



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Summary:

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

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 best-practice approach to consultation.

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Department	Office of the Chief Executive
Policy Custodian	Community Development Officer
Superseded Documents	Nil
Related Legislation	International Association for Public Participation Guidelines - IAP2 Community Engagement Strategy Community Engagement Guide/Toolkit Local Government Act 1993 Disability Inclusion Act 2014 – NSW
Delegations of Authority	Chief Executive, Senior Staff and Managers

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, seeking out and facilitating the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in the decision. Meaningful engagement is central to the successful development of strategies, policies and Council decision making by being aware of and responsive to the needs of the community. Public Participation 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 equitable 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, economic and social 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, people that may experience social disadvantage, 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 (NSW legislation) and provides 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 and reflective practice 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 and core values as established by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). The five (5) levels of engagement are shown in the table below:

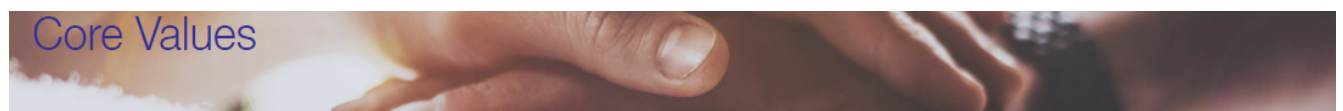
IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

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.

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.
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.

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The International Association for Public Participation – Core Values are:



1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

(Reference: International Association for Public Participation www.iap2.org.)

The Code of Ethics is a set of principles which guide us in our practice of enhancing the integrity of the public participation process. As P2 practitioners, we hold ourselves accountable to these principles and strive to hold all participants to the same standards.

- 1 Purpose:** we support public participation as a process to make better decisions that incorporate the interests and concerns of all affected stakeholders and meet the needs of the decision-making body.
- 2 Role of Practitioner:** we will enhance the public's participation in the decision-making process and assist decision-makers in being responsive to the public's concerns and suggestions.
- 3 Trust:** we will undertake and encourage actions that build trust and credibility for the process and among all the participants.
- 4 Defining the Public's Role:** we will carefully consider and accurately portray the public's role in the decision-making process.
- 5 Openness:** we will encourage the disclosure of all information relevant to the public's understanding and evaluation of a decision.
- 6 Access to the Process:** we will ensure that stakeholders have fair and equal access to the public participation process and the opportunity to influence decisions.
- 7 Respect for Communities:** we will avoid strategies that risk polarizing community interest or that appear to 'divide and conquer'.
- 8 Advocacy:** we will advocate for the public participation process and will not advocate for a particular interest, party or project outcome.
- 9 Commitments:** we will ensure that all commitments made to the public, including those by the decision-maker, are made in good faith.
- 10 Support of the Practice:** we will mentor new practitioners in the field and educate decision-makers and the public about the value and use of public participation.

Extracted from IAP2 Foundations of Public Participation.

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)
V2.0	16/12/2020	Council	Review/Amended (Res No. 283/20)
V3.0	21/12/2022	Council	Re adoption of Policy (Res No. 248/22)