MURRAY RIVER COUNCIL
COUNCIL POLICY

DRAFT
COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT
POLICY

POL-104.V#3

murray river
council

1. INTRODUCTION

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.

It is for these reasons, Council implemented a community engagement process which underpins its values and seeks to bring together community, stakeholders and Council to achieve the Vision and Mission for the region.

While it is not possible to consult with the community on every issue, Council would like to ensure that the community is as well informed as it can be on major issues, plans and projects; has the necessary factual information to form an opinion and has opportunities through community engagement to enhance Council's decision making.

Community engagement will be undertaken by Council where significant policy development or change is proposed, where a planning determination may affect the community, where decisions may impact or be of interest to the community and where such is mandated by State Government legislation.

Engagement involves a range of activities that allow residents to:

▸ Be informed of Council activities;

▸ Be involved with Council in improving the community;

▸ Provide input to Council on local issues; and

▸ Help make decisions.

Engagement allows the Council to:

▸ Gather information, data and facts;

▸ Gather a range of opinions;

▸ Understand better opportunities, concerns and potential barriers; and

▸ Learn about unintended consequences.

Engagement activities range from everyday informal discussions, contact with stakeholders during service delivery, group discussions or meetings, formal consultation processes, through to Council supporting community members in taking action on issues themselves.

Engagement is not just about discussion and relationships, it leads to real outcomes in communities, such as better services, facilities, policy and infrastructure. Engagement can help these outcomes be achieved by community members being more informed of the Council's direction and activities, being able to have input into some decisions, better understanding of the Council's decisions and priorities, and working more collaboratively with the Council.

Engagement does not mean that every detail of Council's operation is open to community comment and/or control. Nor does it mean that Council's employees will be distracted from the delivery of services. There are many situations where engagement is not necessary and the Community Engagement Framework clearly identifies these situations.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Policy are:

▸ To implement a formal system where community engagement is undertaken in a manner that fits the community need or legislative requirements of a project.

▸ To meet the requirements of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 relating to Community Participation Plans;

▸ To ensure community and stakeholders are engaged;

▸ For Council, to embrace ongoing dialogue with our communities to improve decision making processes through inclusive, accessible and responsive community participation; and

▸ To note that community engagement does not replace the decision-making functions of the elected Council, or the organisation, but informs it.

3.   SCOPE

This Policy applies to Council Officials and consultants responsible for community engagement undertaken for and/or on behalf of the Council.

Community engagement at the Council takes place before a decision is made. It encompasses formal, planned opportunities for participation in exploratory, capacity building or decision-making processes; information delivery or sharing; the informal building of networks and relationships; and individual interactions between the organisation and residents.

- Build alliances and relationships for the future;
- Bring different groups together for a common outcome; and
- Think about how to address/minimise outcomes.

4.   LEGISLATION

- Local Government Act 1993 (NSW)

> Chapter 3 – Section 8A – Guiding Principles for councils - (3) Community participation Councils should actively engage with their local communities, through the use of the integrated planning and reporting framework and other measures.
>
> Chapter 4 – How can the Community Influence what a Council does? Section 9-20 inclusive.

- Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (NSW)

> Part 1 – Section 1.3 Objective of Act - (j) to provide increased opportunity for community participation in environmental planning and assessment.
>
> Part 2 – Division 2.6 Community Participation. Section 2.21-2.24 inclusive.

5.   POLICY STATEMENT

Undertaking community engagement encourages practices within the Council area that can result in:

- Residents knowing when and how the Council will consult them and when Council needs to make decisions on their behalf;
- Residents being well-informed about issues, strategies or plans that may directly or indirectly affect them;
- Councillors, Council employees and consultants (engaged by Council) engaging effectively, appropriately and in a timely manner within the community when making decisions or forming policies and plans;
- Community engagement being appropriate, designed for task and audience across all areas of activities; and
- Active, informed and engaged residents.

Council is committed to community engagement that is:

Sincere in its intent.

Councillors and Council employees are upfront and explain the level of influence that the community can have in the community engagement process and will highlight the negotiable and non-negotiable elements of any community engagement.

Clearly focussed, available and understood by all.

For all critical planning processes, such as the Community Strategic Plan, Delivery Program, Operational Plan, Budget, various Strategic Plans, major projects or significant changes to service delivery, Council will prepare a Community Engagement Plan. These plans will be developed, effectively resourced (staffing and financial) and implemented.

Inclusive, accessible and diverse.

Engagement activities will be all encompassing to ensure a diverse and broad range of perspectives can be heard and captured. Council will take into account the diversity of the community by being sensitive to the needs of particular individuals or groups to maximise their ability to contribute. Council will ensure that it provides mechanisms to engage with the aged, youth, parents, one-parent families, carers, people with disabilities, different religious and cultural backgrounds, as well as people with language or technological barriers.

Informative and provides feedback.

Council stives to provide information in plain English without the use of technical terms or jargon; where information is technical in nature, supporting explanatory information will be provided and participants are given the opportunity to provide informed input into the engagement process.

Well timed

Council will undertake community engagement at the appropriate stage in the life of a project, the engagement process will be timed to ensure the community is able to help identify issues and provide comment and opinion that contribute to the decision-making process; be endeavouring to allow for a reasonable period for public response during a period of consultation.

Responsive and transparent

Enabling communities to have a more meaningful role in Council's planning and prioritisation processes. Participants know at the start of the community engagement how their input will be used and at the conclusion of a project the community will be provided details/feedback in relation to the outcomes of the engagement process, where possible and appropriate.

Evaluated and monitored

Council will undertake an assessment to determine whether the objectives of the consultation process have been achieved and determine if the engagement activities were appropriate. Outcomes of this evaluation will better inform future Council decisions and community engagement methodologies.

Effectively resourced

Council will at the beginning of the engagement process ensure adequate resources (staffing and financial) are available to enable the engagement process to satisfy the required outcomes and the success of the engagement program. Additional support will be provided to Council's employees to continue to develop capacity and gain confidence to engage effectively with communities.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Council is committed to people taking part in public discussion relating to Council decision making. Good decision making is influenced by a number of factors including the way Council engages the community in the process. Council considers the following principles of community engagement as critical to quality outcomes:

‣ A collaborative process;

‣ Flexibility of engagement tailored to each set of circumstances;

‣ Valuing community input;

‣ Building trust; and

‣ Beginning early and following through on feedback loops.

murray river council

Council's Community Engagement Framework is based on the principles of IAP2 (International Association of Public Participation) and utilises the IAP2 spectrum (Appendix A)

‣ Inform;

‣ Consult;

‣ Involve;

‣ Collaborate; and

‣ Empower.

as the accepted standard for undertaking community engagement.

IMPLEMENTATION

Council has developed / will be developing the following documents to aid in the implementation of this Policy:

Community Engagement Strategy

A public document for the community so that they know the types of issues that Council will consult on, how Council will consult and what the feedback loops will be to give line of sight to how community input has influenced decision making.

Community Engagement Framework / Procedure / Toolkit

An internal working document that provides Council's employees with the tools and templates required to engage in appropriate, effective community engagement. It also hosts induction information for Councillors relating to the adopted community engagement model (IAP2) and commitment of Council to that model.

6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Position	Responsibility
Chief Executive Officer	Overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the Community Engagement Strategy and associated resources.
Manager Community Engagement	Responsible for the implementation of the Community Engagement Strategy, Framework and toolkit resources. Provide a Community Engagement service to all portfolios of Council (assist in the development and implementation of engagement plans)
Communications Coordinator	Support the Community Engagement Strategy and associated resources. Develop communication materials to strengthen community engagement activities.
Directors, Managers and Supervisors	Undertake actions as required within the Community Engagement Strategy and Framework.
Project Managers	Develop and implement Community Engagement Plans in line with the Community Engagement Strategy and associated resources.
Council Employees	To be aware of and ensure compliance with this Policy.
Council Committees	To be aware of and adhere to this Policy.

7. EVALUATION AND REVIEW

It is the responsibility of the Manager Community Engagement, to monitor the adequacy of this Policy and recommend appropriate changes.

This Policy will be formally reviewed every four (4) years, inline with the review of the Community Strategic Plan (CSP) or as needed, whichever comes first.

8. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS, DEFINITIONS & ACRONYMS

External Documents:

‣ IAP2 (International Association of Public Participation)

‣ IAP2 spectrum

Internal Documents

‣ MRC Vision and Mission Statement

‣ MRC Community Strategic Plan (2022-2032)

‣ MRC Delivery Program (2022-2026)

‣ MRC Operational Plan & associated Budgets (2022-23, 20223-24, 2024-25, 2025-26)

‣ MRC Community Engagement Strategy

‣ MRC Community Engagement Framework/Procedure/Toolkit (to be developed)

‣ MRC Community Engagement Plan (IAP2 Plan)

‣ MRC Community Engagement Closing the Loop Plan   (to be developed)

‣ MRC Strategic Plans

‣ MRC Project Management Framework

‣ MRC Project Management Plans

Definitions:

Term	Definition
Community Engagement	Is defined as "a way to improve communities by identifying and addressing local ideas, concerns and opportunities by involving the public in certain processes that affect them and their communities." Community engagement is the planned process that allows us to consult with and work with stakeholders and community to shape a decision or action in relation to a problem, opportunity, outcome or project.
CSP	Community Strategic Plan
Council Official	Includes Councillors, members of staff of Council, administrators, Council committee members, conduct reviewers and delegates of Council.
Community	‣ a community from a geographic location (community of place), ‣ a community of similar interest (community of practice), or ‣ a community of affiliation (such as industry or sporting club)
Stakeholder	Individuals or organisations with a specific stake in the outcome of a decision to the impact of a policy, project or proposition.
IAP2	International Association of Public Participation.

9. DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version No.	Details	Dates	CM9 Reference	Resolution No.
1	Initial Issue	29 June 2017 to 28 Sept 2021	VF/20/410	320617
2	Updated to meet current advice on managing the pandemic and organisation change	28 Sept 2021 to DRAFT	VF/20/410	130921
3	Updated associated documents, formatting, responsibilities table	DRAFT	VF/20/410	

Council reserves the right to review, vary or revoke this policy at any time
This Policy is scheduled for review in 2027.

NOTE:
This is a controlled document. If you are reading a printed copy please check that you have the latest version by checking it on Council's Electronic Document system. Printed or downloaded versions of this document are uncontrolled.

DISCLAIMER:
This document was formulated to be consistent with Murray River Council's legislative obligations and with the scope of Council's powers. This document should be read in conjunction with relevant legislation, guidelines and codes of practice. In the case of any discrepancies, the most recent legislation should prevail. This document does not constitute legal advice. Legal advice should be sought in relation to particular circumstances and liability will not be accepted for losses incurred as a result of reliance on this document.

Appendix A:

IAP2 SPECTRUM OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that define 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.

	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 concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of a preferred solution.	To place the 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.
Role of the Community	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Decide