

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN

EXPLANATION NOTE

This Community Engagement Strategy has been prepared in accordance with Section 402 of the Local Government Act 1993, which supports an integrated approach to community engagement planning. It should be read in conjunction with Maitland City Council's Community Engagement Policy and is supported by a suite of tools for staff use.

For community engagement relating to Council's planning functions under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, see Council's Community Participation Plan.

| VERSION | DATE APPROVED | DESCRIPTION OF CHANGE |
|---------|---------------|-----------------------|
| 1. | | |

INTRODUCTION

Maitland City Council is committed to embedding a philosophy of community engagement across all areas of our organisation. Since the adoption of our first Community Engagement Strategy in 2009, we have consistently demonstrated this commitment to identifying, prioritising and responding to community needs.

With each review of this strategy, we have refined and improved activities to provide more opportunities for the community to have their say. We have revisited Council's Community Engagement Strategy, based on feedback from the community and staff, as we move towards a more embedded approach to community engagement. Council made a commitment in the Community Strategic Plan, Maitland +10, to ensure meaningful, informed and genuine community engagement is active in Council decision making. We intend to achieve this by building the capacity of our staff to take a more active role in designing, planning and managing engagement across the organisation.

This strategy includes a four year action plan that details what we plan to do in order to achieve the objectives set for community engagement. Through these actions we aim to further develop engagement activities, upskill and train staff, enhance the perception and value of community engagement across the organisation and build trust in the engagement process with the community.

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Acknowledgement

Maitland City Council acknowledges the Wonnarua People as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land within the Maitland Local Government Area. Council pays respect to all Aboriginal Elders, past, present and future with a spiritual connection to these lands.

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1. CONSULTATION

To inform this strategy, we reviewed the community feedback collected over the past three years and identified what's important to our community when it comes to consultation and engagement. Specifically, we asked how people want us to communicate with them and how they wish to be consulted to help understand their expectations for how Council engages with them. Staff who regularly engage with the community to plan and deliver Council projects were also consulted.

This feedback has helped shape Council's community engagement principles, objectives and action plan.

Our community told us we need to:

- Listen and act on feedback
- Make it easier for people to be involved
- Be more transparent about the process
- Engage earlier and before the decisions have been made
- Be genuine about involving the community
- Provide more opportunities for young people to get involved
- Facilitate more face to face interaction.

Our staff told us we need to:

- Build engagement into our projects
- Be supported by our leaders
- Be transparent about what the community can influence
- Be flexible and responsive to change
- Use engagement to inform decision making
- Be proactive
- Include all stakeholder groups
- Be meaningful and genuine when we do engage
- Report back to stakeholders about project outcomes
- Make engagement accessible to everyone.

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2. WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Community engagement is both the process and the outcome of working with the community to solve problems and/or inform decision making. It is also known as community consultation, stakeholder engagement and public participation.

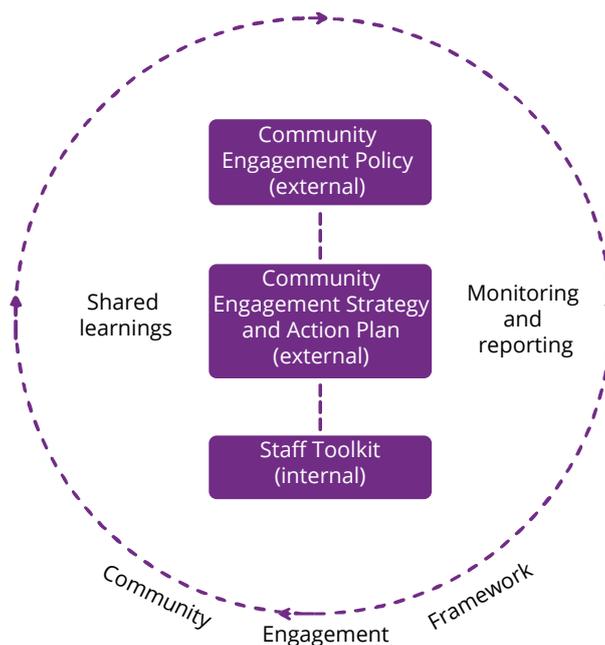
The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is the international member association which seeks to promote and improve the practice of public participation or community and stakeholder engagement. Council has adapted the IAP2 definition of community engagement for the purpose of this framework.

Our community is anyone affected by, or interested in, a decision of Maitland City Council. It includes individuals and groups of people, stakeholders, interest groups and community groups. A stakeholder is an individual, a group of individuals, organisation or political entity with a specific stake in the outcome of a decision.

3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Council's Community Engagement Framework guides the design, planning and management of community engagement activities. It comprises a Community Engagement Policy, a Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan (this document) to provide transparency and accountability to the community, and an internal toolkit to support staff.

Figure 1: Maitland City Council Community Engagement Framework



Community engagement is a planned process with the specific purpose of working with organisations, stakeholders and our community to solve problems and/or shape decisions in relation to a problem, opportunity or outcome.

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3.1 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODEL

The framework is based on an adapted model of IAP2 Australasia’s Community Engagement Model. The model recognises that community engagement is not a one way path from Council to the community. Engagement may be motivated from within the community or even led by the community itself.

Table 1: Adapted Community Engagement Model for Maitland City Council

| Roles | Description |
|---|---|
| Community advocacy Community leads/Council acts | The community leads to identify, highlight and propose the action required to solve a problem or take an opportunity. To achieve the desired result requires Council action. |
| Community act and contribute Community leads/Community acts | The community leads the conversation and has responsibility for the action. |
| Council implementation Council leads/Council acts | Council leads engagement and seeks input to shape the policies, projects and services for which it is responsible. Engagement is used to both inform the community about the proposal and to provide input to the shape and execution of the project. Final decision making sits with Council and Council is responsible for taking action. |
| Behaviour change Council leads/Community acts | Council leads the conversation with the community and individuals are responsible for taking action. |
| Shared leadership and action | Council and the community both participate and contribute to the decisions and both lead and take responsibility for taking action. |

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3.2 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM

IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum is used by Council to help identify the level of influence and participation that is required based on the purpose of the engagement project. The spectrum also sets out Council's approach to the community at each level to ensure transparency about what the community can influence and what it cannot.

Table 2: Adapted IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum

| INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION  | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| | INFORM | CONSULT | INVOLVE | COLLABORATE |
| Purpose | To provide information about something where the decision has already been made. | To obtain community feedback on ideas or projects to progress the decision making. | To work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. | To partner with the community in each aspect of the decision including the development of options and identification of the preferred solution. |
| Our approach | We will keep the community informed about a decision or direction. | We will listen to and acknowledge community concerns and aspirations and provide feedback on how community input influenced the decision. | We will work with the community to ensure that concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the options developed and provide feedback on community input influenced the decision. | We will work with the community, so their advice, innovations and recommendations are included in the final decision that we make together. |
| Role of the community | Listen | Contribute | Participate | Partner |

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4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Our principles are consistent with international best practice, most notably the IAP2 Core Values. They also reflect the social justice principles of access, equity, participation and rights, and our organisational Guiding Principles.

Table 3: Alignment of our engagement principles and Guiding Principles

| COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES | GUIDING PRINCIPLES | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|--|---|
| | Make things easy  | Be welcoming  | Be open minded  | Look out for me  | Keep your promises  |
| Informative and transparent – we will provide the community with the information they need to participate | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Inclusive and accessible – we will make it easy and fair for everyone potentially affected by a decision to participate | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| Proactive and timely – we will provide regular opportunities for the community to participate and engage before the decision has been made | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Meaningful and genuine – we will listen to our community and consider their input as part of decision making | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Flexible and responsive – we will use community feedback to design our engagement activities | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Reported – we will tell the community how their input affected the decision | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ |

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5. WHEN AND HOW WE ENGAGE

In deciding when and how to engage about a project or issue, we consider several factors, including the impact, scale and complexity of the decision to be made, the number of people affected and the geographical area. Possible financial, environmental, legal and reputational risks will also be considered.

These variables will determine the priority Council gives engagement projects so resources can be allocated and the most appropriate tools selected.

Council will engage with the community, where appropriate, when:

- proposing a change in service or strategic direction
- a new project, plan or initiative is being developed
- developing or changing a significant policy, strategy or plan
- planning major infrastructure projects
- making decisions that will impact our community.

To ensure consistency across the organisation, an engagement matrix has been developed.

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Table 4: Council's engagement matrix

| PRIORITY SCORE | 1-5 | 6-10 | 11-15 |
|------------------------|--|---|---|
| | LOW RISK | MEDIUM RISK | HIGH RISK |
| Local impact | <p>Operational or small project which requires information to be shared to a specific locality. No history of controversy or conflict.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naming of a local facility • Upgrades to neighbourhood parks and playgrounds • Local street upgrade • Local minor traffic proposals | <p>Local project of moderate impact on a specific locality. Potential to create controversy or conflict at a local level, or there is an existing or potential for medium local interest.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addition or loss of a neighbourhood park or playground • Major upgrades to local parks or open spaces • Long term local road closures or detours • Removal of local car parking | <p>Large project of high impact on a specific locality. Existing or historical controversy or conflict locally.</p> <p>Existing or historical high level of local interest.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master plans for local shopping precincts, parks and open spaces • New neighbourhood centres, libraries |
| LGA wide impact | <p>Operational project which requires information to be shared across the LGA or to a specific population group. No history of controversy or conflict and historically low interest.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flagship events • Policy updates | <p>Large scale programs and activities which impact the LGA or a specific population group/s. Potential to create community controversy or conflict and potential for a high level of community interest.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to waste and recycling services • Changes to fees and charges of specific facilities or services • Policy changes | <p>High impact, large, strategic or long term projects with a history of controversy or conflict across the wider community. Existing or historical high level of community interest.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special rate variations (SRV) • Community Strategic Plan (CSP) • Major reviews of the LEP, DCP |

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5.1 WHEN WE WON'T ENGAGE

There are times when Council will only inform the community of our decisions and actions. These will occur in cases when:

- there is no scope for community input
- public health and safety are at risk
- an immediate resolution is required
- an initiative involves confidential or commercial information
- developing or reviewing internal procedures and protocols
- council is responding to an emergency
- there are legal constraints.

When decisions are made without engagement, the community will be informed about why the decision was made, where appropriate.

5.2 MANDATORY ENGAGEMENT

Various legislation sets minimum requirements for consultation on a range of matters. In some instances, we will go above and beyond the minimum requirements to ensure our community has adequate opportunity to have their say.

Council has prepared a Community Participation Plan (CPP) to set out how and when we will engage with the community on the planning functions we perform under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979. This includes making strategic plans and planning instruments, such as the Local Environmental Plan, as well as the role Council has in assessing and determining development applications.

To understand how and when we will undertake community engagement for these functions, please refer to the CPP on our website.

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6. WHO WE ENGAGE

More than 83,000 people called Maitland home in 2018 with the population forecast to reach more than 100,000 people by 2036. Our engagement aims to ensure all stakeholder groups are considered and provided opportunities to be informed and participate in engagement activities.

Stakeholders are defined as any individual, group of individuals, organisation or political entity with a specific stake in the outcome of a decision. Stakeholders can vary significantly from project to project. That is why a comprehensive analysis of the community is provided in the toolkit to assist staff in identifying stakeholders in a project and the most appropriate methods to use for each stakeholder group.

The below list is not exhaustive but provides an overview of the various groups who may have a stake or interest in a project.

| STAKEHOLDER GROUP | EXAMPLES |
|---|---|
| Residents and ratepayers | Those who live and/or pay rates in the Maitland Local Government Area |
| Community of interest | Those communities who are directly or indirectly affected by a project, such as a specific suburb, town, precinct |
| Government agencies | Departments of state and federal government whom Council advises and seeks advice from about projects |
| Committees and community organisations | Committees or organisations with a specific interest in or knowledge of a particular matter such as senior citizen groups, environment groups, sports, arts and cultural groups |
| Population groups | Specific groups with demographic commonalities such as age, background, ability, gender, cultural heritage |
| Business community | Individuals, associations or networks active in the business community |
| Service or facility users | Individuals or groups who use local services or facilities such as sports grounds, halls, libraries, community centres, pools |
| Visitors/tourists | Individuals or groups who choose to visit Maitland and may have an interest in recreational, and visitor services or facilities |



7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

7.1 COUNCIL STAFF

It is the responsibility of all Council staff to identify engagement opportunities in their areas of work. The role of Council staff undertaking engagement is to collect robust and unbiased data that is representative of the stakeholders affected by or interested in the project.

7.2 CONTRACTORS

Consultants contracted to deliver engagement activities are required to do so in accordance with Council's Community Engagement Framework to ensure a consistent approach across all our engagement activities.

7.3 COUNCILLORS

Every four years, residents and ratepayers of the Maitland Local Government Area vote for 12 Councillors and one popularly elected Mayor that make up the elected Council. The Mayor and Councillors represent residents and ratepayers of Maitland and have specific powers and responsibilities as set out in the Local Government Act 1993.

With regards to community engagement, individual Councillors have the responsibility to:

- facilitate communication between stakeholders and the governing body
- make considered and well informed decisions as a member of the governing body.

While the collective role of the governing body is to:

- consult regularly with stakeholders and keep them informed of the Council's decisions and activities.

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8. THE LINK BETWEEN ENGAGEMENT AND DECISION MAKING

Feedback received from the community is an important element in Council decision making. However, it is not always the case that decisions will be made solely on community input.

There are a range of other factors that need to be considered and balanced including:

- Budget impacts
- Social impacts
- Legislation
- Governance
- Council policies and resolutions
- Technical and professional advice
- Economic impacts
- Environmental impacts.

In most cases, decisions that will impact the community are made by the elected Council unless otherwise specified as part of the engagement project or by delegation to the General Manager or other nominated Council officer. Only under the Empower level of participation does the Council commit to accepting the decisions of the community, usually through a deliberative process. This has not been included in Council's Community Engagement Framework.

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9. OUR ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND ACTION PLAN

The objectives of this Community Engagement Strategy align with Council's Guiding Principles and community engagement principles. Each objective is supported by actions that will be delivered over a four year period.

Through these actions we aim to further develop Council's engagement activities, upskill and train staff, enhance the perception and value of community engagement across the organisation and build trust in the engagement process with the community.

OBJECTIVE: OUR STAFF HAS THE SKILLS AND CAPACITY TO ENGAGE EFFECTIVELY.

| ACTION | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Develop an engagement toolkit to support the consistent planning and delivery of engagement activities across Council | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Include engagement in the corporate onboarding program for new starters and the staff handbook | | ✓ | | |
| Develop and implement an ongoing staff training plan based on the IAP2 engagement modules | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Include community engagement as a rolling agenda item on all Corporate Leadership Group and Executive Leadership Team meetings | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Investigate and implement a software solution to collate and analyse consultation data in one accessible location | | ✓ | | |
| Become a corporate member of the IAP2 to take advantage of corporate discounts for events and training for staff | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

OBJECTIVE: OUR STAFF LEARN FROM AND CELEBRATE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES.

| ACTION | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Provide input into Council's internal knowledge management system to share engagement resources | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Host regular knowledge sharing opportunities to evaluate engagement initiatives and share lessons for ongoing improvement | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Evaluate community engagement activities by seeking feedback from internal and external stakeholders | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Share positive community engagement case studies through Council's communication channels and, if appropriate, enter industry awards | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Measure progress against the objectives of the strategy to ensure Council is tracking toward a more embedded approach to engagement | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

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OBJECTIVE: OUR COMMUNITY IS INFORMED AND HAS OPPORTUNITIES TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS.

| ACTION | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Communicate and promote engagement opportunities using existing channels as well as investigating new channels that integrate interactive or smart technologies | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Develop and implement a strategy to build the profile and membership of the Maitland Your Say Facebook group and mailing list | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Develop resources to support the community to make effective submissions to Council on matters of interest | | ✓ | | |
| Maintain a database of stakeholders who wish to be updated on Council's engagement activities | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Develop an annual proactive program of formal and informal engagement opportunities to listen to the community on Council services and build relationships | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Investigate opportunities for ongoing knowledge sharing and interaction between the community and Council | | ✓ | | |

OBJECTIVE: OUR COMMUNITY FEELS LISTENED TO AND UNDERSTANDS HOW THEIR INPUT HAS BEEN CONSIDERED IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS.

| ACTION | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Develop standard, high level, reporting templates on the outcomes of engagement activities | ✓ | | | |
| Publish engagement outcomes to 'close the loop' on Maitland Your Say website and Maitland Your Say Facebook group | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Include 'community engagement implications' as a standard heading in Council reports | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Pilot a deliberative approach to community engagement at the Empower level of participation. | | | ✓ | |

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| OBJECTIVE: OUR ENGAGEMENT IS TIMELY AND RELEVANT. | | | | |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| ACTION | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
| Investigate the most appropriate tools to gain insights from the community into the performance of Council | | ✓ | | |
| The Engagement Team is represented on Council's project control groups | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Maintain an engagement calendar to map and track engagement activities happening across Council to align engagement opportunities and mitigate the risk of consultation fatigue | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Develop an engagement planning form to support preparation of the Operational Plan and Budget | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Relevant staff participate and/or attend relevant industry webinars, conferences, workshops and training opportunities | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |

| OBJECTIVE: OUR ENGAGEMENT IS INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE. | | | | |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| ACTION | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
| Create guidelines and protocols to promote participation of Aboriginal people, people with disability and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in community engagement activities | | ✓ | | |
| Investigate tools and engagement approaches to target young people | ✓ | | | |
| Implement relevant communication tools to target young people | | ✓ | | |
| Develop or enhance partnerships with community leaders, groups and other agencies to increase participation in engagement activities | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Ensure engagement materials are written in plain language and easy to understand | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Host engagement activities in accessible venues where possible. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Host three Council meetings per year in an alternate venue across the LGA | | ✓ | ✓ | |

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10. REPORTING BACK

Just as we intend to close the loop with our community on how their input has influenced decision making, we will also keep the community informed about the implementation of this strategy and action plan.

We will use a range of channels but the best way to stay up to date on all things Maitland Your Say will be to subscribe to our mailing list through our website maitlandyoursay.com.au

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11. WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE

Part of a successful engagement plan includes using robust measures to evaluate engagement activities and identify opportunities to improve processes and outcomes. We measure the success of our engagement activities using a range of quantitative and qualitative metrics, depending on the scope and type of engagement.

Council also regularly monitors and measures how we're tracking as an organisation to engage our community using tools such as feedback forms, community surveys, online analytics to measure elements such as the reach of passive and active stakeholders, the demographic profile of active stakeholders and how data collected during engagement is used to inform decisions.

This information is published twice yearly in On The Move that reports on the progress of Council's Delivery Program, as well as in Council's Annual Report.



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