

Engagement Strategy for Community Strategic Plan 2010 – 2020

Background

Engagement with the citizens, their communities, and other stakeholders in the City of Shoalhaven is an essential part of Council's commitment to open and transparent governance and civic leadership. Council's Community Consultation Strategy sets out its commitment to effective community engagement.

Underpinning this commitment is a recognition that the concept of a civil society places duties and obligations on elected representatives, public authorities and citizens respectively to play their part in the government of the community and the development of the city for the best of all possible outcomes. In that context, community engagement is an invaluable process for enabling communities to participate in decisions that affect them, inherently strengthening and enhancing the relationship between communities and government.

The implementation of a specific Engagement Strategy is a key element of the process in the development of the Shoalhaven Community Strategic Plan 2010-2020. The new Strategic Plan will provide the primary "vision" and strategic direction in Council's integrated planning and reporting framework. The framework will also incorporate a Delivery Program, Operational Plan and Resourcing Strategies, together with planned reporting on achievement of the key strategies.

The Community Strategic Plan will replace Council's *CityPlan* (2000 and 2005) and will outline a vision for the city for the next 10 years, together with strategies that will help the community and the city to aspire towards social, economic, and environmentally sustainable objectives for the city. For example, the new vision and strategies might embrace characteristics such as creativity, accessibility, health and well-being, safety, generosity of its citizens, sustainability, connectivity, physical assets and civic governance.

The Engagement Strategy aims to ensure that Council optimizes its engagement with the citizens and various communities, and stakeholders in the preparation of the new Community Strategic Plan. The community's contribution will help to determine the final shape of the new Strategic Plan.

This Engagement Strategy can be read together with the Project Scope statement for the Shoalhaven Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework (June 2009).

Vision

Shoalhaven City Council's current vision is:

"We will work together in the Shoalhaven to foster a safe, attractive place for people to live, work, stay and play; where growth, development and environmental protection are managed to provide a unique and relaxed lifestyle."

CityPlan was adopted in 2000, and reaffirmed in 2005. It has been progressively delivered, and its vision brought to life, through Council's service programs, capital work and strategic projects, across the four key areas of environment, community, economy and governance. The new Community Strategic Plan will fundamentally embrace a new vision, focusing on the period 2010 to 2020.

Objectives

Citizens, their communities, and other stakeholders represent many kinds of collective interests on a wide range of issues and places, and collectively form “the community”. The Council will invite the community to become engaged in the analysis, debate and planning processes, so that the new Strategic Plan’s vision and strategies reflect community aspirations, in turn supporting Council and other policy settings and decision making that direct the community and the city towards its preferred future vision.

This Community Engagement Strategy is intended to support the preparation of the Shoalhaven Community Strategic Plan, consistent with the provisions of the Draft Local Government Amendment (Planning and Reporting) Bill 2009 and associated Regulations and towards Council’s completion date of March 2010. It will direct Council’s engagement and communication with Shoalhaven’s citizens, their communities, and other stakeholders in the preparation of the Community Strategic Plan 2010-2020 and related plans, strategies and programs.

This strategy will:

- enhance community understanding of and confidence in Council’s planning and delivery of services, works and projects, towards the vision outlined in the Community Strategic Plan;
- ensure that all parts of the community are informed about and have the opportunity to be involved in the preparation of the Community Strategic Plan, shaping its vision and strategies towards a plan that is compelling and relevant for the entire city;
- embrace compelling and relevant communications and engagement principles and methodologies.

Principles

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) provides a recognized framework for community engagement, through which public information, consultation, involvement and collaboration are used with clear purpose and supporting commitments and methodologies, to ensure effective engagement aligned to the project scope. The IAP2 framework is summarized below:

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate
<p>Public Participation Goal: To provide balanced and objective information to assist understanding of topic, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.</p>	<p>Public Participation Goal: To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.</p>	<p>Public Participation Goal: To work with the public throughout the process to ensure that concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.</p>	<p>Public Participation Goal: To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including development of alternatives and identification of preferred solution.</p>
<p>Promise to the Public: We will keep you informed.</p>	<p>Promise to the Public: We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how input influenced the decision.</p>	<p>Promise to the Public: We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how input influenced the decision.</p>	<p>Promise to the Public: We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.</p>
<p>Example techniques</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letterbox drops • Rates Notice inserts • Fact Sheets • Internet sites • Open Days 	<p>Example techniques</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comment • Focus Groups • Surveys • Public meetings 	<p>Example techniques</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated workshops • Deliberative polling 	<p>Example techniques</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen Advisory Committees • Consensus building • Participatory decision-making

At various stages of the Community Strategic Plan development, different engagement techniques will be used based on the following IAP2 descriptions:

Inform	One-way communication providing balanced and objective information to assist understanding about something that is going to happen or has happened.
Consult	Communications designed to obtain public feedback about ideas on rationale, alternatives and proposals to inform decision making.
Involve	Participatory process designed to help identify issues and views to ensure that concerns and aspirations are understood and considered prior to decision making.
Collaborate	Working together to develop understanding of all issues and interests to work out alternatives and identify preferred solutions.

Strategy Delivery

Three Phases

The Engagement Strategy will be implemented in three phases, reflecting the iterative development of the Community Strategic Plan and its connection to other elements of the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework.

The three phases will be:

- Phase 1 – seeking wide participation and validation from external influences, key issues, priorities, current plans and strategies;
- Phase 2 – engaging directly with specific sections of the community to shape planning directions and priorities;
- Phase 3 – seeking the response of the entire community to a draft Strategic Plan including at least a vision, strategies and achievement measures.

Council will carefully consider the outcomes of each phase of the engagement process before determining the way forward and hence the nature of the proposals adopted or presented in the subsequent phase.

Audiences

Relevant communities, communities of interest and stakeholders to be invited to participate in the new Plan's development, through the Engagement Strategy, include:

- Citizens of Shoalhaven
- Community Consultative Bodies
- Community and sporting associations
- Council staff
- Councillors and elected representatives
- Business and industry representative associations
- Defence associations and organisations
- Indigenous peoples' representative groups / traditional owners
- Representatives of government agencies and statutory bodies
- Schools and educational institutions
- Youth associations or representatives

Engagement methods

Methods used to undertake the engagement processes will be developed based on the IAP2 framework principles, from the following examples*:

- Briefings provided by Council staff
- Briefings provided by consultants or external providers, together with Council staff
- Focus groups
- Individual contact
- Access to information - and possible interactive opportunities – on Council's internet site
- Other forms of electronic communication, such as social media, emails, RSS feeds, text messages, CD or flash drive publication
- Letters, flyers and information sheets
- Media releases, statements and media briefings
- Public meetings and facilitated workshops
- Public notices and advertisements
- Surveys

- Public displays, posters

* This is not an exhaustive list and all communication and engagement methods and techniques deemed suitable should be employed, with reference to IAP2 and/or other guidelines.

Communications Plan

Linked to the Community Strategic Plan engagement process, it is expected that a more broadly applicable and widely used Corporate Communications Plan will be developed. This will support the consistent delivery of Council's community engagement objectives during the Strategic Plan's development.

Achievement of engagement objectives

The Community Strategic Plan Engagement Strategy may be considered a success when:

- 60 per cent of citizens who are surveyed say the council has listened to them;
- 75 per cent of people affected by Council works, services or changes know of those works, services or changes;
- 60 per cent of citizens agree that Council's reputation as an organisation that understands their concerns and represents community aspirations is good or excellent.

These achievement measures could be assessed by way of an independent and statistically valid survey of representative sectors of the community, following the Community Strategic Plan project completion.

Contacts

Group

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Approvals

Please note

All communication deliverables need to be approved by the Assistant General Manager before production and distribution.

Background materials and references

- For further information on background materials for communication / engagement, you can see the following internet sites.
- http://www.lga.sa.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/Community_Engagement_Handbook_March_2008_-_PDF.pdf
- An interesting case study in a local government that has changed in the UK, see <http://www.southtyneside.info/>
- See <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=71665> for background knowledge, sharing of best practice cases in the UK local government arena.
- See <http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=6551> for background material on a UK best case for community consultation.
- For further information on the NSW Department of Local Government consultation documents see http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/dlg_generalindex.asp?sectionid=1&mi=6&ml=9&AreaIndex=IntPlanRept