Community Engagement Strategy

2020-2024

Acknowledgement of Country

Council acknowledges the traditional Custodians of lands and waters within our Shire and recognises their ongoing responsibility to care for Country and of teaching and learning.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and extend our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Nations Peoples. "

Mission Statement

"

To keep our community informed and offer every opportunity to participate in meaningful and timely engagement with Council that leads to the right outcomes for all.

Making decisions together.

"

Message from our Council

The Community Engagement Strategy 2020–2024 aims to help Balranald Shire citizens understand how and when Council will engage with them, and how they can have a real say on issues that affect their future.

It also reflects the growing demands being placed on regional Councils – through both legislative changes and growing community expectations – to ensure that the community and other key stakeholders can influence decision-making processes.

The Strategy draws on the enthusiasm of both the Council Administrator and his Executive Leadership Team, who are determined to deliver better community engagement by applying the latest ideas and techniques. Empowering our people through community engagement is one of Council's top priorities. We welcome the experience, imagination and know-how of our citizens in contributing to Council's work.

This Strategy will be reviewed every four years.

A key theme for our Community Engagement Strategy is:

"Making decisions together"

Our commitment to an engaged community

What is community engagement?

Different terms are used to describe the concept of community engagement, including public participation and community consultation. In Australia, the term community engagement tends to be used more than public participation, with consultation now considered to be a point on the engagement (or participation) spectrum[1]:

This spectrum (shown in the table below) depicts a continuum from everyday conversations or media posts to high-level strategic engagement and empowerment. Later on in the CES we will unpack the ways Council engages under this participation spectrum.

Typically, community engagement refers to the process of involving people in the decisions that affect them. Engagement is considered to be 'the process by which government, organisations, communities and individuals connect in the development and implementation of decisions that affect them'.

Due to the varying often specific nature of community projects, differing levels of community engagement are required to drive mutually beneficial outcomes.

We see community engagement as a process whereby Council:

- proactively seeks out community values, concerns and aspirations;
- incorporates those values, concerns and aspirations into a decision-making process with feedback loops; and
- establishes an ongoing partnership with the community to ensure that their priorities and values continue to shape Council's strategic direction.

This is in line with the United Nations Brisbane Declaration on Community Engagement (International Conference on Engaging Communities, 2005) which envisages community engagement as a two way process.

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.

(Referendums, Polls and Council Elections) |
| **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 possible. | We will implement what you decide. |

[1] IAP2 Participation Spectrum 2014 ®

Why is engagement important?

Engagement is the single most important action in the ongoing community-Council relationship. It is the common thread running through our Integrated planning and reporting framework:

Firstly, we need an engagement strategy in order to inform and update our Community Strategic Plan. The NSW Local Government Act states:

"The Council must establish and implement a strategy (its community engagement strategy), based on social justice principles, for engagement with the local community when developing the community strategic plan."[2]

There are four social justice principles that underpin our Community Engagement Strategy. They are:

1. **Access** - greater equality of access to facilities and services;
2. **Equity** - overcoming unfairness caused by unequal access to economic resources and power;
3. **Rights** - equal effective legal, industrial and political rights;
4. **Participation** - expanded opportunities for real participation in the decisions which impact lives.

Secondly, we need it for effective decision-making.

Councils are increasingly recognising the value of community and stakeholder engagement as an essential part of project planning and decision-making.

This Strategy has four main objectives. They are to:

1. Continue to strengthen relationships with the community so that engagement activities are ongoing conversations rather than isolated events.
2. Give the Shire's diverse communities and stakeholders a voice in Council's decision-making, within practical limits of time and resources.
3. Ensure that people receive timely information that is free of bias, easy to access and understand, and helps them to make meaningful contributions on the issues that matter.
4. Explain why, how and when Council will engage.

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[2]NSW Local Government Act 1993, No 30, Section 402 (5)

How we engage

This Strategy groups different forms of community engagement (based on the International Association of Public Participation spectrum) into three broad categories, as shown in the table on the next page. However, these are not mutually exclusive and in most cases Council will use a combination of techniques to ensure each and every engagement process is successful. In accomplishing this, residents and stakeholders will have access to the information they need to understand what Council is doing and the decisions it has to make.

Moreover, some sections of the community require more customised engagement approaches to ensure matters such as cultural sensitivity, venue and location accessibility and times of engagement are considered.

Engagement can never be a simple, 'one size fits all – tick the box' exercise. The scope, timing and type of engagement will vary according to the circumstances of each issue under consideration or decision to be made.

Market Streetscape Revitalisation 2018
Reference Group Workshop

Engagement Level	Description	Example Techniques
INFORM *Making sure people stay in the loop on Council's activities that interest them*	Experience shows that – in many cases – accurate information is all that people want, especially if they feel that they can trust Council to work in the community's best interests. To prepare good plans, make sound decisions and deliver projects to an expected standard.	Customer Service – Shire Office, Visitor Information Centre
		Council-run websites
		Social media
		Printed media: local newspapers, Shire newsletter
		Site signage (Infrastructure Projects); posters on bulletin boards and Shire offices
		Weekly radio interviews
CONSULT & INVOLVE *Actively seeking people's views and exchanging information between Council and the community*	These forms of engagement are necessary to ensure Council is kept up-to-date on matters of community interest, issues that are (or may become) controversial, and that people can make their views known on such matters, and be sure that those views will be fully considered.	Customer Service – Shire Office, Visitor Information Centre
		Written submissions to Council or the General Manager
		Surveys (either online, printed or informal)
		One-on-one appointments with the Administrator, General Manager & Executives
		Stakeholder Forums (conferences, expos etc)
		Public Forums (relating to proposed decisions of Council)
COLLABORATE & EMPOWER *Bringing people into the decision-making process*	In some cases, engagement may need to go further. Representative groups of people and organisations will be established to actively collaborate with the Adminstrator and/or Council staff in the preparation of plans and policies, the design and implementation of projects, or the management of a Council program or facility. Council has the power to delegate some responsibilities to community-based committees. The most important form of democratic empowerment in local government includes the 4-yearly election of Councillors, as well as polls and referendums.	Project reference/working groups
		Advisory Committees
		Polls and referendums
		4-yearly Election of Councillors

Engagement Level	Criteria	Techniques	Explanation	Examples
INFORM *Making sure people stay in the loop on Council's activities that interest them*	• *Straight-forward issue involving relatively few people* • *Little or no risk of controversy or conflict with community values* • *Minimal impacts on individuals, community life or the environment*	Customer Service – Shire Office, Visitor Information Centre	Shire Customer Service Staff have a sufficiently broad awareness of council activities and are able to have informal conversations with people enquiring about specific interests and activities relating to Council	New community member visiting Council offices enquiring about location of public spaces (particularly playgrounds, facilites and services)
		Council website	A range of information, community news, Council activities and documents in a single webpage with links to other valuable services and information. Online enquiry portals allow people to ask about specific services, projects or notices.	Seniors Week Luncheon; Advertising for expressions of interest to join the Balranald Youth Advisory Committee; Downloading the application for development form; Viewing the Community Strategic Plan
		Social media	Small to medium sized information content will be active throughout Shire's social media platforms on typically a day-to-day frequency; Ordinary Meetings of Council are televised live on Facebook	Australia Day events; Pool opening hours; unsealed road closures due to rain
		Printed media: local newspapers, Shire newsletter	Shire may, for a period of time, utilise newspaper advertising space in local newspapers for items requiring public exhibition; during prolonged projects or events to keep the community updated on progress; newsletters are sent out monthly to all ratepayers via post containing information on all council/community activity.	Market Streetscape Revitalisation Project – Weekly updates in The Guardian newspaper and monthly updates in the Shire Newsletter; Development Applications exhibiitons; Council Posiitons Vacant; changes to policy or local laws
		Site signage (esp. for Infrastructure Projects); posters on bulletin boards located in the public places and Shire offices	Notification in public spaces about projects and events	(Poster) Inviting expressions of interest to join a Project Reference Group; (Sign) Showing a conceptual overview of an Infrastructure Development Project
		Weekly radio interviews	A 3-minute radio interview on 3SH (typically interviewing the General Manager or the Administrator, but could be other Executives or Managers) on important upcoming or of-the-week activities or events in the Shire	Council staff discussing on radio events such as the upcoming Five Rivers Festival, Euston Salami Frestival, sports and recreation events
CONSULT & INVOLVE *Actively seeking people's views and exchanging information between Council and the community*	• *Significant risk of controversy or conflict with community values* • *Likely significant impacts on individuals, community life, economy or environment* • *Complex issue or issues involving multiple community groups and/or other stakeholders* • *Decision-making would benefit from substantial community feedback*	Written submissions	Incoming correspondence from community (either via emails or letters) enquiring or making requests in relation to specific matters.	Letter to the General Manager requesting that Shire consider extended opening hours at the Janelle Masters Memorial Pool
		Surveys	They are most importantly used to gather key analytical data on the community that will underpin strategic objectives. Surveys are also for-cause to test public opinions/attitudes on existing matters, projects or proposals.	A Survey Monkey on-line survey (link from Facebook and Council webpage) to understand the behaviours and health of people using non-scheme drinking water supplies.
		"Drop-in" or "Strut the Street" public sessions	Typically for the Administrator, Executives and Project Officers to meet informally with the public and business fronts to discuss matters of importance or generally meet-and-greet. Drop-in sessions are normally publicised via Inform techniques	Administrator setting up at the Discovery Visitor Information Centre and meeting with passers-by
		One-on-one appointments with the Administrator, General Manager & Executives	The public may from time-to-time need to engage in one-on-one conversation with the Administrator, the General Manager, or the Executives. The proposed time is conveyed to the Executive assistant who checks availability via the respective Council person's calendar and then confirms appointment.	A resident makes a request at the Shire office to discuss the Euston Recreation Reserve with the Director for Infrastructure and Development, the meeting time is confirmed, is recorded in the DID calendar and they meet either on site or at Shire Offices at the agreed time.
		Community Engagment Events	Council occasionally organises public engagement events, openly inviting all residents, businesses, organisations and service providers to meet across one or two days under one or all of the Strategic Goals of the CSP (Environment, Economy, Society). The goal is to discuss current challenges/opportunities and share visions about the future in a facilitated, exchanged environment. Such events are designed to inform Council on community aspirations, opportunities and challenges	Community Growth Strategy Forum – held every two years across two evenings to understand the challenges and opportunities of the industries, businesses and services in our community
		Deputation to present at Public Forums (prior to Ordinary Council Meetings)	Specifically related to agenda items of the Ordinary Council Meeting; generally for community members to express their opinions or to provide feedback prior to Council making decisions	Annual review of the delivery program including rates, fees, and charges
COLLABORATE & EMPOWER *Bringing people into the decision-making process*	• *High risk of controversy or conflict with community values.* • *Major potential impacts on community life, economy or environment* • *Highly complex issues or issues involving multiple community groups* • *Decision-making requires input of considered community expertise and advice, either one-off or ongoing.*	Project reference/working groups	invitations sent are either open to the general public or selective for skilled local individuals to form a group of around 10-12 with the objective of open discussion on project intent/concept that informs design.	Market Streetscape Revitalisation Working Group engaging with a landscape architect to develop conceptual design elements
		Advisory Committees	Representatives of communities of interest, aligned with the community strategic objectives of the CSP under an established charter; groups of 8-12 that meet every month/quarter to offer information and recommendations to Council in line with a committee charter	Balranald Beautification Committee recommendation to establish a rose garden at the Balranald Lawn Cemetery entrance. Council resolved to support the project leading to donations and volunteership achieving it.
		Public Forums	As per Section 4 of the 'Model Code of Meeting Pactice for Local Councils in NSW' – The Council will hold a public forum prior to each ordinary meeting of the Council for the purpose of hearing five minute oral submissions from members of the public on items of business to be considered at the upcoming meeting. Public forums may also be held prior to extraordinary Council meetings.	Member of the public presenting their concerns over the proposed development of community infrastructure upon Crown Reserves
		Constitutional referendums and Council polls	As per Schedule 10 of the Local Government (General) Regulation 2005, the Administrator may choose to seek the community's views on any issue through a non-compulsory poll of electors' opinions, or it may hold a 'constitutional referendum' on certain electoral matters (e.g. use of wards, the number of councillors), in which case voting is compulsory and the result is binding.	As per Section 224(2) of the Local Government Act, public referendum to decide the number of Councillors for Council Governance ahead of local elections
		4-yearly Election of Councillors	Next Council Election will be scheduled for September 2024	

Engaging on social media

Council, through both its Executive Services and its Tourism and Community Services, administrates a range of social media pages to inform and consult with our locals and visitors.

There are principally three Council entities that use social media platforms to inform and consult with our communities:

- **Balranald Shire Council** – Council seeks to provide residents and visitors on-line information about Council services; day-to-day updates on issues, activities, and events; provides community with opportunities to enquire on specific matters.
- **Discover Balranald & Surrounds** – specifically seeks to deliver on-line visitor services and information; orientated towards tourism attraction and gauging quality via meaningful visitor feedback.
- **Balranald Caravan Park** – seeking to engage with travellers on-line to notify capacity, facility and quality of the Council-run caravan park; to notify of events, activities and issues to do with the caravan park; gauging quality via meaningful visitor feedback

Below is a matrix of Council entities and their social media platforms they utilise (red - no account, green – active account):

	Webpage	Facebook	Trip Advisor	Instagram	Twitter
Balranald Shire Council	🟢	🟢	🔴	🔴	🟢
Discover Balranald & Surrounds	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴
Balranald Caravan Park	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🔴

Council Webpages

www.balranald.nsw.gov.au/
http://visitbalranald.com.au/
http://balranaldcaravanpark.com.au/

Council on Facebook

Facebook is the most popular social media platform for our community. We have three Council-administrated pages

@DiscoverBalranald
@BalranaldShireCouncil
@BalranaldCaravanPark

The following is an extract from the Balranald Shire Council and Discover Balranald & Surrounds Facebook page 'Social Media Administration Rules':

> *"…The pages have been developed to help keep the community and visitors up to date with Shire news and to notify visitors of what there is to see and do in and around Balranald and surrounding regions. Community interaction and feedback is welcome."*

An extract from the Balranald Caravan Park Facebook page rules:

> *"The page has been developed to share experiences with our current, future and past visitors. Community interaction and feedback is welcome.*
>
> *All posting of comments on this page are at the discretion of the page administrators. We do not intend to prevent the posting of candid comments or critiques, but will take appropriate steps to protect the privacy and rights of individuals."*