



LACHLAN SHIRE
COUNCIL

Wiradjuri Country

Lachlan Shire Council

DRAFT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

2024-2028



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Lachlan Shire Council acknowledges the Wiradjuri people as the Traditional custodians of this land.

We recognise their strength and resilience and pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are part of the Lachlan Shire community.



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FOREWORD

A message from the Mayor of Lachlan Shire

I am pleased to present Lachlan Shire Council's Community Engagement Strategy. This document demonstrates Council's commitment to engaging with our communities and details when and how we will do so.

Engagement is at the heart of everything we do at Lachlan Shire as we collaborate with our residents to deliver our shared vision for a resilient and prosperous community.

Community engagement is about ensuring we deliver better outcomes for everyone and we recognise that our community has a diverse range of experience and knowledge. Therefore, in this strategy we will identify how we will engage with a variety of different community members and other stakeholders to ensure that we identify solution that meet our shared vision.

Through the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework, Council has made a commitment to meet the needs of the community now and into the future. To deliver on this commitment we need to understand what impacts our community members as they go about their daily lives. The level of community involvement in decision making will vary depending on the impact of any decisions to be made and we will outline these differences in the strategy.

In this strategy we show how we will provide the community and other stakeholders with meaningful opportunities to have their say on the services, policies, plans and projects we deliver. This strategy provides everyone with clarity and transparency so all stakeholders understand when we will involve them and the role they play in the process of engagement.

Like all plans and strategies of Council, the Community Engagement Strategy will evolve as our community changes. This strategy has been developed for the next four years but we will review and update it in consultation with the community whenever needed to ensure it remains current and relevant to the needs of Council and the community of Lachlan Shire.

John Medcalf OAM
Mayor of Lachlan Shire

Lachlan Shire Vision
For Lachlan Shire to be a resilient community providing economic and social growth, through evolving agricultural, business and mineral activities.

INTRODUCTION

A council must establish and implement a strategy (called its Community Engagement Strategy) for engagement with the local community when developing its plans, policies and programs and for the purpose of determining its activities (other than routine administrative matters).

What is community engagement?

Community engagement is the process of involving the community and other stakeholders in making decisions that shape their local area. This includes seeking feedback about the plans, policies and projects that Council develops on behalf of the community. Engagement is essential for us to evaluate the impact that decisions of the Council will have on the community. It is also how we understand what services and projects will best meet the community's needs and aspirations.

At Lachlan Shire we are committed to undertaking consistent, best-practice engagement with all our stakeholders. This involves being open and transparent through providing a range of inclusive engagement opportunities for our community and other stakeholders.

Why do we engage?

At Lachlan Shire we believe everyone has the right to have their views and voices heard and to participate in public decision making. Community engagement is how we provide this opportunity to our community and stakeholders.

For Council, community engagement provides us with the opportunity to understand many points of view to help us identify solutions that meet community expectations for delivery of services. It also helps us build partnerships with the community and contributes to understanding of shared and conflicting priorities. Engagement activities give us the opportunity to inform the community about our goals and purpose, promote transparency and accountability, and build trust within the community. Failure to participate in engagement can result in poor outcomes for the community due to lack of information about their needs and expectations.

Legislative requirements

Lachlan Shire Council is committed to meeting our legislative obligations to ensure our community is informed and involved in planning for its future.

This includes section 402A of the *Local Government Act 1993* quoted above. This strategy must be based on social justice principles and is an integral part of Council's strategic planning and service delivery processes.

Furthermore, Lachlan Shire is a Child Safe Organisation in accordance with the *Children's Guardian Amendment (Child Safe Scheme) Bill 2021*. This requires us to implement the Child Safe Standards including Standard 2 - Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously. To do this we must actively seek opinions of children and give consideration to their age, development, maturity understanding and communication methods.



OUR ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

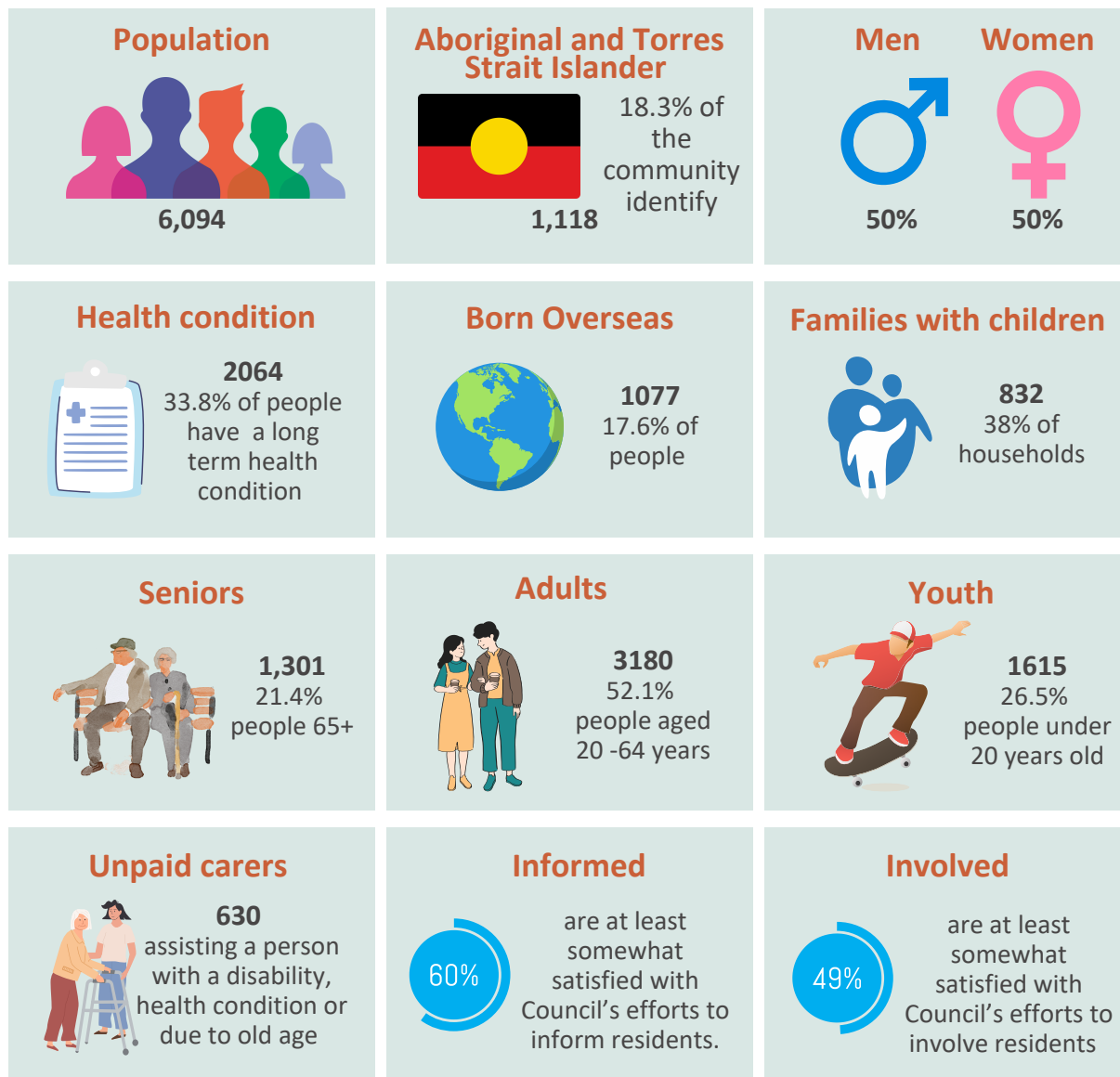
Council is committed to engagement with our community and other stakeholders that is based on the social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights. To put this into practice our engagement is based on the following guiding principles:

Principle	Our Commitment	What this looks like
Accessible and inclusive	We remove barriers to participation to ensure our decision making is informed by a range of opinions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify impacted groups • Use a range of flexible engagement methods • Identify gaps and develop ways of reaching those people
Building partnerships	We work in partnership with our community and other stakeholders to build understanding and trust.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being open and trustworthy • Developing shared goals • Provide regular engagement and feedback opportunities
Clear and timely	We respect our community's time and provide clear, accessible and prompt information on how to be involved in engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering information early • Using clear, concise language • Provide updates on progress and outcomes
Transparent and genuine	We provide genuine opportunities to listen to and understand our community's needs and ideas so they inform our decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarifying what can and can't be influenced • listening openly and objectively • Respecting the time and effort of participants



OUR COMMUNITY

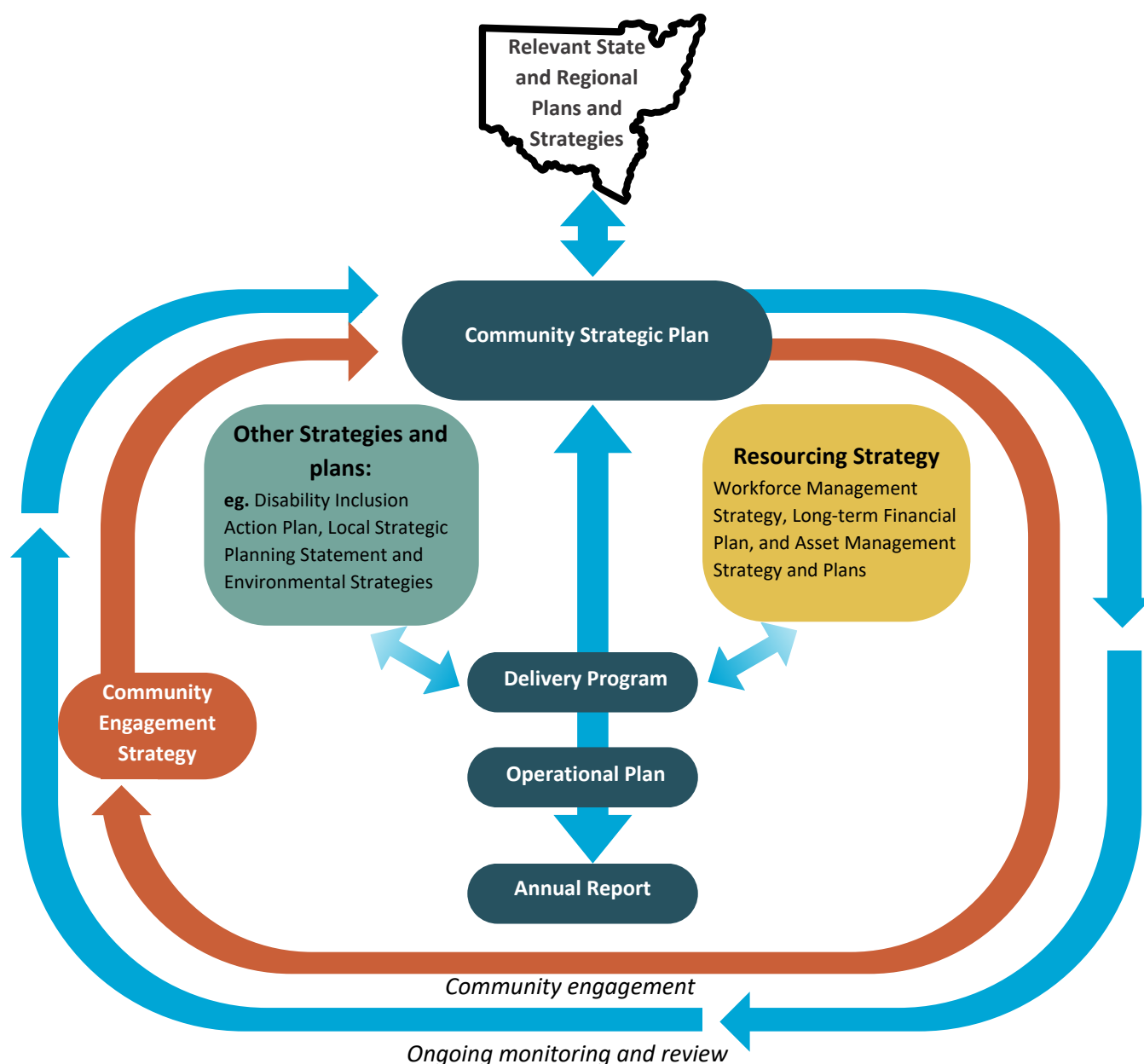
Lachlan Shire is 14,973 km² in the heart of Central West New South Wales. Our diverse population lives in three towns, five villages and the surrounding agricultural land. Our community and visitors are from different towns, wards, cultural backgrounds, ages and family life stages. As our population changes over time a broad range of voices must be heard in order to successfully plan for the future. Here is our community at a glance:



Residents are most likely to access information about Council through our newsletters and social media pages.

OUR PLANNING PROCESS

Community engagement is at the heart of the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework. This framework determines how Council's plans and strategies work together to deliver the needs and aspirations of the community. The overarching 10 year Community Strategic plan is informed by engagement with the community and provides us with a clearly defined strategy based on the community's priorities. We continue to seek feedback throughout the planning process during development of the supporting plans and strategies as well as on projects and other matters that impact members of the community.



WHY WE ENGAGE

Our community has told us that access to information about Council decisions and community engagement are a high priority for them. Meeting this expectation is important for our Council.

We believe that through meaningful engagement with the community we can develop partnerships where we share and understand each other's values, concerns and aspirations. We want our community to understand the complex challenges of the environment Council operates in and to participate in helping us rise to these challenges and deliver solutions that meet our shared goals.

Council makes decisions through representative and participatory democratic processes. Representative democracy processes involve Councillors as the community's representatives. Councillors are elected by the community to form a Council that makes decisions about local matters that impact community life. The elected Council develops policies and long-term strategic plans, monitors performance and makes decisions to control the work done at Lachlan Shire. In this representative process, the Council is accountable to the community who elected them.

Participatory democracy processes enable the community to be involved in the decisions made by the elected Council. Community engagement is at the heart of participatory democracy and enables the community and other stakeholders to exercise their right to be informed and have a say on matters of importance to them. The level of influence the community will have on decision making will vary depending on the decision to be made.

Why participate in engagement?

Participating in community engagement and being involved in the decision making process is one way that community members can make a contribution toward improving the quality of life of everyone living in our shire. By being involved, community members can:

- Be a leading voice for the community
- Share ideas, needs, experiences, concerns and aspirations
- Gain a deeper understanding of what is important to others
- Be part of planning for the changing needs of the community
- Hear what others think and make meaningful connections
- Find out about projects directly from Council
- Have your say on our impact on the environment
- Learn about what Council must consider when making decisions
- Understand how the outcome of decisions will impact the wider community

We want to know what our community thinks.

We ask for their feedback and ideas to help us make decisions about projects and services.

HOW WE ENGAGE

Our approach to engagement is based on the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum. The spectrum describes five possible levels of engagement and assists us in identifying the appropriate style of community engagement based on the goals, timeframe, resources and level of impact of the decisions to be made. The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation is the international benchmark for community engagement and is recommended by the Office of Local Government.



The lowest level of the spectrum, *Inform*, is used when we are providing information about a matter where there is no opportunity for community decision-making. The spectrum proceeds through the levels of *Consult*, *Involve* and *Collaborate* to *Empower* depending on the level of impact the community is able to have on the decision. The final level has limited application in Local Government as final decision-making rest with the Councillors elected to represent the community.

Increasing impact on the decision					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Public Participation goal	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.
Promise to the public	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.	We will implement what you decide.

WHO WE ENGAGE WITH

To undertake effective engagement it is vital that we identify and understand our key stakeholders. This will vary for each engagement process due to the scope of our work. Therefore, it is important to determine which groups and individuals within, and outside, our community will have an interest in the decisions of Council and to design engagement activities that reach as many of these people as possible. We always aim to reach a broad range of people in our community to ensure that a range of voices are heard to better understand the impact of our decisions.

Our Stakeholders

Key Stakeholders in the community include:

- Residents and ratepayers of Lachlan Shire
- Young people and students
- Retirees and mature aged people
- Families with children
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, community groups and representative bodies
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) community members
- Community, sporting, cultural, volunteer, religious and environmental groups
- The local business community and industry groups
- Council's staff and advisory committees
- LGBTIQ+ community
- Schools and childcare facilities
- Health and disability support services

Other Stakeholders include:

- State and Federal Government departments and agencies
- Federal and State Government Members of Parliament
- Other councils
- Investors in our shire
- Police and emergency service providers
- Not-for Profit and Non Government Organisations
- Visitors to our shire and our potential future community



This list is varied and not definitive. Depending on the topic Council is engaging on, there may be other stakeholders. Not all stakeholders will be involved in each community engagement activity. Stakeholders will be determined based on those who have an interest in, and will be impacted by, what Council is engaging on. Our engagement activities will be designed to enable us to reach those stakeholders whose voices we need to hear and give them the opportunity to participate.

INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION

Inclusive participation practices ensure everyone in our community has the opportunity to share ideas and perspectives through the community engagement process. We are committed to ensuring that we provide mechanisms for all voices to be heard and inform our decision making. We respect and value the differences in our community that impact their experiences and influence their perspectives on a range of situations.

At Lachlan Shire we recognise that some groups or individuals within our community may experience barriers to participating in engagement. We also understand that different people like to engage in different ways, so what works for one group of people may not work for others. To ensure we are engaging with diverse groups of people, that are representative of the differences within our community, we look for ways to identify gaps in our engagement processes and develop strategies to improve our community engagement practice.

Strategies we will employ in all engagement to ensure it is as inclusive as possible include:

- Using plain language that is easy to understand
- providing information in a variety of accessible formats
- Providing assistance or translation services where necessary
- Holding engagement activities at accessible venues
- Ensuring we engage with stakeholders in a variety of locations across the Shire
- We will use a variety of engagement methods that are tailored, flexible and appropriate for different groups of stakeholders
- We will conduct our engagement activities in locations and at the time and day that is most appropriate for target groups
- We value cultural protocols and knowledge and foster their inclusion in our engagement
- We understand the value and variety of local knowledge across the Shire and aim to incorporate local perspectives in each engagement activity
- We will incorporate the commitments outlined in our disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) in our engagement where appropriate



WHEN WE ENGAGE

Each project or function that the Council undertakes has different opportunities for community engagement. The decision making power may be placed with either community, councillors, the General Manager, another government agency or a combination of any of these stakeholders. We will consider when there are opportunities for community involvement to influence the decision making and determine the appropriate level of community engagement for each function or project.

We will explain the level of engagement and influence we are seeking and keep the community updated on the decision making progress. There will be situations where community participation is crucial and some where there will be little, to no opportunity for community involvement. Things that may limit the community's ability to be involved in decision making include safety, State or Federal Government requirements and other factors. In these cases we will keep the community informed, in line with the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation, through our website and media channels.

Some functions of Council are routine or require engagement with internal stakeholders or other institutions during development. While community involvement is limited, there is sometimes an opportunity for community consultation on a draft decision prior to its adoption. We will consult the community on these matters and be clear about the level of influence that consultation will have on this decision.

Other projects and functions of Council will provide a greater opportunity for the community to influence the decision, sometimes at multiple points in the decision making process. The following table demonstrates possible ways we could engage with the community on some of our key priorities to help explain this.

Project type	Engagement level	How we communicate	Engagement methods
Council key long-term plans: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Strategic Plan • Delivery Program • Resourcing Strategy • Community engagement Strategy • Strategies • Masterplans 	Involve	We will work with the community to understand their needs and ensure their priorities are reflected in the decision. We will provide a range of opportunities for the community to have input and share their views. We will give the community feedback on how their input has influenced the decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drop-in Information sessions • Pop-up kiosks • Surveys • Crowdsourcing • Interviews • Workshops • Public exhibition • Social media • Website news

Project type	Engagement level	How we communicate	Engagement methods
Council's key policies	Consult	We will ask the community for their views on the options identified by Council. We will use a range of communication techniques to ensure the community are aware of the opportunity to provide feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public exhibition • Social media • Website news • Council newsletter • Submissions
Council's Annual Operational Plan and Budget	Consult	We will ask the community for their views on the options identified by Council. We will use a range of communication techniques to ensure the community are aware of the opportunity to provide feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public exhibition • Social media • Website news • Council newsletter • Submissions
Capital works projects and placemaking. Example: playgrounds and draft masterplans	Involve	<p>We will work with the community to understand their needs and ensure their priorities are reflected in the decision.</p> <p>We will provide a range of opportunities for the community to have input and share their views.</p> <p>We will give the community feedback on how their input has influenced the decision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drop-in Information sessions • Pop-up kiosks • Surveys • Interviews • Workshops • Meetings • Crowdsourcing • Public exhibition • Social media • Website news
Maintenance and renewal capital work.	Inform	We will share information on current activities and plans through a range of mediums to ensure stakeholders are aware of Council's proposal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local media • Social media • Website news • Council newsletter • Public notices

ENGAGEMENT METHODS

Due to the diversity of our community and other stakeholders, and the breadth of services which Council supplies, we cannot take a one-size-fits-all approach to community engagement. Each time we engage with the community it is an opportunity for Council and the community to bring new understanding about each other's priorities and challenges. Therefore, it is important to engage with stakeholders whose experience and opinions can best inform our decision.

By using a range of different communication channels we will ensure that we reach as many community members and other stakeholders as possible. Furthermore, by using a variety of engagement techniques we can provide opportunities for involvement to people with different levels of ability to participate. By communicating well and providing a variety of ways to contribute feedback, we are better able to gather information from a diverse cross section of our community.

Some of the ways we communicate are:

- Council's website
- "Council News" newsletter
- Public Notices and Media Releases
- Local Media
- Social Media - Council's Facebook page and community noticeboard pages
- Electronic Noticeboards
- Letter box drop

Some of the engagement activities we use are:

- Surveys
- Drop in information sessions
- Public exhibition
- Submissions
- Phone hotlines
- Public meetings
- Workshops
- Events
- Pop-up kiosks
- Briefings
- Focus Groups
- Reference Groups
- Working Parties
- Advisory committees
- Webinars
- Interviews
- Site visits
- Joint venture



EVALUATION AND REPORTING

Efficient and effective community engagement is required to help Council realise its goals and the aspirations of the community. Monitoring and review of our engagement activities enables us to identify areas where we need to improve our practice so we have the most productive conversations with the community that we possibly can.

Evaluation will focus on determining:

- How **efficient** our engagement was - was it completed on time and on budget?
- How **effective** it was - did the feedback we received contribute valuable information to the decision making process?
- Was it **appropriate** - could the critical stakeholders access it or should we have used a different method?
- What was the **impact** of the engagement - did we achieve a better result because of the engagement and did it contribute to the establishment of trusting relationships?

We will use a variety of evaluation and reporting methods to assess our performance so we can learn from it and provide information to our Councillors and other stakeholders.

These methods include:

- Reviewing our Community Engagement Strategy every four years to ensure it is aligned with legislative requirements and best practice engagement methodology.
- Ensuring we monitor community satisfaction with our engagement and communication practices through our bi-annual Community Satisfaction Survey.
- Tracking participation levels in engagement activities.
- Monitoring online engagement on our website and social media.
- Evaluating quantitative data including asking engagement participants how they became aware of the consultation.
- Collecting and reviewing qualitative data such as asking participants to provide formal or informal feedback on engagement events.
- Reporting on engagement to Council.
- Providing feedback on engagement activities to participants or other stakeholders.



BUILDING CAPACITY IN ENGAGEMENT

In order to conduct community engagement activities that have impact because they are efficient, effective and appropriate we will work with our people to help them develop the skills and commitment to deliver successful engagement.

Councillors

As the community's elected representatives, our Councillors engage with our stakeholders in a range of ways to hear their views and aspirations. Councillors may also attend planned engagement activities. To ensure our Councillors are effective participants in engagement, we offer them appropriate professional development to assist them to enhance and refine their skills.



Council Staff

In order to build organisational capacity to deliver successful community engagement activities, we will offer learning and development opportunities to staff in positions that undertake engagement. We will encourage participation in training and other development opportunities across the organisation that will enable our staff to develop skills and confidence in stakeholder engagement.

Council will ensure that senior staff have the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge in public participation and deliberative democracy to help them lead and foster successful engagement activities. It is a requirement that Council's Communication and Community Engagement Coordinator holds an IAP2 Certificate in Engagement and undertakes continuous professional development to maintain this qualification. This role is also responsible for mentoring other staff by providing advice on best practice engagement methods and supporting them in their engagement activities.

A Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit is available for staff to access to assist them to run successful engagement activities. This toolkit will be reviewed as required in response to the evaluation of our engagement activities and practice.



**LACHLAN SHIRE
COUNCIL**

Wiradjuri Country

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