



Heart of the Stirlings



SHIRE OF GNOWANGERUP

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Community Engagement Guidelines and Toolkit

June 2022

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDELINES

Objective

Community engagement strives to achieve an effective two-way communication process between the Shire and our community. The outcome desired is effective public participation in the Shire's projects and programs and meeting the Shire's statutory obligations where consultation with the community is mandated.

The guidelines and toolkit outline a number of methods that the Shire can use to encourage community input into the Shire's future plans and proposals for new services and initiatives.

Guidelines

- 1) Whenever the Shire is proposing changes to levels of service, the introduction of new fees and charges, or any other changes which significantly change the way the Shire has interacted with its community, a high level of community engagement is required to explain and seek endorsement of these changes.
- 2) When the Shire is developing new projects and programs, a level of community engagement appropriate for the size and scale of the project or program will be undertaken to ensure that the community is well informed of what is proposed and given the opportunity for feedback

Key Principles of Consultation

- All relevant stakeholders will be identified
- An appropriate method of community engagement will be developed by staff (with Council input if required)
- The process will allow stakeholders adequate time to respond to issues
- The consultation process will occur as early as possible
- The number and types of communications methods will be determined by the complexity of the matter, the range and availability of stakeholders to be consulted, and the timeframe available to complete the process.

Types of Communication

- 1) Participation
- 2) Comment
- 3) Advice

1) Participation:

Appropriate for large projects affecting a wide range of stakeholders, involving significant investment of finance and other resources, or likely to have a major impact on the community during the timeframe of the project.

Participation is likely to be a process carried out before Council makes a decision to proceed.

Participation can take the form of:

- Surveys & Questionnaires – sent to relevant stakeholders, especially those most likely to be affected by the decision.
 - Public displays and online presentations
 - Advisory Committee/Working Group – a group of representative stakeholders assembled to provide public input
 - Public Meeting – formal meeting with scheduled agenda
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2) Comment:

Appropriate for lesser projects under consideration by Council.

Comment is relevant when Council has a preferred position or preferred plan, option or method, and seeks community input before making a final resolution.

Comment can take the form of;

- Submissions invited by way of public notices, social media notices etc.
- Surveys/Questionnaires advertised for the community to complete, again by way of notices and online and social media communication
- Face to face discussions with affected stakeholders or groups

3) Advising Stakeholders and the Community generally:

Appropriate for issues relating to compliance, statutory notices for planning and building service, administrative issues such as local laws, property, electoral enrolments, nomination of candidates for Council, footpath construction, advising the community of significant Council decisions.

Advice is relevant when Council has **made a decision** and wishes to communicate that decision to affected stakeholders and the community.

Advising stakeholders and the community generally can take the form of;

- Media – Shire President and/or CEO informing public through press releases and social media articles
- Local newspaper and newsletters – public notices
- Council publications – Facebook, Shire Newsletter, Shire web page and notices on notice boards
- Direct Mail, SMS releases

Other Public Consultation

Each financial year Council is required to hold an Annual Electors meeting within 56 days of accepting the Annual Report. The Annual Report itself is a significant communication asset outlining achievements during the year under review, highlighting the Shire's financial performance, its progress against its major planning documents, and information on a range of prescribed outcomes.

Council prepares a Community Strategic Plan which needs to be formally reviewed every four years. The required public consultation for this document represents one of the most important community engagement activities for a local government, because this plan forms the strategic direction which the local government will pursue on behalf of its community.

Accessing Council Information

Copies of draft documents, where comments have been invited, will be displayed at Council Administration, Library and on Council's website.

Copies of Agendas and Council Minutes can be obtained free of charge and will be displayed on Council's website.

Statutory Requirements

The Shire is required to comply with specific legislative requirements such as minimum periods, publication in the Government Gazette and public notices. Consultation processes identified in this policy should be seen as complementing any prescribed statutory requirements.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

Introduction

This Community Engagement Toolkit has been developed as a resource to assist Council staff and consultants in the delivery of community engagement activities. These community engagement methods are described with information provided on situations under which they might be used, potential advantages and disadvantages, and tips on things to consider for their effective use.

This toolkit captures methods that are currently used or likely to be used by Council in community engagement activities with respect to the level of resourcing required. It is recognised that several other effective engagement methods are not covered in this toolkit. Most engagement methods in this toolkit are adaptable and could be effectively tailored to specific issues in the community. Although the engagement methods in this toolkit are categorised according to levels of engagement, some of the methods can be used for more than one level on the engagement spectrum.



1.PARTICIPATION

1.1 Committee

Description and Use	Think it Through	Best Practice Note
<p>A structured small group of community or stakeholder representatives that meet regularly and operate under a terms of reference. May also have members from Council (elected or employee). Can vary from members providing their own feedback or ideas to planning processes, to members acting as conduit between the broader community and Council.</p> <p>The committee offers expert and community advice on policies, plans, issues and initiatives. Committees are statutory requirements in some circumstances.</p> <p>The Local Government Act 1995 empowers Councils to establish special committees on such terms and for such purposes as it thinks fit.</p>	<p>It is a ready audience formed around common theme, suitable for long term engagement and addressing complex issues, highly political or high emotion issues.</p> <p>Can be effective for understanding the broader community better, improving quality of policy, strategy and plans, building community capacity for engagement and developing relationship. Committee members gain understanding of other perspectives, leading towards compromise.</p> <p>It is time and labour intensive and members may not achieve consensus.</p> <p>Valuable for checking views before going out to the wider audience.</p> <p>Balanced and full representation is difficult due to the small size of committees and the diversity of the community.</p>	<p>Define roles and responsibility up front.</p> <p>Be forthcoming with information.</p> <p>Use a consistently credible process.</p> <p>Interview potential committee members in person before selection.</p> <p>Council must accept need for give-and-take.</p> <p>Record of all meetings should be properly documented.</p> <p>Representativeness is vital.</p> <p>Consider the expertise that is required in the committee.</p>

1.2 Community Leaders

Description and Use	Think it Through	Best Practice Note
<p>Leaders of various communities or interest groups are briefed and they disseminate the information to their groups to elicit their views and opinions.</p>	<p>It is able to reach larger numbers of community members than would direct communication by Council.</p> <p>It is low cost, facilitates the development of relationships and may be effective for some hard to reach audiences. Depends on the availability of leaders, their skills and standing with their community.</p>	<p>Engage leaders who are affirmed by their community.</p> <p>Consider providing take away published materials, e.g. fact sheets.</p> <p>Be cautious when engaging with communities where factions exist.</p> <p>May be necessary to brief community leaders one-on-one.</p>

1.3 CEO Visits

Description and Use	Think it Through	Best Practice Note
<p>Open, invitation for community members to meet with the CEO in various locations. It is used to understand issues and identify opportunities and solutions.</p> <p>Currently the CEO visits the Yongergnow Malleefowl Centre once per week and the Borden Pavilion once per month.</p>	<p>It is effective in small groups (not more than 10) and helps build relationships.</p> <p>It is semi-formal and therefore not intimidating.</p> <p>The conversation can be dominated by an individual or persons.</p>	<p>Invite interested community members and groups.</p> <p>Use a familiar venue where conversation can be had while sharing a meal or drink.</p> <p>Keep it short (not more than 2 hours).</p>

1.4 Public Meeting

Description and Use	Think it Through	Best Practice Note
<p>A formal meeting where Council can share information or make a presentation to the general public and respond to questions asked by members of the public. It is usually a large group and is open to all interested members of the community to attend and ask questions.</p> <p>It has legislative requirements in some circumstances. See Part 6 of the Local Government Act 1995.</p>	<p>It is transparent and enables addressing immediately and directly any misconception and concerns.</p> <p>It may be helpful in understanding community reactions, implications of propositions and building relationships.</p> <p>The depth of the discussion is sometimes limited.</p> <p>Those attending may not be representative, meeting can be hijacked or dominated by individuals or groups and can quickly escalate out of control because emotions are high.</p> <p>Some people find public meetings intimidating.</p> <p>It can result in low turnout and can lead to bad public image if things go wrong.</p> <p>Suitable for engaging within a tight timeframe.</p>	<p>Ensure compliance with legislation where required.</p> <p>It is better to have a single issue up for consideration.</p> <p>Advertise widely, including details of date, time, venue and subject of discussion.</p> <p>Give enough notice for people to prepare ahead, e.g. organise child care.</p> <p>Use accessible venue that will be big enough for the meeting.</p> <p>Consider day and time of the meeting, including public parking space, closeness to public transport, traffic hour, etc.</p> <p>Arrange for knowledgeable guest speakers where necessary.</p> <p>Review all materials and presentation ahead of time.</p> <p>Set up the venue to allow for interaction between Council and the public.</p>

		Set the rules that will guide the meeting from the very beginning.
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1.5 Working Group or Working Party

Description and Use	Think it Through	Best Practice Note
<p>A small ad hoc group of individuals with diverse and complementing expertise collaborating to achieve specified goals.</p> <p>The goal may be to study and report on a particular question and make recommendations based on its findings, develop a policy or implement a program.</p> <p>It might involve council staff from different departments, representatives of community groups, government officials or citizens.</p>	<p>Good for drawing on the expertise of a range of people to help develop policy or solve a problem.</p> <p>Useful for exploring issues before broader engagement takes place.</p> <p>Effective for internal consultation and the development of proposals.</p> <p>May be time consuming to set up.</p>	<p>Ensure all the required expertise is represented.</p> <p>Identify and invite directly persons with the required skills for the assignment.</p> <p>Keep meetings brief.</p> <p>Allow enough notice for members to plan ahead.</p> <p>Be forthcoming with information.</p> <p>Requires strong leadership.</p>

2. COMMENT

2.1 Customer Service Form

Description and Use	Think it Through	Best Practice Note
<p>Forms used to obtain feedback from the community and stakeholders.</p> <p>They are available on the Website and in hard copy in the following locations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admin Office • Depot • Library • Swimming Pool 	<p>Can be easily distributed, able to reach a wide audience and it is cost effective.</p> <p>Effective in collecting immediate response from participants at events.</p> <p>Response rate may be poor.</p>	<p>Provide writing materials, e.g. pen, when used at events.</p>

2.2 Focus Group

Description and Use	Think it Through	Best Practice Note
<p>A form of structured interview in which a small group of stakeholders are asked questions about their views, opinions or attitudes towards an issue or project.</p> <p>The facilitator allows for an open discussion guided by the questions but may follow the flow of participants' discussions.</p> <p>It is useful for gaining in-depth understanding of a target population's opinion of issues and for testing ideas before implementation.</p>	<p>It is effective for reaching target audience or particular segments of the community.</p> <p>Less formal and intimidating than public meetings.</p> <p>It is useful for exploring issues before broader consultation takes place.</p> <p>Selection of participants may be biased and some may request money before they participate.</p> <p>Usually needs to be combined with other engagement methods before making an informed decision.</p> <p>Information obtained is qualitative in nature.</p>	<p>A skilled focus group facilitator is required.</p> <p>It is more effective when a group is not more than 15 individuals.</p> <p>Explain the purpose and the process to participants at the beginning.</p> <p>Participants must be representative of the target population.</p> <p>Provide refreshments.</p> <p>Use location that is convenient to participants.</p> <p>Conduct at least two sessions for a given target population at alternate times/days.</p>

2.3 Forum, Briefing, Information Session

Description and Use	Think it Through	Best Practice Note
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<p>Presentations and discussions with community or stakeholder groups to provide information and gather feedback, ideas or opinions.</p> <p>It is useful in identifying the needs of stakeholders and getting them involved in the decision making process.</p>	<p>It works well with existing stakeholder groups and can be held during their usual meeting time.</p> <p>Effective for small and large groups, including hard to reach audiences.</p> <p>Provides opportunity to increase stakeholders' awareness, build capacity and relationships.</p> <p>It is suitable for issues that are highly emotional, highly political or where there is a need to understand the impact of Council's actions or decision on specific issues.</p> <p>May leave out people who are not part of or active in the existing group.</p> <p>Can be formal or semi-formal, depending on the audience.</p> <p>Some people find face-to-face public engagement intimidating.</p>	<p>Requires good facilitator and presenter that understand the issue and the stakeholders/audience.</p> <p>PowerPoint is a good tool to use.</p> <p>Keep presentation short and simple.</p> <p>Allow for question and answer time.</p> <p>Provide refreshments.</p> <p>Timing and date of the event is important to encourage attendance and depending on the needs of the stakeholder group.</p> <p>Provide publications to take away as necessary.</p> <p>Give opportunity for one-on-one chat after the session.</p>
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2.4 Survey

Description and Use	Think it Through	Best Practice Note
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<p>A series of questions provided to a sample which is representative of the stakeholder to collect information on their views, opinions or concerns on an issue or a range of issues. The information collected is analysed to understand stakeholder's perspective on the issue/s.</p> <p>Types of surveys include online surveys, telephone surveys or written surveys. They could be mailed out via email or surface mail. Surveys are either self-administered or interviewer administered.</p> <p>They are useful in understanding the community better, identifying issues and generating ideas.</p>	<p>Survey monkey is effective for online surveys.</p> <p>It is effective for hard to reach audiences and people who are unlikely to attend engagement events.</p> <p>The confidentiality results in more candid responses.</p> <p>Opinions can change and the response rate may be poor or unrepresentative.</p> <p>It takes time to plan and develop an effective survey.</p> <p>It is possible and sometimes advisable to use different types of surveys (online, phone, written) to gather feedback as this can facilitate greater participation.</p> <p>It can be difficult to measure qualitative information.</p> <p>People with literacy or language difficulties may find it challenging.</p>	<p>Ensure sufficient sample size and representativeness of the survey community is achieved.</p> <p>The officer designing the survey should be knowledgeable about the issue/s and every question must have a clear purpose.</p> <p>Before the questions, provide brief overview of the purpose of the survey, how the information gathered will be used and estimate time to answer the questions.</p> <p>Assure respondents of confidentiality.</p> <p>Request some demographic information. Make the survey as anonymous as possible.</p> <p>Provide incentive for participation, e.g. prize draw.</p> <p>Keep it short and simple.</p> <p>For easier collation, provide tick box options or use likert scale measure with space for comments where necessary.</p>
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2.5 Written Submissions

Description and Use	Think it Through	Best Practice Note
<p>Formal document intended to provide relevant facts and opinions of persons or groups of persons relating to an issue for which a decision is pending.</p> <p>Submission is made in response to a call for submission by Council.</p> <p>In some instances, written submission is prescribed by regulation or legislation.</p> <p>Submissions can be made in hard copy or online.</p>	<p>Useful for receiving detailed response to issues being considered.</p> <p>Able to provide information on underlining reasons for respondent's opinion.</p> <p>Response rate may be low.</p> <p>People with literacy or language difficulty may find it challenging.</p> <p>Suitable for engaging at the early stages.</p>	<p>Where submission is a legislative requirement, ensure full compliance is provided for.</p> <p>The person/group making the submission must self-identify. Anonymous submissions are often unacceptable.</p> <p>Provide details about what the submission should contain, closing date/time, and what the next step will be after the submission closes.</p> <p>Advertise call for submissions widely.</p>

3. ADVICE

3.1 Advertisement

Description and Use	Think it Through	Best Practice Note
<p>Paid advertisement in print media.</p> <p>Useful for promotion of engagement activities or projects.</p> <p>It is a legal obligation in some circumstances.</p>	<p>Opportunities exist for Council advertisements in following publications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great Southern Herald • Albany Advertiser • In the Gnow • Borden Bulletin • Ongerup Grapevine <p>Potentially reaches most households.</p>	<p>Be aware of the cut-off date to submit an advertisement for publication that meets your needs or the legal requirement where it applies.</p> <p>Consider the best day and section of the publication to put your advertisement.</p> <p>Follow Council's Communications and Social Media Policy.</p>

3.2 Bill Stuffers/Rates Notice

Description and Use	Think it Through	Best Practice Note
<p>Information flyer included with scheduled Council rates notice.</p>	<p>High probability that target recipients will be informed.</p> <p>It is an economical use of existing mailing.</p> <p>Can only be used at specific times as rates notices are distributed periodically.</p>	<p>Flyer should be well designed and reader-friendly.</p>

3.3 Bulk Messaging

Description and Use	Think it Through	Best Practice Note
<p>Dissemination of a large number of text messages for delivery to mobile phone devices.</p> <p>It can be used to provide information or notification to members of the public.</p>	<p>Can be an effective way to disseminate urgent information directly to community members.</p> <p>It is convenient and can reach a large audience.</p> <p>It is not able to receive feedback through the same channel.</p> <p>Can send a message of up to 160 characters and longer messages may automatically split up into several parts.</p> <p>Most mobile phones support this type of text messaging.</p>	<p>Keep it short and simple.</p> <p>Ensure up-to-date contact list is used.</p> <p>Utilise links to website and other platforms to keep the message short.</p>

3.4 Letter Drop

Description and Use	Think it Through	Best Practice Note
<p>Personalised or bulk letters mailed directly to community members or stakeholders.</p> <p>Personalised letters are a legal obligation in some circumstances.</p> <p>They convey information to recipients and are useful for requesting direct feedback.</p> <p>They are often suitable for issues that are highly political.</p>	<p>Effective in building relationships and when engagement timeframe is short.</p> <p>High probability that target recipients will be informed.</p> <p>Letter drop can potentially reach all households in a postcode.</p> <p>It can target specific towns within the Shire.</p> <p>It can be low cost but requires time to prepare.</p>	<p>Keep it short and simple.</p> <p>Ensure content complies with legal requirements where necessary.</p> <p>Use envelopes that indicate it is an official communication.</p>

3.5 Media Release

Description and Use	Think it Through	Best Practice Note
<p>A media release is provided to journalists to publish for free through their media organisation. Media can be print, broadcast or online.</p> <p>Media releases are useful in keeping the media informed on important community issues and Council's position. They are often suitable on issues that are highly political.</p>	<p>Media releases are often perceived as more credible by the public because it has been vetted by an independent third party (the media organisation).</p> <p>If the media organisation deems the issue to be pertinent, they are likely to make further enquiries on it. This can help disseminate information quickly and broadly.</p>	<p>Be clear about the specific information you wish to communicate and do your research.</p> <p>The Shire President is the official spokesperson of Council.</p> <p>Build relations with local media organisations and journalists for an improved chance of having your media release published, including when and how you want it published.</p>

3.6 Reports

Description and Use	Think it Through	Best Practice Note
<p>Official document reporting research, policy findings or providing an account of actions that have taken place.</p> <p>It is useful for providing detailed information to the community.</p>	<p>Able to provide thorough information on issues or decisions.</p> <p>People with literacy or language difficulty may find it challenging.</p> <p>Suitable for engaging at the closing stages.</p>	<p>Format document to be reader-friendly, e.g. use appropriate font type and size, page the document, etc.</p> <p>Use graphs and charts where appropriate.</p> <p>Report should have a brief introduction, body and conclusion.</p>

3.7 Social Media

Description and Use	Think it Through	Best Practice Note
<p>Facebook – Most common social media platform where comments, photos and videos can be exchanged with a closed group or the general public.</p>	<p>Increasingly popular, easy to access, convenient and used by a diverse range of stakeholders and organisations.</p> <p>Effective in promoting engagement opportunities and has multiplier effects as information is easily shared with others.</p> <p>Able to broadcast to a large audience and suitable for reaching the public instantly (e.g. it is very useful during emergency situations).</p> <p>They are mainly accessed through handheld devices which are quite common.</p> <p>It is cost effective but has high cost implications for setting up a system to moderate discussions on the platform.</p> <p>It can invite negative comments on the public domain.</p>	<p>Keep it short and simple.</p> <p>Refer to relevant Council policies for guidance.</p> <p>It is more effective to promote the engagement opportunity and how the public can participate, e.g. make submission, than seek direct feedback on any of the social media platforms.</p>

3.8 Website

Description and Use	Think it Through	Best Practice Note
<p>The use of Council's website home page or dedicated pages to convey information to the public.</p> <p>It is useful for informing and updating the community as well as receiving information from the feedback from.</p>	<p>Effective in getting information to the general public on demand and in real time.</p> <p>It is cost effective.</p>	<p>Have a good content management system in place.</p> <p>Use pictures to enhance visual appeal and ensure text is easy to read.</p> <p>Work closely with the Community Development Team to understand Council's requirements.</p>