of community interest at the local level.	Consult Involve Collaborate Empower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement to playgrounds Changes to specific services Local traffic management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local or interest-specific reference group Local survey Focus group Pop-up/Market Public Meeting Drop-in session Personal briefing or interviews
Low impact on local area or group*	Lower level of impact or interest in a local area, small community or user group of a specific facility or service. Only a small change to a facility or service at the local level.	Inform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor bridge or road repairs Renewal of street furniture Bushfire mitigation works 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted email Letterbox drop Social media News feed or blog Media release or advertising

* There are some circumstances where some minor statutory planning projects fall under this low impact threshold (also refer to principle 8: Statutory). Examples include Shire-wide omnibus amendments and R-Code compliant development which occurs locally.

6. We are innovative and always improving our engagement approach

The Shire is working to continuously improve how we engage, and design approaches that are creative, relevant and engaging. We are open to new and innovative engagement methodologies and tailor our approach to draw people into the process and maximise the reach and impact of our engagement. We evaluate the success of engagement at the end of each project and regularly share improvement opportunities across the organisation.

7. When it is not effective or appropriate to engage

It is not effective for the Shire to engage when the community's feedback cannot influence the outcome. In the following instances, the Shire will inform stakeholders why the decision has been made:

- When the community have little influence over the final decision which would be made by Council or another agency.
- When Council cannot influence a decision by another agency or party.
- When the decision to be made concerns a minor operational matter with minimal impact on the community or stakeholders.
- When implementing a project or decision that has already been engaged on.
- When there is insufficient time due to legislative or legal constraints, or urgent safety issues to be addressed.

The Shire aims to be as transparent as practicable with community stakeholders and in these events, the Shire will document the reasoning why engagement could not occur and provide this information to interested stakeholders.

The Shire will coordinate the timing of high impact engagements to best manage and avoid consultation fatigue in the community. The Shire, where practicable will not commence an engagement process between the last Council meeting of the calendar year and the first Council meeting of the following year, unless there is a legal requirement, Council direction or other necessity to do so. Although this may occur if there is a specific need to engage absentee landowners who are commonly in the shire area around the summer period.

8. Timeframes

Engagement timeframes will be set to provide sufficient time for community input and meet statutory requirements where required (see Section 9). Additional time for engagement will be also factored in around public and school holidays.

9. Statutory engagement

In some instances, the Shire is legally required to conduct consultation with the community. In these cases, the Shire will treat the prescribed level of engagement as the minimum standard.

There are some circumstances where some minor statutory planning projects fall under the low impact threshold as detailed under principle 5. Examples include Shire-wide omnibus amendments and R-Code compliant development which occurs locally.

Relevant legislation

- Local Government Act 1995
- Planning and Development (Local Planning Schemes) Regulations 2015
- Planning & Development Act 2005
- Residential Design Codes
- Bushfire Mitigation Act 1955
- Land Administration Act 1997

Relevant documents

- Strategic Community Plan 2040
- Engagement Guide
- Engagement Framework
- Community Engagement Toolkit

References

IAP2 – Public Participation Spectrum

IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any community engagement program.

www.iap2.org.au/resources/spectrum/

IAP2 – Quality Assurance Standard

The IAP2 Quality Assurance Standard is recognised as the international standard for public participation. www.iap2.org.au/resources/quality-assurance-standard/

Human Centred Design (HCD)

HCD approach leads to the creation of government services that align with people's needs and desires. Involving end users in the overall design process leads to greater buy-in and impact. www.vic.gov.au/introduction-human-centred-design

Document and version control table			
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