



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Summary:

The purpose of this policy is to outline Tenterfield Shire Council's commitment and approach to engaging with our community.

The Community Engagement Policy, alongside the Community Engagement Strategy and Community Engagement Guide/Toolkit will provide the framework to enable the Tenterfield Shire Community to provide input to the formulation of Council strategy, policy and decision making and to provide a consistent and transparent approach to consultation.

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Department	Governance
Policy Custodian	General Manager
Superseded Documents	Nil
Related Legislation	International Association for Public Participation Guidelines - IAP2 Community Engagement Strategy Community Engagement Guide/Toolkit
Delegations of Authority	General Manager, Directors, Managers, Staff

1. Overview

Tenterfield Shire Council recognises that community engagement and participation processes are a vital part of local democracy. Effective engagement practices are critical to good government and accordingly Council is committed to undertaking and developing its engagement with the Tenterfield Shire community.

Community engagement is about involving the community in decisions which affect them. It is central to the successful development of strategies, policies and Council decision making by being cognisant of and responsive to the needs of the community. It involves seeking broad input and informed agreement to determine the best possible solution for Council and the community however it does not necessarily mean achieving consensus.

2. Policy Principles

Council's community engagement practices are based on the principles of social justice and community inclusivity, which are as follows:

2.1 Social Justice Principles

(a) 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.

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

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

(d) 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.

2.2 Community Inclusivity

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

- a) Engaging a balanced 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 Council 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.

3. Policy Objectives

1. **Establish, maintain and resource a community engagement framework** to facilitate a consistent, coordinated and well planned approach to 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. **Monitor and evaluate** Councils engagement activities and incorporate feedback to improve and enhance Councils community engagement activities and capability into the future;
4. 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;
5. Ensure that broadly **representative information** is obtained from engagement activities and is sourced through a range of mediums to ensure the principles of equity, access, participation and rights;
6. Ensure the engagement of the Tenterfield Shire community in Council's **strategic planning and policy decision making** processes;
7. Ensure that Council is meeting all of its **legislative requirements** regarding community consultation;
8. Encourage greater community **ownership and acceptance** of Council decisions;
9. 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;
10. Enable **Council and the community to work together** to achieve balanced decisions and the best possible outcomes.

4. Policy Statement

- 4.1 The Tenterfield Shire Council community engagement framework consists of this policy, the Community Engagement Strategy and the Community Engagement Guide/Operational Toolkit.
- 4.2 Council will endeavour to ensure that its engagement processes are appropriate, accessible, well-planned and adequately resourced.

- 4.3** The level of community engagement undertaken relates directly to the level of community involvement required and should always be appropriate to the nature, complexity and impact of the issue, plan or strategy.
- 4.4** Where statutory requirements or legal timeframes are in force then these will take precedence.
- 4.5** Council, as the elected representatives for the whole community, should always balance information and opinions received from engagement activities against the best interests of those who are difficult to engage with or those who choose not to engage, based on a support for the proposed strategic direction or policy position.
- 4.6** Councillors must ensure that they bring an open mind to decision making forums in order to inform and be informed by the view of others.
- 4.7** Council staff will ensure that the Councillors are informed of community engagement activities relating to high impact projects and this advice will be provided prior to the activities occurring.
- 4.8** For high impact projects or issues that affect the whole of the Tenterfield Shire (e.g. Local Environment Plan, Community Strategic Plan etc.) Council should consider holding activities at sites across the local government area.
- 4.9** In circumstances where the level of involvement requires members of the public to make submissions to Council, content received may be regarded as public information and be available for general access.
- 4.10** Prior to the making of any decision Council will ensure that it is well informed of the possibility and benefits of alternative decisions on matters before them, including reporting and recommendations that reflect all sides of the issue.
- 4.11** Council's community engagement framework recognises that there is diversity in the activities and projects across Council and the type of engagement undertaken should vary accordingly.
- 4.12** Councils approach to community engagement is based on the spectrum of engagement as established by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). The five (5) levels of engagement are shown in the table below:

IAP2 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
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 give the public a real voice in the final decision making*
<p>INCREASING LEVEL OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION</p>				

*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.

5. Scope

This policy applies to all areas of Council's activities in the delivery of its functions as a Local Government authority, with the exception of notifications for development applications and other legislated notification periods.

6. Accountability, Roles & Responsibility

Managers and Project Managers from across all sections of Council are responsible for implementing this policy and complying with the community engagement framework.

The Community Engagement Framework sets standards and provides guidance to support consistent community engagement activities; however, successful delivery of community engagement is reliant on effective planning, management and evaluation of those activities.

Support and guidance to staff undertaking community engagement activities will be provided by Councils Communication staff.

Communications staff should be seen as a resource to assist other areas of Council to undertake their consultation projects. It does not, however, absolve any section's responsibility and ultimately accountability regarding undertaking effective community engagement.

7. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

Community – Includes all of the people who live, work, study, own property, visit or conduct private or government business in our Council area. The community can be referred to as stakeholders or comprise of stakeholders;

Stakeholder – is a person or group who has an interest in a project or issue, or who may be affected by a decision relating to the item;

IAP2 – International Association for Public Participation;

Engagement – A broad term which includes all levels of participation for including the community in decision making. Consultation is just one level of engagement;

Community Engagement - is the processes and structures in which Tenterfield Shire Council:

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

Communication – Generally refers to the exchange of information from Council to the community and can also include the exchange of information or views from the community to Council.

Submission – A submission is a formal response to a public document made during the public exhibition period.

Comment – A comment is a response received during early engagement or consultation that is not part of a formal public exhibition endorsed by Council.

8. Related Documents, Standards & Guidelines

Key legislative requirements with regard to community engagement for NSW local government organisations are located in the:

- Local Government Act NSW 1993;
- NSW Local Government (General) Regulations 2005;
- Disability Inclusion Act 2014

Council will also have regard to all relevant standards and guidelines, including but not limited to:

- Social Justice Principles;
- Public Participation Principles;
- Community Inclusivity Principles; and
- International Association for Public Participation Guidelines (IAP2).

9. Attachments

Nil.

10. Version Control & Change History

Version	Date	Modified by	Details
V1.0	11/10/2016	GM	Original Policy construction
V1.0	24/11/2016	GM	Adopted (Res No. 266/16)