



murray river
council

Community

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

V3 February 2023

Contents

PART 1 Our Community Engagement Principles...3

Introduction.....	4
Why we engage.....	5
Who we engage with.....	5

Part 2 Our Community Engagement approach.....6

How we'll engage.....	7
The right tools.....	8
When we engage.....	8
The delivery.....	9

PART 3 Our plans for Community Engagement...10

The action plan.....	11-12
What does success look like?.....	12

PART 4 Community Participation in Planning.....13

Introduction.....	14
Community Participation Principles.....	14
Minimum requirements for Community Participation.....	15-16
Encouraging engagement.....	16
The exceptions.....	17
Making a submission.....	17
The submission process.....	17
Our commitment.....	17
Our Vision and Values	19
Supporting resources.....	19
Review.....	19
References.....	19



Document photo credits:
123RF
Cindy Power Photography
Brandrick Architects
We are Explorers



PART I
**Our Community
Engagement Principles**



Here at Murray River Council, we believe that conversations and interactions with our community will enhance customer services and transform and strengthen the relationship between Council and its residents.



This Community Engagement Strategy has been prepared as a framework to support the delivery of Council's Community Strategic Plan (CSP) and general operational activities, and has been prepared to satisfy the requirements of a Community Participation Plan being prepared under the provisions of the EP&A Act, which is detailed in Part 4 of this document.

Council needs to provide information to, and receive information back from the community to deliver its services and plan for our future. This means creating an environment where our daily interactions with community members are heard, captured in a measurable way and used to inform decision making.

We believe the key to this approach is the ability to actively listen and develop processes which consider community views and allow the knowledge, experiences and aspirations of our customers to be at the forefront of Council operations.

As such, this strategy looks to lay the foundation work needed to achieve this and to encourage open, transparent and active relationships between Council and the Community.

Implementing this Strategy is the shared responsibility of the entire Murray River Council organisation and applies to Councillors, staff, contractors and consultants. The Strategy recognises that the key to successful community engagement is a productive and collaborative partnership between all stakeholders.

Why we engage

Murray River Council is a business that delivers a range of services and maintains over \$700 million worth of assets. Our 12,000 residents value the quality of their towns, facilities and lifestyle and want to be well informed and involved in council's delivery of items that affect the things that are important to them.

Not every decision or project of council requires the same level of engagement, but if we continue to strengthen relationships with communities, engagement activities will become ongoing dialogues rather than isolated actions.

This strategy is therefore based on two key strategic aims:

We want to liaise with the community on relevant projects to ensure all stakeholders are informed, and where appropriate, build meaningful engagement opportunities where community feedback is invited and considered.

We want to increase public awareness of Council's objectives, activities and services and develop an environment of trust, transparency, mutual respect and confidence between the community, stakeholders and Council.

Who we engage with

Broadly, our community includes people who live, work, and access services, participate or contribute to community life in Murray River Council.

Therefore our principle stakeholders in regards to this strategy would include:

- residents and ratepayers;
- local businesses, industry groups and potential investors;
- developers and future residents ;
- service providers;
- community groups, sports, clubs and local organisations;
- those who work and volunteer in our LGA;
- users of particular facilities;
- other levels of government or organisations, including emergency services
- Council staff, councillors and contractors.



Engagement activities can become ongoing dialogues rather than isolated actions.



PART 2


Our Community Engagement approach

How we'll engage

Council's overall approach to community engagement has been informed by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum. The IAP2 spectrum is an internationally recognised platform used to provide guidance to the public service, not for profit sector, private industry and communities.

The spectrum identifies that there are different levels of engagement from "Informing" through to "Empowering". No single approach to engagement will serve every project or every stakeholder. The spectrum requires that the level of engagement must be determined by considering the issue, problem or opportunity requiring engagement, the objectives to be achieved by engaging and the extent that stakeholders can assist Council to make decisions.

*(International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) www.iap2.org.au)



		Increasing level of public impact				
		Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	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 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 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 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
	Example	Community updates on maintenance or renewal works	Asking for community views on policies	Developing Council's Strategic Plans	Working with the community to develop plans and ideas for a new community space	Council delegates decision making to a particular group or sector – like Youth Committee for example

The right tools

Community engagement methods will vary depending on the goal of the participation, the impact of the decision, and the audience being engaged and their level of trust in Council, the level of public participation desired, complexity of the issue and the time frames and resources required.

Therefore, a mix of engagement methods is generally required to cater for different stakeholder needs, preferences and the level of participation Council is seeking to achieve. It should be noted that these are often not mutually exclusive and in most cases Council will use a combination of techniques to ensure the engagement process is successful.

Some examples include:

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Fact sheets -Website -Newsletters -Social media -Adverts -Letters -Emails -Media Releases -Presentations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Surveys -Information sessions -Pop-up stalls -Focus groups -Meetings -Email submissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Focus groups -Workshops -Polling -Social media -<i>YourSay</i> online platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Stakeholder committees -Participatory decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Citizen jury -Ballots -Delegated decisions

When we engage

In broad terms, and in relation to this strategy, our community engagement will cover the following:

- Council policies, programs and projects that will have significant impacts on local people , community life, sense of place, the environment, business and the economy
- Strategic and corporate plans including the Community Strategic Plan and long-term Resourcing Strategy, 4-year Delivery Program, and annual Operational Plan (including the budget)
- Land-use and development plans, including the Local Strategic Planning Statement, Local Environmental Plan, Development Control Plans and Locality Plans
- All other matters where legislation requires community notification or consultation.

The delivery

The actual delivery of our engagement has been informed by five key elements to ensure we clearly define the scope of the public participation exercise, understand who is affected and how they should be included, and identify the resources, skills and time required for effective public participation. This process is linked to our Project Management Framework.

DEFINE

At this stage we will:

- Assess the level of community impact and interest to determine when/if to engage
- Determine if we are informing the community or asking them to contribute to a decision
- Clearly define the project and the purpose of the engagement.

PLAN

At this stage we will:

- Prepare an engagement plan with clear objectives and stakeholder analysis
- Plan how to raise awareness and encourage participation.

IMPLEMENT

At this stage we will:

- Inform, consult, involve or collaborate with the community/stakeholders, or empower where relevant
- Ensure internal stakeholders are aware of the engagement activities
- Measure quantifiable information including reach, feedback and participation levels.

REPORT BACK

At this stage we will:

- Give consideration to all feedback received unless the activity is for information only
- At agreed points, Council will report back to the community the results and outcomes of engagement and how decisions were influenced.

REVIEW

- In this stage Council will review the engagement process and what has been learnt during the implementation of the Community Engagement Plan.

This engagement process will be further unpacked in our internal toolkit.



We need to understand who is affected and how they should be included.



PART 3
**Our plans for
Community Engagement**

The action plan

This updated Community Engagement Strategy builds on the principles initially adopted in the Community Engagement Strategy when Council was first formed in 2016. It provides greater clarity of our principles and opens up a space for a number of new actions to further develop Council's approach to genuine engagement with our community.

Successful implementation of the Strategy may require professional development opportunities for staff and Councillors to fully understand their role in community engagement. This development will work alongside the implementation of key, top level actions to meet our strategic aims, as listed below.

We want to liaise with the community on relevant projects to ensure all stakeholders are informed, and where appropriate, build meaningful engagement opportunities where community feedback is invited and considered.		
What we have	What we'll do	Where we want to be
Whilst Council does engage, the organisation lacks any formalised Community Engagement Framework.	Develop a Community Engagement Framework-including Strategy (adoption of this document), and investigate the potential for an internal community engagement network to drive our engagement culture.	Council has a revised community Engagement Framework in place that assists Council to execute best practice community engagement whereby staff can identify the best method of engagement for each campaign and project
Council has an interactive online platform that brings all community engagement activities in to one place for the community to review and respond.	Further develop the online platform providing community members with an online location where they can review, consider and respond to community engagement related projects. Ensure the activities in the online platform are able to be replicated in hard copy for additional participation to occur (we note our region still has issues with connectivity).	Council has in place an interactive online platform that provides the community with a clear line of sight to Council's projects. The online platform will be a place where community members can easily review project progress and understand how and when they can participate in the process. Not all Council projects will be noted, only those which require consultation or statutory obligation will be published.
Council's approach to Community Engagement is not consistently embedded in the early stages of project planning.	Develop and roll out a community engagement program that assists staff in understanding how to appropriately determine community engagement requirements on a project by project basis.	Council has embedded a consistent culture of community engagement whereby staff are considering engagement as early as possible in the project's development.

We want to increase public awareness of Council's objectives, activities and services and develop an environment of trust and confidence between the community, stakeholders and Council.

What we have	What we'll do	Where we want to be
Community has limited knowledge of Council services.	Implement a marketing campaign to build awareness and exposure to Council services and projects.	Increased community awareness of Council services.
Council does not currently have an internal process to assist portfolios to effectively promote their projects.	Develop an internal process that facilitates a co-ordinated and proactive approach to informing the community of Council's role.	Council has an embedded PR process that ensures all relevant projects are effectively communicated to the wider community.
Some organisational issues are currently impacting negatively on Community's trust of Council, via disengagement of staff.	Developing internal culture strategies to further strengthen community and Council relationships that seek to increase council and community interaction where appropriate.	Strengthened relationship between council and community whereby community feels a sense of trust in Council through their interactions with staff.
Community and internal stakeholders have limited exposure to our council values.	Continually promote our council values, vision and mission.	Council values are actively put into practice and community is confident that we display them.

What does success look like?

The overall effectiveness of our Community Engagement Strategy is measured by Council decisions and actions that acknowledge and reflect quantifiable and evidence-based community input. This also includes stakeholder understanding of those decisions and actions, even if there is not always a shared agreement regarding the outcome.

In top-level terms, success will mean:

- There is a commitment by Councillors and staff and common understanding of when to engage with the community in a meaningful and appropriate way about decisions that affect them
- We have consistently reached the participation targets in our engagement processes (number of participants/captured views etc)
- Council decisions and advocacy activities are evidenced by community engagement findings
- We have utilised online communication and engagement techniques, complementing traditional engagement methods
- We have provided a consistent and easy-to-understand process to guide staff through the engagement process for services, activities, projects or decisions
- We have met, and in some cases exceeded legislated engagement requirements.

An architectural rendering of a modern building with a large, cantilevered roof. The building's facade is composed of light-colored, rectangular panels. In the foreground, there is a large, open area with a light blue floor and a green lawn. A set of blue bleachers is visible under the overhang of the building. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. A semi-transparent dark blue rectangle is overlaid on the lower part of the image, containing white text.

PART 4
**Community Participation
in Planning**

This section – our Community Participation Plan (CPP) – has been developed to make participation in planning clearer for our community, detailing how and when you can participate in the planning system and the different types of proposals you may come across.

Murray River Council has a responsibility to deliver the objectives of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act), including the promotion of orderly and economic use of land, facilitating ecologically sustainable development and promoting social and economic wellbeing. Community participation is an overarching term covering how we engage the community in our work under the EP&A Act, including strategy development, plan making and making decisions on proposed development.

The level and extent of community participation will vary depending on the community, the scope of the proposal under consideration and the potential impact of the decision. We will however consistently make efforts to define the scope of the public participation exercise and understand who is affected and how they should be included.

As such, this section connects back to Part 2 of our Community Engagement Strategy which outlines our overall engagement approach.

Community Participation Principles

As a planning authority striving for best-practice community participation, Council will have regard to the following, as guided by Section 2.23 (2) of the EP&A Act:

- (a) The community has a right to be informed about planning matters that affect it.
- (b) Planning authorities should encourage effective and on-going partnerships with the community to provide meaningful opportunities for community participation in planning.
- (c) Planning information should be in plain language, easily accessible and in a form that facilitates community participation in planning.
- (d) The community should be given opportunities to participate in strategic planning as early as possible to enable community views to be genuinely considered.
- (e) Community participation should be inclusive and planning authorities should actively seek views that are representative of the community.
- (f) Members of the community who are affected by proposed major development should be consulted by the proponent before an application for planning approval is made.
- (g) Planning decisions should be made in an open and transparent way and the community should be provided with reasons for those decisions (including how community views have been taken into account).
- (h) Community participation methods (and the reasons given for planning decisions) should be appropriate having regard to the significance and likely impact of the proposed development.

Minimum requirements for Community Participation

Schedule 1 of the EP&A Act outlines the minimum requirements for the public exhibition of planning and policy documents and applications submitted to Council for determination. These minimum requirements are listed below:

Mandatory community participation requirements (as per Schedule 1, Part 1, Division 1 of the EP&A Act)	Minimum public exhibition requirement
Draft community participation plans (part four of this Strategy)	28 days
Draft Regional plans	45 days
Draft local strategic planning statements	28 days
Planning proposals for local environmental plans subject to a gateway determination	28 days or: (a) if a different period of public exhibition is specified in the gateway determination for the proposal—the period so specified, or (b) if the gateway determination specifies that no public exhibition is required because of the minor nature of the proposal—no public exhibition
Draft development control plans	28 days
Draft contribution plans	28 days
Application for development consent (other than for complying development certificate, for designated development or for State significant development)	14 days or: (a) if a different period of public exhibition is specified for the application in the relevant community participation plan—the period so specified, or (b) if the relevant community participation plan specifies that no public exhibition is required for the application—no public exhibition
Application for development consent for designated development	28 days
Nominated Integrated Development	28 days
Application for modification of development consent that is required to be publicly exhibited by the regulations	14 days or; The period (if any) determined by the consent authority in accordance with the relevant community participation plan
Environmental impact statement obtained under Division 5.1	28 days
	Exhibition timeframes are in calendar days, include weekends and begin when the information is placed on public exhibition (not directly after a Council meeting).

Non Mandatory exhibition timeframes	
Planning and general strategies	28 days
Masterplan and precinct plans	28 days
Environmental/Park space plans	28 days
	Exhibition timeframes are in calendar days, include weekends and begin when the information is placed on public exhibition (not directly after a Council meeting).

Consultation on DAs is carried out in accordance with Council’s relevant Development Control Plan, and varies according to the nature, scale and likely impact of the proposal or project being considered or assessed. Not all proposals will be on public exhibition.

Typically though, DAs are advertised for at least 14 days and submissions then considered before decisions are made on balance – usually by a senior member of staff acting under delegated authority.

However, for a small percentage of applications the elected Council may require further public consultation and/or call up the matter to a Council meeting in order to make the decision itself, where there are a number of objections or conflicts with planning instruments.

Encouraging engagement

A regular and valuable way for the communities to participate in the planning system is by making a submission on our strategic planning documents during an exhibition. You can also provide us with feedback at any time.

A key technique we use to encourage community participation is formal, public exhibitions. During an exhibition we make available relevant documents that may include a draft of the policy, plan or proposed development that we are seeking community input on.

The public exhibition process includes:

- giving notice to individual landowners/occupiers
- advertising the exhibition notice, including how submissions can be made
- making documents publicly available.

Council will not make any decision relating to a proposal until the submission period has ended.



Residents can provide us with feedback at any time.

The exceptions

In the case of land use planning and development, Council's discretion over types and levels of engagement is sometimes limited:

- Some Development Applications (DAs) or Complying Development Certificates (CDCs) are classified as 'Exempt' or 'Complying' Development, and may be assessed by private Certifiers rather than Council staff. In these cases there can be little or no consultation.
- Proposals for very large and/or costly developments are determined by the State Government. Consultation on these proposals is normally guided by the statutory minimum requirements. In some cases the consultation provisions of Council's Development Control Plan may be applied, but Council still has no authority to make the final decision.

Making a submission

Submissions relating to applications and other exhibited documents must be made in writing and be lodged with Council within the exhibition period specified in the public notice.

A submission must:

- Be in writing by email or letter
- Clearly explain your view or opinion
- Be submitted by 4pm on the specified closing date
- Clearly reference the application, policy or plan on public exhibition
- Include the author's name, address and daytime telephone number

The submission process

- Submission is made and assigned to the corresponding DA
- Submission author details are recorded and submission is acknowledged
- Submission is considered in assessing the DA
- Author is notified of outcome

We will provide the community with feedback on how we are responding to its input as part of our engagement activities.

We will provide reports to Council on the matter at hand which will include the community's feedback to demonstrate how we have given genuine and proper consideration to their input. In particular, a summary of the input is provided along with a description of how community views were considered in reaching a determination.

Our commitment

We believe all levels of Government have a role in actively involving the community in planning for their home, towns and community. Council will therefore engage communities in relevant planning processes at the earliest possible opportunity to leverage local knowledge, ideas and expertise to ensure the best planning outcomes are reached.



Our vision

Murray River Council has vibrant, diverse and cohesive communities. We are supported by strong local business and primary industries. We value our beautiful waterways and natural surrounds.

Our values

Murray River Council has four core values that drive us in our dealings with the people we serve, our stakeholders and the community. We live these values every day:

We achieve our goals through **collaboration**.

We take **responsibility** of our contribution to servicing our community.

We act with **integrity**.

We demonstrate **excellence** by delivering our best.



Supporting Resources

MRC Community Engagement Framework (internal resource to be developed).

Review

Within 3 months of the local government elections as part of a broader review of the Community Strategic Plan.

References

International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) : www.iap2.org.au

www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au

NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment "Community Participation Plans - Guidance material to councils"



**murray river
council**

PO Box 906 Moama, 2731

murrayriver.nsw.gov.au

1300 087 004