

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

INTENT:

Provide direction for Council's community engagement activities and establish a consistent, coordinated approach to community participation in Council's decision making process.

SCOPE:

This policy applies to all Councillors and staff of Cook Shire Council across all areas of Council's operations.

The Community Engagement Policy defines the mechanisms which council will use to engage the community, as outlined in the *Community Engagement Strategy*.

It provides Councillors and staff with a transparent process to identify engagement opportunities and to maximize the benefits of community engagement, as outlined in the *Community Engagement Framework*.

DEFINITIONS:

Council defines successful **community engagement** as:

An effective two-way relationship between Cook Shire Council and the Cook Shire community, in which both sides are well informed and collaborate to improve Council services and ensure responsible decision making in the Shire.

The core structure of community engagement is based on the following:

Informing: providing the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding problems/opportunities, solutions/alternatives and decisions.

Consulting: asking communities for ideas, testing support for a proposal or obtaining feedback on preferences when there are options available

Involving: working directly with the public to ensure that public concerns and needs are consistently understood and considered.

Collaborating: partnering with the public in every aspect of the decision, including the development of alternative solutions and the identification of the preferred solution.

Empowering: placing final decision making in the hands of the public.

PROVISIONS:

1. LEGISLATION

This Policy has been prepared after consideration of the following (as amended) pieces of legislation:

Cook Shire Community Plan 2011-2021

The communities' needs and expectations are identified in the Cook Shire Community Plan 2011-2021. Cook Shire's Community Plan was developed after extensive consultation with the Cook Shire community and other key stakeholders. The information contained in the Plan outlines community goals, strategy and priorities upon which the Corporate Plan has been developed

Cook Shire Council Corporate plan 2012-2017

The Corporate Plan is the link between our community's needs and expectations and the operational activities undertaken by Council. It identifies 'Cooperation' as one of the Council's core values, defined as the principles of 'social inclusion and meaningful community engagement'.

This is further specified under heading 4.3.1 'Active, Creative and Connected' to 'provide to a standard that ensures (at a minimum) legislative compliance and equitable access: e) Community Engagement across all relevant activities'.

Queensland Sustainable Planning Act 2009

Local Government Act 2009

Local Government Regulation 2009

2. RESPONSIBILITIES

All Councillors and operational staff will play a key roles in engaging with the community. Councillors have responsibility for engaging with their local and regional communities; and operational staff has responsibility for engaging the community in their day to day business activities and on agreed projects.

3. POLICY STATEMENT

Cook Shire Council offers various ways for community members to participate in the decision making process and strives to increase the representation of views and opinions of our diverse community. Council believes that it can make better decisions by actively seeking input early in the decision making and policy development process.

Council will use different community engagement strategies and techniques depending upon the issue or project, its particular circumstances and the target audience.

The Engagement Principles model is based on five engagement principles. These key principles underpin Cook Shire Council's approach to community engagement:

1) Timeliness

Council will engage with its community in ways that are timely, open to all, easily understood and not overly resource intensive.

2) Inclusiveness

Council's goal is one of inclusive involvement. All voices matter, all opinions are valued and considered.

3) Integrity

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.

4) Action Learning

Council is committed to the development of innovative engagement approaches, learning from each engagement experience, and using this knowledge to improve our approach to engagement.

5) 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.

This approach provides consistency and facilitates the alignment of performance reporting requirements under the new Queensland Local Government Act (2009). Each principle seeks to clarify the purpose of why Council engages with the community and guide how that engagement occurs.

4. PURPOSE OF ENGAGEMENT

Being clear about the purpose of the engagement is a step that needs serious consideration. A clear purpose will help in the setting of objectives and in determining what method(s) will be selected to engage the community, including who and how they will participate.

Different levels of engagement are appropriate, depending on the complexity of an issue, possible outcomes, timeframes, resources, potential impact on the community and levels of community concern or interest.

Each level of engagement implies a promise to the community. If the promise is not defined, or is misunderstood by the participants or the decision makers, the process may result in dissatisfaction and/or disillusionment.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Council has developed a Community Engagement Framework that provides a consistent approach to community engagement. It considers:

- the complexity of the issue,
- the potential impact on our community and
- the sensitivity of the issue

	COMPLEXITY		COMMUNITY IMPACT		SENSITIVITY		STRATEGY
LOW	there is one clearly defined issue/problem that has a straightforward solution	<input type="checkbox"/>	the project will have little effect on the community, any changes will be minor	<input type="checkbox"/>	the project has general acceptance throughout the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	Inform
MEDIUM	there are a few issues/problems that have a straightforward solution	<input type="checkbox"/>	the project will fix a major problem but the change will cause some inconvenience AND/OR will have a considerable or lasting impact on community	<input type="checkbox"/>	some disagreement regarding the project exists within the community AND/OR There is some potential for community groups/individuals to gain attention by raising the profile of the project	<input type="checkbox"/>	Inform/consult
	there is one clearly defined issue/problem that has several possible solutions						Consult
							Consult/Involve
HIGH	there are multiple issues/problems and there are several possible solutions AND/OR it is unclear how to resolve them	<input type="checkbox"/>	the project will benefit the community, but the impact/inconvenience will be significant AND/OR the degree of acceptance of the changes varies notably among residents	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strong disagreement within the community or between community and decision makers AND/OR There is high potential for individuals and groups to use the project to gain attention	<input type="checkbox"/>	Involve
							Collaborate

The Community Engagement Framework indicates which engagement strategy is appropriate based on the weighting of various factors. Council operational staff across departments will assess activities and projects for which community engagement is indicated and they will make a recommendation to Council based on the Engagement Framework to inform, consult, involve or collaborate, keeping in mind the increasing demand on time and resources these strategies require.

Council will assess these recommendations and make the final decision as to which strategy is required. Engagement techniques can then be selected to suit the circumstances. If the situation changes at a later stage, the engagement strategy may need to be modified.

Using the community engagement core structure and framework, the following techniques have been identified to support engagement strategies

STRATEGY	GOAL	PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	TECHNIQUES
INFORM	Providing information to the public to assist understanding of how decisions will be/were made.	We will keep you informed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fact Sheet - Web page - Facebook - Newsletter - Newspaper article - Display - Signage
CONSULT	Obtaining feedback on decisions and preferences when there are options available.	We will listen to you and acknowledge concerns & preferences. We will provide feedback on how your input influenced the decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public comment - Survey - Focus group - Public meeting
INVOLVE	Working together to understand and consider the public's needs and concerns.	We will work with you to ensure your concerns and needs are directly reflected in the decision and provide feedback on how your input influenced this decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workshop - Public meeting - Reference group - Deliberate polling
COLLABORATE	Partnering with the public in all aspects of the decision making.	We will ask you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and we will incorporate your advice and recommendations to the maximum extent possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advisory committee
EMPOWER	Handing over final decision making to the public.	We will implement what you decide.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delegated decisions

This policy is to remain in force until otherwise determined by Council.

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