



WENTWORTH SHIRE COUNCIL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

WENTWORTH
SHIRE COUNCIL

This document was compiled by Wentworth Shire Council.

Main cover image courtesy of Michael Blyde. All other images were sourced from Council's Image Library unless otherwise stated.

Copies of this plan can be viewed online at www.wentworth.nsw.gov.au

© Copyright Wentworth Shire Council 2020

WENTWORTH SHIRE COUNCIL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

INDEX

Overview	4
Objective	5
Introduction	6
Our commitment	7
Principles	9
International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)	10
Applying IAP2 Spectrum to Wentworth Shire Council	11
Stakeholder mapping	12
Courses of action	13
Engaging with Councillors	14
Engaging with the media	15
Engaging with the Community	15
Have your say	16

OVERVIEW

This policy outlines how Council will undertake public consultation and community engagement to achieve the following actions listed in goal 4 of Council's 2017-2027 Community Strategic Plan:

- Provide strong and effective representation, leadership, planning and decision-making
- Encourage the self determination of individual townships and community groups
- Collaborate with others to achieve desired outcomes for the local community

The Strategy sets out the steps Council will follow in cases where the Local Government Act (the Act) requires Council to follow its public consultation policy as well as setting out the steps that Council will follow in other cases involving council decision-making.

Under the Local Government Act 2003 (NSW), Council is required to operate within the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) Framework (right). The framework recognises:

- That most communities share similar aspirations: a safe, healthy and pleasant place to live, a sustainable environment, opportunities for social interaction, opportunities for employment and reliable infrastructure; and
- That council plans and policies do not exist in isolation.

By drawing together various council plans, it allows both Council and the community to understand how the plans interact and to get maximum leverage from their efforts by planning holistically and sustainably for the future.

Furthermore, it provides other organisations that work in collaboration with Council for example government agencies, non-government organisations, and community-based groups - with the community's vision for the future.

Council is committed to providing opportunities for the community to contribute to solutions and be involved in its decision making processes. While Council encourages input from the community and will take into consideration community feedback, under the Local Government Act the final decision remains the responsibility of the Council Members.



1

OBJECTIVE 1

Wentworth is a vibrant, growing and thriving shire.

OBJECTIVE 2

Wentworth is a desirable shire to visit, live, work and invest.

OBJECTIVE 3

Wentworth is a community that works to enhance and protect its physical and natural assets.

OBJECTIVE 4

Wentworth is a caring, supportive and inclusive community that is informed

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this document is to outline a community engagement strategy for Wentworth Shire Council in line with Council's strategic objectives. **Primarily Objective 4: Wentworth is a caring, supportive and inclusive community that is informed and engaged in its future.**

The purpose of this strategy is to:

- Clearly demonstrate Council's commitment, expectations and processes for Community Consultation and Engagement
- Establish a set of principles for guiding Council's community consultation and engagement activities
- Provide a framework for a coordinated, well planned approach to engagement that is genuine and inclusive and meets the needs of each stakeholder group (not one-size fits all)
- Provide guidance on the provision of feedback to communities, stakeholders and partner agencies about how their contribution has influenced the development of

strategic plans and policy

- Provide a framework for monitoring and evaluating Council's engagement activities to incorporate feedback to improve and/or enhance engagement experiences
- Enable Council to become a leader in best-practice community engagement
- Meet the legislative requirements of the Local Government Act.



Introduction

WENTWORTH SHIRE: OUR COMMUNITY PROFILE

Situated at the junction of the Murray and Darling Rivers, Wentworth Shire is home to vibrant communities, a diverse agricultural sector, unique natural environments, and significant Cultural Heritage.

Strategically located bordering NSW and SA, and at the cross-roads of the Sturt, Silver City, and Calder Highways, Wentworth Shire provides important linkages to the major ports of Sydney (1,075km), Melbourne (585km), and Adelaide (420km).

The Sturt Highway (a key national freight route) and the Silver City Highway, intersect the Shire from east to west, and north to south respectively.

It has a population of approximately 8,000 people and covers an area of 2,616,926 hectares (26,000 sq. km).

Council's greatest population density is in the townships of Wentworth, Dareton, Buronga and Gol Gol situated on the southern boundary (along the Murray River).

The remote township of Pooncarie is located on the Darling River, approximately 120km north of Wentworth.

Known as the 'Gateway to the Outback', Wentworth Shire has become an important outback destination for tourists, and combined with cross-border neighbour Mildura the region attracts over 300,000 visitors annually; a number of which are return visitors.

Additionally, the shire boasts a number of local, regional and national events including major sporting events, arts and culture events, and a range of annual community events.

As part of both the NSW Western Division and cross-border Sunraysia region, Council continues to foster collaborative partnerships with government agencies, neighbouring councils, and is a member of a number of organisations that work together to represent the needs of our region.

Our commitment

Council's approach to community engagement will generally involve the following five processes:

- Providing information to the community, e.g. existing plans and strategies, fact sheets, statistical information, and discussion papers. The aim of providing information is to assist in establishing where we are now.
- Seeking information from the community by obtaining feedback on the levels of service the community wants and is willing to pay for, suggestions, opinions and other relevant information that may assist in the planning process. The aim of seeking information is to assist in establishing where we want to be.
- Involving the community in working through the issues raised and developing objectives and strategies for the plan. The aim of involving the community is to assist in establishing how we will get there.
- Charting the course of action to assist in determining outcomes or making final decisions.
- Providing feedback to enable stakeholders to understand how their input informed the course action, direct feedback or public exhibition of plans may be undertaken.

Wentworth Shire Council is committed to ongoing stakeholder engagement that is:

- Inclusive and targeted - ensuring that a broad range of community members have input into developing policies and plans. We will seek to engage with Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women, people with a disability, older people and young people
- Transparent - we will provide a transparent and open approach with our engagement activities
- Innovative and accessible - we will use a range of tools and methods to ensure that all stakeholders have the opportunity to participate

- Informative and respectful - we will provide information to participants to enable them to contribute in a meaningful way. We will seek to foster mutual respect by listening to all ideas and contributions and responding where possible. We will respect people's privacy by storing all information in accordance with the Privacy Act 1988 (Cwth).



Principles

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (IAP2)

Council recognises that Community Engagement is an emerging field of practice that is embraced globally by governments at all levels, institutions and corporations to promote the participation of local communities and stakeholders in decision making.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is an international member association which seeks to promote and improve the practice of public participation or community engagement, incorporating individuals, governments, institutions and other entities that affect the public interest

The IAP2 Core Values are:

- 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;
- Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision;
- Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers;

- Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision;
- Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate;
- Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way; and
- Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

In addition, IAP2 has developed the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum (below) to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any community engagement program.

The Spectrum shows that differing levels of public participation are legitimate depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of impact of the decision to be made. The five levels of public participation are: Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower.

	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.
Council's Promise	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 seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	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 work together with you to formulate 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	<i>Listen</i>	<i>Contribute</i>	<i>Participate</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>Decide</i>



Applying IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum to Wentworth Shire Council

Not every decision made by Council requires community engagement, however when planning community engagement activities Council's Communications staff will work with the necessary department to determine the level of community participation required as per the spectrum.

It is important to remember that the level of participation in decision-making should be proportionate to the impact of the decision being made – strategic decisions that influence longer-term outcomes for the whole community or have flow-on effects for other decisions should have a much higher degree of community participation than a decision that impacts a very small sector of the community for a very short timeframe.

Council staff will endeavor to plan their community engagement activities in a timely and effective manner.

Engagement tools

To inform: Press releases, public notices, community newsletter, website, social media, notification letters

To consult: Community meetings, surveys and questionnaires, public meetings, focus groups, forums and workshops, community newsletter, website, social media, public exhibition

To involve: Community meetings, Focus groups, Forums and Workshops, Committees, Online information –e.g. websites, email news, social media.

To collaborate: Community meetings, Focus groups, Forums and Workshops, Online information – e.g. websites, email news, social media.

To empower: By ensuring that the core principles of integrity, inclusion, deliberation and influence are apparent in all community engagement

Stakeholder mapping

Stakeholder mapping (analysis) allows engagement to be specifically tailored to the targeted stakeholder group and the issues of relevance to each stakeholder group.

Undertaking stakeholder mapping is vital for effective two-way communication as it reduces the risk of marginalising groups or individuals.

It assists to gain real community ownership of decisions or projects and ensures that communication is occurring with the right people at the right time.

There are a number of criteria that can be used to segment stakeholder groups.

The first way is the type of stakeholder as described above.

The second important consideration is the capacity of the stakeholder groups to engage.

This is particularly important for “hard to reach” stakeholders such as youth, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, older people, and people and communities who are geographically isolated or transport disadvantaged.

Understanding the capacity of the target stakeholder group’s ability to participate influences the methods of engagement that can be used.

Another factor in determining a stakeholder’s ability to engage is their understanding of the issues or opportunities.

Stakeholder categories

Stakeholders can be grouped into one of the following four categories:

- **Latent/passive:** these individuals and stakeholders don’t demonstrate an interest in the issue/project/decision at all
- **Emerging:** these individuals and stakeholders are starting to form ideas and opinions on issues, projects and

decisions

- **Aware:** these individuals and stakeholders are aware of issues, projects and decisions and demonstrate knowledge of the topic and can confidently comment on it
- **Active:** these individuals and stakeholders are doing or saying something about an issue, project or decision and are trying to influence others to their position.



Courses of action

HOW TO APPROACH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ON PROJECTS

STAKEHOLDER	SUGGESTED ACTION	COMMENTS	TIMELINE
Councillors	Involve councillors early on – whether it be councillor tours/famil/tailored detailed reports on larger issues. For smaller issues a simple early press release or email would suffice.	The earlier this is done the better, before the information is made public. Give the councillors the privilege of early information.	Recommend this be the first move in any big project.
Media	Invite the media to a face to face meeting/press famil for key projects. Sit down session with the General Manager and the Mayor. For smaller projects issue a press-release, but only after the information is put on the council's website and social media.	While a press release could be an easy set and forget, we will build a better rapport with media outlets by collaborating more with them. Use the media as our chance to sell ideas to the community. Press releases tend to simply inform, which is ok on smaller issues but for the larger ones we need a bigger scale.	ASAP after councillors informed – around the same time as the concept is on public display
Community	More emphasis on public exhibitions – via website and social media as well as physical displays in Library, Civic Centre, Shire Offices	Any feedback would need to be managed with close-ended questions (via a survey), otherwise it could quickly get out of hand if people can submit pages and pages of feedback. Utilise the library to help with the less online-savvy people of the shire. From this we can release images to appear in select shopfronts etc – so people are more aware. Passive engagement – people can view at their leisure and implement feedback mechanism ie via Facebook survey, box at libraries across the Shire, Council's Offices and VIC. Implement pop-up sessions in relevant small towns. These were well received for the Dareton Revitalised Stratgy.	ASAP after councillors are informed

The above table describes courses of action to aid in applying the IAP2 Principles in a practical format.

Council has three key stakeholder groups at minimum where engagement: the elected councillors whose role it is to represent the community and vote on council matters, the media who are effectively the voice of the community and a conduit for council to disseminate information to the community, and the most important stakeholder which is the community who stand to be the most impacted by Council decisions and projects.

Engaging with councillors

The elected Council is the face of the organisation and the key decision makers. They vote on recommendations from staff and

are integral in ensuring the community they represent have a say on Council activities.

Being elected to Council grants a Councillor a level of privilege with Council information. They vote to put projects out to public exhibition, which places them as the first step of community engagement.

For Councillors to effectively make their decisions on a project's suitability to go out to the public they should be given a chance to investigate the project themselves.

This could be in the form of the reports given to Councillors, or a famil/tour of a potential facility. After this is done then once voted on a project will be ready to exhibit publicly.

Engaging with the media

projects according to the above table.

The media have a crucial role to play in Council's community engagement. The media is the community's voice, and also Council's way of communicating the other way.

Developing good relationships with local media is important in ensuring Council's message is put across clearly.

Understanding the media's role in giving the community a voice and holding decision makers to account is also vital. Not everything will be received favourably by the community so therefore the media becomes a vessel for Council to have an audience.

Engaging with the community

The community is Council's most important stakeholder. It is their rates money being spent, they are the most affected by Council activities, and a good relationship between Council and the community meets Council's strategic objectives.

Once the Councillors have voted to put a project to public exhibition it becomes time for Council staff to ensure the community has the best chance to view and have their say on applicable

Have your say

Council welcomes comments and submissions from the community.

If you would like to become involved in any of the activities listed above, you should make contact with the Office of the General Manager, at the Wentworth Shire Council.

Telephone (03) 5027 5027 or email: council@wentworth.nsw.gov.au