



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY



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# INTRODUCTION

This Community Engagement Strategy outlines the process for involving the Tenterfield Shire community in Council's strategic planning and decision-making processes, ranging from the development of Council's Ten (10) Year Community Strategic Plan and policy positions to the annual Operational Plan.

Council supports the right of individuals to participate in decision making that affects their future.







## The strategy:

- 1) Defines community engagement and identifies the methods of engagement Council uses for the key stages of engagement – inform, consult, and involve/collaborate;
- 2) Identifies the broad categories of Council matters which require engagement; and
- 3) Provides an Engagement Matrix to align the methods of engagement with the category of Council matters.

Tenterfield Shire has a population of over 7,000 people spread across a diverse area of 7,333 square kilometres that encompasses the main township of Tenterfield and the villages of Drake, Jennings, Legume, Liston, Mingoola, Torrington and Urbenville, as well as a number of smaller rural communities.

Part of Council's core responsibility is to consistently engage with the community through a variety of different forms. From Shire wide high impact projects to locality-based low impact projects, this strategy will outline Council's commitment to keeping the community informed, consulted and involved.

The strategy will result in representation from a broad cross section of the Tenterfield Local Government Area including its citizens, ratepayers, businesses, employees, visitors, community groups, and interest groups - a hallmark of a healthy community.

The strategy aims to give all stakeholders opportunities to participate, so no sector of the community is disadvantaged. It includes measures to involve groups that are at risk of absence from public debate, such as older people, youth, indigenous people, people with a disability, low socio-economic groups and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.





# What is Community Engagement?

For the purposes of this strategy, community engagement is defined as the processes and structures in which Council:

1. Communicates information to the community; and
2. Seeks information, involvement and collaboration from the community with the primary aim of informing Council's decision making.

Best practice community engagement as prescribed by the International Association for the Public Participation (IAP2) defines community engagement as:

*"Any process that involves the public in problem solving or decision making and uses public input to make decisions".*

In general terms it is an inclusive process to ensure the community has the opportunity to participate in decisions that impact them.

The process of community engagement can extend from a phone call or letter, to a program of major community workshops. The initiative for community engagement may come from within Tenterfield Shire Council or from outside.



The background of the page is a photograph of a rustic interior. It features a wooden wall and floor. On the left, there is a window with a green frame and white curtains. In the foreground, there is a small white wooden table and two wooden chairs with metal frames. A large blue circle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the title and two paragraphs of text.

# Scope

This Community Engagement Strategy relates to most activities undertaken by Council, with the exception of regulated or statutory notifications (i.e. development applications). If legislative requirements or other council policies exist which address specific information/consultation processes, they take precedence, but the implementation of that legislation and those policies should be cognisant of the Community Engagement Strategy.

There are many external factors that sometimes limit the level of engagement possible. For example, state or federal legislation may prescribe specific activities, or project characteristics may determine what can or should be done. Community members also have opportunities to participate beyond the approaches outlines in the Community Engagement Strategy by making a presentation directly to Council on any matter being considered at the monthly meetings.



# Benefits

Effective engagement makes communities feel more connected with their councils, strengthens trust, goodwill and respect.

There are a number of benefits resulting from a Community Engagement Strategy which:

- Helps Council plan services better to meet community needs and aspirations
- Helps Council prioritise services and make the best use of resources
- Allows a broader range of views to be expressed, more information to be assembled, and more possible solutions to be considered before making decisions
- Enables Council and the community to work together to achieve balanced decisions
- Offers opportunities for residents to contribute to and influence outcomes which directly affect their lives
- Encourages greater community ownership and acceptance of Council decisions
- Reinforces Council's commitment to be open and accountable





# Objectives

1. Provide a framework to facilitate a consistent, coordinated and well planned approach to community engagement that is genuine and inclusive and meets the needs of various stakeholder groups
2. Ensure that the Tenterfield Shire community is informed about issues, strategies or plans that may directly or indirectly affect them
3. Build a positive reputation for Tenterfield Shire Council by demonstrating that Council is listening, informing and being informed by a broad and representative cross section of the community
4. Ensure the involvement of the Tenterfield Shire community in the development, implementation and review of Councils strategic planning and policy decision making processes
5. Encourage greater community ownership and acceptance of Council decisions
6. Assist the Council to better plan services to meet community needs and aspirations whilst prioritising competing services and projects to make the best use of limited resources.
7. Monitor and evaluate Council's engagement activities and incorporate feedback to improve and enhance Council's community engagement activities and capability into the future



# Principles

Council's community engagement practices are based on the principles of Social Justice and Community Inclusivity:

## **Social Justice Principles**

**Equity** - There should be fairness in decision making, prioritizing and allocation of resources, particularly for those in need. Everyone should have a fair opportunity to participate in the future of the community. The planning process should take particular care to involve and protect the interests of people in vulnerable circumstances.

**Access** - All people should have fair access to services, resources and opportunities to improve their quality of life.

**Participation** - Everyone should have the maximum opportunity to genuinely participate in decisions which affect their lives.

**Rights** - Equal rights should be established and promoted, with opportunities provided for people from diverse linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds to participate in community life.





# Community Inclusivity

Council, in its engagement activities, will make every effort to ensure that all perspectives are considered, by:

- a) Engaging a cross section of the community and using a wide range of information and engagement methods;
- b) Involving targeted groups as identified in particular projects;
- c) Accommodating participants' cultural, linguistic, religious and other special needs in engagement activities;
- d) Endeavouring to involve community groups and individuals who are sometimes hard to reach such as; young people, people with disabilities, the socially disadvantaged, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

Tenterfield Shire is committed to being an inclusive and accessible place for everyone, now and in the future. The Council seeks to meet legislative obligations under the Disability Inclusion Act 2014 and provide equitable opportunities for participation for everyone in the Shire.



# HOW WE WILL ENGAGE

## LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION

The Public Participation Spectrum developed by IPA2 identifies five different stages of consultation relative to the level of impact the community should have on decision making. The stages are:

**INFORM**



**CONSULT**



**INVOLVE**



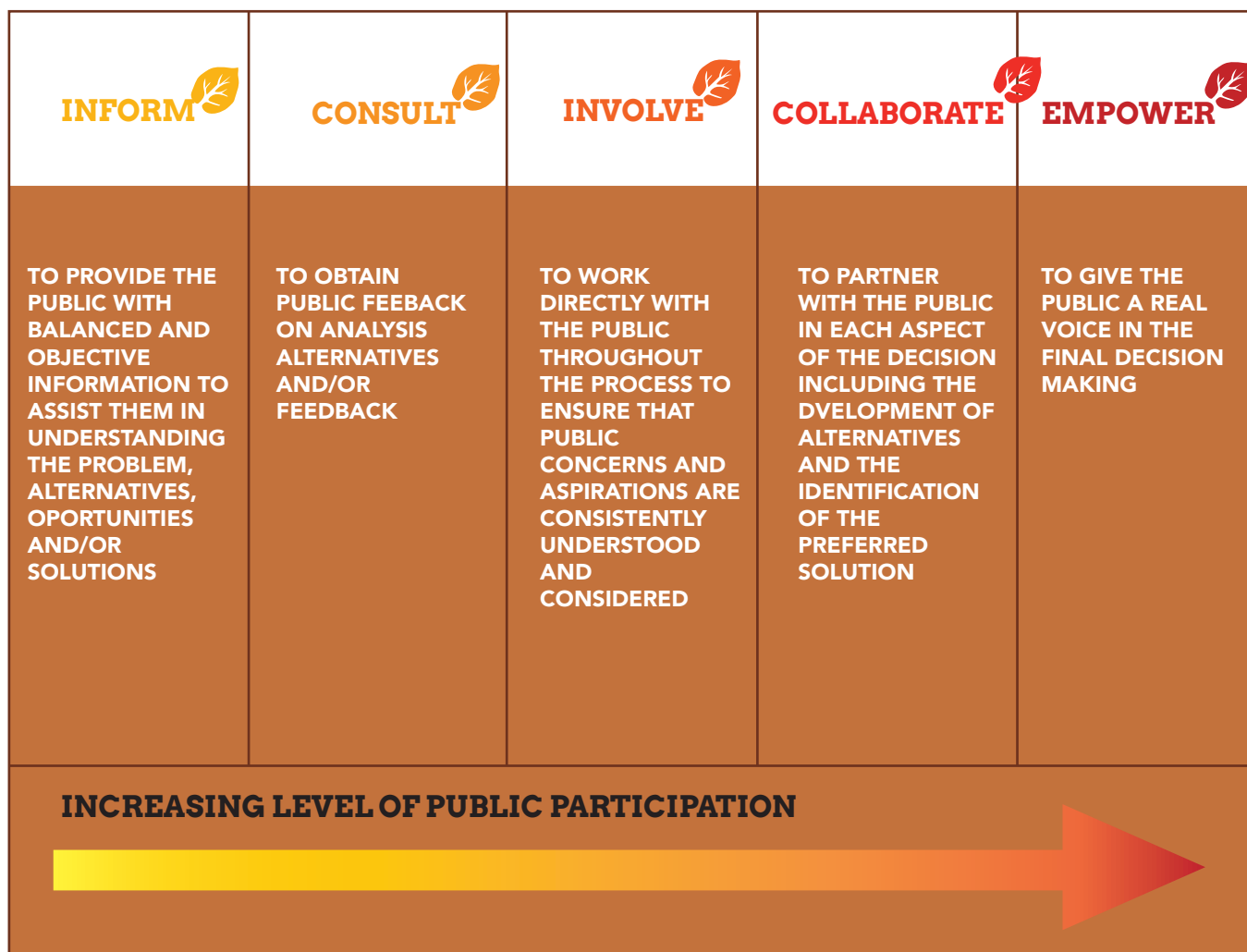
**COLLABORATE**



**EMPOWER\***







*\*Council functions under the Local Government Act NSW 1993; and accordingly only the elected body of Council is 'empowered' to make decisions and implement actions.*

*Hence, engagement activities conducted at the Empower level will be limited to Council.*

**For Tenterfield Shire Council the key stages can be categorised as:**

**Inform**

**Consult**

**Involve/Collaborate**



# INFORM

**Commitment to the Community - We will keep you informed.**

**Council's Role - Give stakeholders balanced, accurate and relevant information on decisions, policies, plans and strategies. The Community's Role - Listen.**

*The inform stage is for day-to-day use, often when Council has already made a decision, to communicate the outcome or status of projects, or when there is only one way that Council believes it can progress a project.*

**Customer Service Centre:** Council's administration office in Tenterfield provides a 'one-stop-shop' for Council services using customer service, visual displays, and printed materials for Council related business.

**Tenterfield Shire Council websites:** One of Council's primary communication tools, the website should be a comprehensive source of information for all Council services and programs.

**Advertising & Features:** Council will consider the use of advertising/features with any local media servicing the area e.g. the Tenterfield Star.

**Media Releases:** Regular media releases ensure Council provides reliable, timely and accurate information to all media servicing the Tenterfield Local Government Area, including print and broadcast.

**Publications/information material:** Tenterfield Shire Council publications about Council specific programs, services and initiatives are a valuable source of information.

**Council facilitated community events:** Council-hosted events which provide opportunities for councillors and staff to provide information to the community. Council also strongly supports and participates in other community events.

**Your Local News:** The newsletter is distributed fortnightly to households throughout the Shire to provide general Council information to residents.

**Targeted Direct Mail:** Addressed letters sent directly to the customer. This is usually specific to a project, geographic location or members of a particular group or demographic.

**Presentation/Public Speaking:** Councillors and staff speak at relevant meetings or events such as community events.

**Community Notice Boards:** At Council facilities, libraries, and areas relevant to the audience.

**Site Specific Signage:** Erected temporarily or permanently to inform the public of the project and relevant project details.









**Commitment to the Community - We will listen to you, consider your ideas and concerns and keep you informed.**

**Council's Role - Facilitate two-way communication between Council and the community. At this level, Council seeks feedback to identify important community issues and perspectives that can influence and assist decision making. Informing is a prerequisite for consultation.**

### **Community's Role – Contribute**

**Community Forums:** These provide an opportunity for members of the community to attend a structured two-way information session hosted by Council, usually about specific projects and topics.

**Public exhibitions and submissions:** Required by legislation for certain types of issues, items on exhibition and development applications are open to submissions from the public. The information is made available for the public to comment on within a certain time frame, while informing citizens how they can make their submissions/comments to Council.

**Community displays/stalls:** Councillors and Council officers are available at a nominated venue and for a specific period of time, encouraging citizens to attend and discuss the topic/s.

**Surveys:** Target audience surveys should be integrated with broader consultation for larger projects, using independent market research companies or survey specialists where possible.

**Site Meeting/Tour:** Interaction at specific locations, usually facilitated by Council for invited participants.

**Briefings:** Inform relevant community groups that they may request a briefing with a Councillor/s or Council staff to discuss a particular issue.





# INVOLVE / COLLABORATE

**Commitment to the Community** - We will work with you on an ongoing basis to ensure your ideas, concerns and aspirations are considered. We will provide feedback on Council's decisions.

**Council's Role** - Create a collaborative relationship/partnership between Council and the community, facilitating involvement in shaping decisions that affect community life. Informing and consulting are components of involving/collaborating.

## **Community's Role – Participate**

**Meetings by invitation:** Community leaders, stakeholders and representatives meet with Councillors and Council staff for discussion, debate and exchange of views on a specific issue.

**Consultation with Specific Purpose Committees:** Formal consultation between Councillors and Council staff with members of the Specific Purpose Committees or other groups with expertise in particular areas. Engagement will be governed by the groups' terms of reference.

**Large Group/Stakeholder Collaboration:** As forums to address a strategic issue or plan, these collaborations bring together Councillors, Council staff, stakeholder groups and individuals with relevant expertise and knowledge to formulate a response.





# EMPOWER

**Commitment to the community- We will give the community the opportunity to participate in a transparent flow of information and feedback to Councillors, who have been empowered as the community representatives to make decisions in accordance with the Local Government Act 1993.**

**Council's Role –Decide**

**Community's Role – Vote for Councillors that you believe will make decisions in the best interests of the broad community.**




# Items for Engagement






Consultation methods vary according to the type of project/issue. This Strategy sets guidelines for engagement on matters which are classified into one of four categories:

1. **Shire-wide / High Impact:** Strategic plans, major projects and resource issues. For example, Community Strategic Plan, Local Environment Plans, Shire-wide Development Control Plans.
2. **Shire-wide / Low Impact:** Operational Plans and Policy Development, minor projects and major projects with limited impact. For example major festivals and events.
3. **Locality Based / High Impact:** Locality improvement and site specific matters and events. For example, development applications in accordance with statutory requirements, construction of Council facilities, and works in central business districts.
4. **Locality Based / Low Impact:** Council service / program planning and delivery. For example, local road works, operational services such as traffic management and general maintenance of public areas or upgrade of parks and recreational areas (minor works level).



This strategy relates to many activities undertaken by Council. However, legislative requirements and other council policies regulate the procedures and outcomes of some Council activities, limiting the opportunities for public input and the scope for community engagement.



WHAT TO DO?		WHEN YOU'RE DEALING WITH			
1 = EVERY TIME		Shire wide/ high impact	Shire wide/ low impact	locality based/ high impact	locality based/ low impact
2 = IN MOST CIRCUMSTANCES					
3 = ON SPECIFIC OCCASIONS					
4 = ON RARE OCCASIONS					
	Customer Service Centre	1	1	1	1
	Tenterfield Shire Council Website/s	1	1	1	3
	Newspaper/advertising/features	1	1	2	3
	Media Release	1	1	2	3
	Publications/Information Material	1	2	2	4
	Council Facilitated Events	4	4	4	4
	Targeted Direct Mail	2	2	2	3
	Your Local News	2	2	2	2
	Presentation/Public Speaking	2	3	3	4
	Community Notice Boards	3	3	3	3
	Site Specific Signage	3	3	3	3
	Community Forum	3	3	2	2
	Public Exhibitions Submissions	1	1	3	4
	Community displays/Information Sessions	2	2	3	4
	Surveys	3	4	4	4
	Site Meeting/Tour	2	3	2	4
	Briefing	1	2	2	2
	Meeting By Invitation	1	2	3	4
	Council Committees/advisory groups	1	2	3	4
	Large Group/Stakeholder Collaboration	1	2	3	4

*Engagement Tools in the involve/collaborate stage will vary depending on the nature of the project*





# TENTERFIELD

## Evaluation & Feedback

Following the implementation of an involve/consult engagement project, Council will evaluate the effectiveness of the program in reaching the desired audience and achieving the required outcomes.

Council will then provide feedback for the people who participated in the program, in order to increase their understanding of how the input gathered during the program was considered/utilized in the decision making process, and what direction was ultimately taken.

By providing open and timely feedback to participants, Council will enhance the transparency of its decision making and further strengthen its relationship with the broad community. Feedback will also improve future engagement programs through a greater understanding of the engagement process.

