



Community Engagement Strategy





Acknowledgment

Cowra Shire Council acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land, the Wiradjuri people, and shows our respect to elders past, present and emerging.



Executive summary

All Councils are required to implement a Community Engagement Strategy under Section 402A of the Local Government Act 1993, which states - *The council must establish and implement a strategy (its "community engagement strategy"), based on social justice principles, for engagement with local community when developing the community strategic plan.* Social justice is based on four interrelated principles of equity, rights, access and participation. The strategy must be reviewed within 3 months of the local government elections.

Our commitment

To ensure that the Cowra Shire community has the opportunity to actively contribute to a fulfilling, positive quality of life.

Our principles

- Respectful and act with integrity
- Clarity of purpose
- Accessible and inclusive
- Show the influence and impact of community input
- Timeliness
- Tailored
- Informed/ Educated
- Meet our legislative requirements
- Active and consistent learning

How we listen to the community

We see you at our facilities and events and we hear from you online, via emails, phone calls, letters, petitions and project proposals.

What is engagement

Community engagement is also called "public participation" and it is about involving the community in decision-making processes that impact them, and is at the very core of our democratic processes in local government.

Why we engage

Council's engage to ensure that we understand and comprehend the diversity of views across the Cowra Shire. As a result, we consider a wide range of options informed by community input and we deliver services that meet the expectations of as many people as possible.

How we engage

Council will adopt the IAP2 Public Participation framework as a methodology for determining the scope of engagement and how decisions are made. This guides us to engage depending on the scope or impact of the project to either inform, consult, involve, collaborate or empower the community in decision making.

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Our commitment

This Community Engagement Strategy sets out a whole of Council commitment to community engagement. Our commitment is that -

Cowra Shire Council will:

- Encourage everyone with an interest in the Shire to understand, be understood and learn from each other through a productive and inclusive exchange of views;
- Ensure that people receive information that is timely, free of bias and easy to access;
- Be transparent, strengthen relationships and build mutual respect through ongoing engagement activities;
- Be open to responses and respectful of differing points of view;
- Articulate our commitment and deliver it.

We aim to ensure that people are:

- Informed about issues and decisions that could affect their current or future way of life;
- Encouraged to share their views with Council;
- Able to raise issues and have their say in a way and at a time that suits them;
- Be involved in decision making processes if they wish to be;
- Confident their views and feedback have been considered;
- Able to get feedback on how their input has been reflected in Council decisions and actions.

Our principles

Cowra Shire Council's approach to community engagement is guided by the following principles:

- Integrity: our engagement will be genuine, meaningful and transparent;
- Clarity of purpose: we will be clear about the purpose of the engagement and how contributions will be considered;
- Accessible and Inclusive: our engagement will be accessible and balanced, capturing a range of values and perspectives by applying a variety of engagement methods that suit the purpose of engagement and the stakeholders involved;
- Respectful: we will act in an honest, open and respectful way to build strong relationships, partnerships and trust with our stakeholders;
- Timely: we engage early and provide enough time for stakeholders to provide input;
- Tailored: We actively seek to identify and engage with those likely to have an interest in the issues involved using appropriate methods;
- Informed: we utilise existing research and findings of other consultations that Council or other organisations have conducted;
- Learning from experience: we review and update Council's engagement techniques to learn and improve;
- Meeting legislative requirements: we will meet or exceed all statutory engagement requirements.



What is engagement?

Community engagement is about involving the community in decision-making, and is at the very core of our democratic processes in local government.

Through community engagement, Council aims to understand varied points of view, clarify community expectations, and build trust. Meaningful engagement allows Council to gather information which enhances decision making and service delivery. Engagement is more than the provision of information. It is an ongoing process which involves two-way communication, talking and listening, and shared decision making.

This Strategy references a continuum of community engagement, based on the *International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum*, - *inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower*.

The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation


The IAP2 Public Participation framework is a methodology for determining the scope of engagement and level of influence the community has in decision making. The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation outlines a continuum of participation that may be appropriate, depending on the outcomes, time-frames, resources and levels of public concern in the decision to be made. At each participation level a different type of commitment is made to the community, which should be made clear and upheld.

By using the IAP2 framework to guide our engagement processes, Council recognises that there is a continuum of engagement that may be applied in different circumstances. For example, if a Council is not actively seeking community input because a decision has already been made, inform is the most appropriate engagement approach.

If, however, Council is seeking to gain further understanding of a matter, and community views, Council will consult or involve people. At the empowerment end of the spectrum, decisions are made by local people without Council involvement.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.



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, 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 possible.	We will implement what you decide.

Why we engage

Council knows that people living in the Cowra Shire value participation, having a voice and being involved.

Engaging with our communities helps us to:

- Make better decisions;
- Ensure our current services, projects and directions align with community priorities;
- Plan for future services, projects and directions by identifying and understanding what is important to our communities and their aspirations;
- Ensure that services best meet the needs of our diverse community including cultural, social and accessibility considerations;
- Encourage a range of voices to be heard;
- Identify shared values, benefits and outcomes and how Council and community can work together to realise our goals;
- Manage risks by understanding and anticipating issues before they escalate;
- Ensure legislative requirements are met.



Who we engage with

A vital component of undertaking community engagement includes identifying and understanding who are the key stakeholders who will be impacted by or who have an interest in a decision. Given the extensive scope of Council's work it is necessary that a range of views are heard. This will at times require engaging with communities outside of the LGA. The list of stakeholders is long and varied and by no means definitive. Stakeholders would be determined based on what Council is engaging on.



Our engagement methods and techniques

In developing project plans for any community engagement activity, our staff are guided by our methods and techniques that may be applied for varying levels of engagement.

Level of Engagement	Examples of Council methods and techniques	Decision maker
Inform To provide information to the community about a project, service, event, emergency or other matter.	* Council Noticeboard * Direct Mail/ Letterbox Drop * Council Customer Service Centre * Publications to promote Council specific events, programs, services and initiatives * Council website and social media * Council agendas and minutes * Media releases and traditional advertising * Council Newsletter digital	Council
Consult To seek an opinion or input to inform a decision.	* Public Exhibitions * Councillors in the Community * Ad-hoc surveys * Biennial Community Satisfaction Survey	Council
Involve To engage with stakeholders to understand and consider their input and feedback.	* Community discussion groups/ focus groups * Project reference groups * Stakeholder forums	Council
Collaborate To work in partnership to come to a decision.	* Committees of Council * Advisory groups	Council and Community
Empower To give the decision-making role entirely to the stakeholders.	* Polls or referendums * Local government elections	Community

How We Listen

Our engagement methods and techniques :

Council's biennial Community Satisfaction Survey has revealed the variety of methods we need to employ to effectively engage with our community.

Pamphlet/letterbox drop remains the clearly preferred method of receiving information from council with email and social media other mediums supported.

By applying our principles to individual community engagement plans, we will ensure that key stakeholders are identified for the particular issue, service or project involved and that we tailor our techniques and methods appropriately.

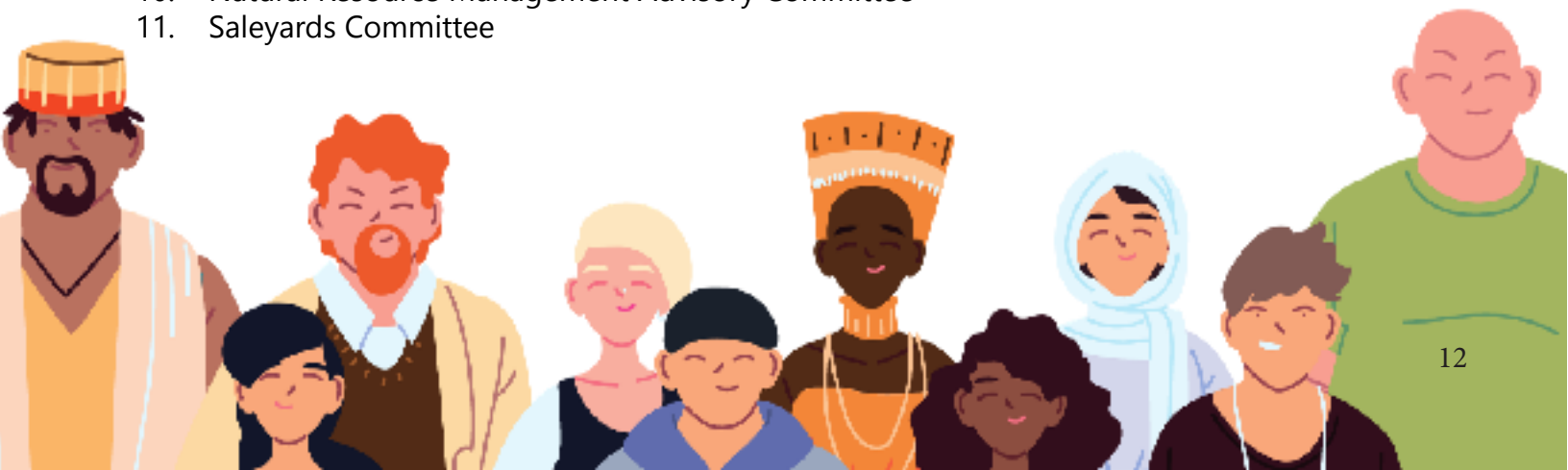
First Nations Community

We acknowledge that fostering a culture of trust, respect and cultural awareness is key to effective engagement with First Nations communities. First Nations people make up 8% of the Cowra Shire community however are often underrepresented in community consultation. Council will make a concerted effort to ensure Aboriginal peoples voices are heard in community engagement.

Advisory Committees

Committees of Council provide an important opportunity for people with skills, knowledge and experience to engage in Council decision making processes. Committees of Council will be utilised to enhance community engagement with specific stakeholder groups. Council has a number of formal committees, established under section 355 of the Local Government Act, 1993, including but not restricted to:

1. Access Committee
2. Australian Chapter of World Peace Bell Association
3. CBD Committee
4. Civic Centre Reference Group
5. Cowra Breakout Association
6. Cowra Public Art Advisory Panel
7. Cowra Regional Art Gallery Advisory Committee
8. Cowra Sport & Recreational Council
9. Cowra Youth Council
10. Natural Resource Management Advisory Committee
11. Saleyards Committee



Engagement Method	How to contact Council	What happens next?
In-Person	Visit our customer service centre in Cowra from 9am-4:30pm from Mon - Fri.	All enquiries taken at the front desk are centrally logged in our Customer Request Management (CRM) system then sent to the appropriate section for action.
Petitions	Anyone can submit a petition to Council for consideration. Petitions immediately demonstrate a level of interest from the community on a specific topic.	A petition with 100 or more signatures will be submitted to a Council meeting for consideration by councillors.
Public Forums and Presentations	<p>There are two ways you can seek to address the Council:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A request to speak at a Public Forum about a matter that has been included in the Agenda for a Council or Committee meeting; 2. A request to make a Presentation to the Councillors about activities or items of community interest. 	Once you have presented in either a Public Forum or as a presentation to the Council, the Council may then either make a notice of motion or a recommendation to Council staff to act on the resolution.
Letters and Emails	<p>All letters and emails sent to Council are documented and then forwarded to the appropriate officer for action.</p> <p>You can write to Cowra Shire Council at Private Bag 342, Cowra NSW 2794 or email: council@cowra.nsw.gov.au</p>	Once written correspondence has been received it is allocated to a Council officer or area with a time-frame set for response.
Phone Calls	Ring 02 6340 2000 for Council Customer Service which is open from 9am-4:30pm (Mon - Fri).	All phone calls are centrally logged while emails are catalogued using our CRM system and then sent to the appropriate section or officer for action.

How we use feedback

The Council decision making process

Cowra Shire Council is governed by nine elected Councillors. Councillors are elected to represent the interests of all ratepayers and residents. Our elected Council will ensure it effectively represents the diverse views of the Cowra Shire community by adopting the principles of this strategy.

The Local Government Act 1993 defines the following roles and responsibilities of Council, in relation to community engagement, to include:

- Councillors represent the collective interests of residents, ratepayers and the local community; and facilitate communication with the community and the governing body;
- The elected Council provides leadership and establishes policy and strategic direction for the organisation and the future of the Shire. The Council consults regularly with community organisations and other key stakeholders, and keeps them informed of its decisions;
- The Mayor as leader of the Council and as a community leader, promotes partnerships with key stakeholders, and together with the General Manager ensures adequate opportunities and mechanisms for engagement between the Council and the local community;
- The General Manager advises the Mayor and Council on appropriate forms of community engagement in different situations, and prepares a Community Engagement Strategy and operationalises that strategy.

Where an engagement activity is referenced in a report to the elected Council, this report will include:

- What consultation activities were undertaken;
- The number of people and organisations who participated;
- The feedback received;
- Online (website and social media) statistics and feedback.

To support informed decision making, the elected Council's role is to consider the issues and points of view raised by the community during the engagement process.

Reporting back on outcomes - closing the loop

Following a planned consultation process, the outcomes will be reported to the elected Council.

Where submissions have been received from members of the community as part of a consultation process, these submissions will be responded to with advice on the outcome of their submission. When a focus group or a community advisory group is formed by Council as part of an engagement process, feedback on the decision will be presented back to the group.

Monitoring and evaluation

Council will evaluate our engagement activities in five key areas:

- Process: how well the engagement was designed and implemented?
- Appropriateness: was the engagement appropriate and how well did the public and stakeholders accept the process?
- Techniques: were the techniques used of value to the project, did some techniques work better than others?
- Reach: were the people we reached representative of those affected by the decision?
- Outcomes: were the intended outcomes of the engagement process achieved?

Learnings from the evaluations will be used to inform future engagement activities, and to update any future Community Engagement Plans.



