Bellingen Shire Council

Connected, Sustainable, Creative

Community Engagement Strategy

Adopted :22 February 2012

Revised: 24 June 2015

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and context

This strategy was designed to outline the approach Bellingen Shire Council takes towards engaging with our community.

This strategy forms part of Council's Community Engagement Framework. The Community Engagement Framework includes:

➤ The Community Engagement Policy

➤ The Community Engagement Strategy

➤ The Community Engagement Toolkit

This strategy defines community engagement and broadly identifies who we will engage with and for what purposes. This document is not intended to alter significantly any current practices of effective engagement but value-add to the level of engagement and consultation already occurring.

The Community Engagement Strategy reflects Bellingen Council's ongoing commitment to appropriately engaging with our community, and to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of our organisation.

2 Objective

2.1 Overall Objective

The objective of the Community Engagement Framework and within that this strategy, is to develop an approach to engaging with the Bellingen Shire Community, and to engender an engagement culture for Council activities and planning.

The purpose of this Community Engagement Strategy is to:

- establish standard processes for community engagement

- ensure those processes are implemented by Council staff and where appropriate by external organisations working with Council

- ensure that relevant decision making takes account of outcomes acquired from such processes along with relevant legislative requirements and other Council policies

- Ensure where appropriate that the community is kept advised of decisions emanating from Community Engagement.

The overriding purpose of this Strategy is to ensure that Community engagement is undertaken in accordance with the Community Engagement Policy adopted by Council.

Council's approach to community engagement is based on the following social justice principles:

Equity – The broadest cross-section of residents will have opportunities to be involved in consultation activities and every effort will be made to implement processes that are fair and equitable.

Access – Strategies will be put in place to ensure that individuals are not excluded from the consultation process.

Participation – A range of methodologies will be implemented to encourage participation. These will include face to face meetings, workshops and gatherings, written publications, committee and reference group formats and over time on-line and social media technology.

Rights – Council respects the right of residents to have their voices heard and be informed about the decision making process.

3   What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement means how and to what degree our community is involved in a Council project or issue.

For our purposes, 'engagement' is used as a generic, inclusive term to describe the broad range of interactions between people. It can include a variety of approaches, such as communication or information delivery, consultation, involvement and collaboration and empowered action in informal groups or formal partnerships.

The word 'community' is also a very broad term used to define groups of people; whether they are stakeholders, interest groups, citizen groups, etc. A community may be a geographic location (community of place), a community of similar interest (community of practice), or a community of affiliation or identity (such as industry or sporting club).

'Community engagement' is therefore a planned process with the specific purpose of working with identified groups of people, whether they are connected by geographic location, special interest, or affiliation or identity to address issues affecting their well-being.

The linking of the term 'community' to 'engagement' serves to broaden the scope, shifting the focus from the individual to the collective, with the associated implications for inclusiveness to ensure consideration is made of the diversity that exists within any community. (http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/effective-engagement)

3.1   Benefits of Community Engagement

"Change is more likely to be successful and permanent when the people it affects are involved in initiating and promoting it"

The benefits of effective community engagement are as follows:

➢ Increased community awareness about Council's services, planning and program delivery

- ➤ Increased awareness across Council of community views and the issues that should be considered as part of the decision making process

- ➤ Increased awareness of the needs, priorities and diversity of the local community which in turn ensures that Council's service provision and planning functions are aligned appropriately

- ➤ Increased level of community ownership and acceptance of decisions affecting our local government area

- ➤ Council and our community working together to address local issues

- ➤ Potential for time resource and cost savings for council.

3.2 Community Engagement

Council engages our communities in a number of ways:

Provision of information: We can provide the community with information to help them understand a situation or problem.

Consultation: We can consult with interested parties to obtain community feedback on alternatives / decisions.

Involvement: We can work directly with the community throughout a process to ensure that community concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

Collaboration: We can also partner with the community in each aspect of a decision making process including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution.

4 Who are our stakeholders?

A stakeholder is defined as a person or group who has or feels they have an interest or stake in a project or issue. There are many ways to identify stakeholders including:

- ➤ Draw on in-house knowledge
  - People or teams who may have run similar projects
  - Brainstorm with cross sections of staff
  - A database of interested community members

- ➤ Review records
  - People who have made previous submissions, attended forums etc
  - Other lists of people who have expressed interest
  - Council's Community Directory

- ➤ Ask our community
  - Call for expressions of interest – public announcements to promote call for interest
  - Ask key members of the community / groups who they think would be interested

> ➤ Identify any hard to reach groups

Groups which should be considered through the engagement process include, but not limited to the following:

Indigenous Groups	Chambers of Commerce	Environmental groups	Volunteer groups
Sporting Groups	Committees of Council	Disabled	Youth
Property Owners	Visitors	Aged	Not For Profit Groups
Schools & other education places	Experts	Utilities	State & Federal Government

In addition Council's Social Plan 2010-2015 identifies a number of priority groups as follows:

- Children and Families
- Young People
- Older People aged 55+
- People with a Disability
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People
- Women and Men

5   Engagement Principles

The following principles will underpin Council's approach to community engagement.

1. Open and inclusive
- Council recognises community participation as a right of all citizens and an integral component of informed decision-making
- Council creates, supports and promotes opportunities for our community to actively participate in decision making
- Council encourages involvement from a wide cross-section of our community using engagement processes that are accessible and inclusive
- Council operates under the key value of openness and is committed to ensuring that the community is well informed about Council's service delivery, planning and decision making processes

2. Mutual trust and respect and accountability
- Council treats all participants' in the engagement process with respect and dignity
- Council approaches engagement from an impartial perspective, free from bias toward any stakeholder involved in the process
- Council is accountable, accessible and ethical in all dealings with our community

3. Engage early and be clear
- Council seeks early engagement and regularly involves the community in decision making

- Council communicates clearly the objectives of the engagement process and provides community members with available and relevant information as part of the engagement process to ensure informed discussion
- Council communicates the parameters of the engagement process to participants from the outset, including legislative requirements, Council's sphere of influence, conflicting community views, policy frameworks and context, budget constraints etc
- Council acknowledges that planning is a critical process to deliver successful outcomes and is committed to developing and implementing community engagement plans

4. Consideration and feedback
- Council is committed to demonstrating that we have considered the contributions from our community as well as relevant data, prior to making any decisions that affect our local community
- Council is committed to providing participants with feedback at key stages throughout the process or project and upon completion, as well as how community input influenced the decision

5. Skills and Resources
- Council endeavours to ensure that sufficient timeframes and adequate resources are allocated to engagement processes
- Council co-ordinates its community engagement processes where possible to optimise resources, ensure efficiency and avoid duplication
- Council recognises the skills required to undertake community engagement, and provides staff with opportunities for further skill development and training.

6. Community Engagement Protocols
The following 'engagement protocols' have been established for community gatherings facilitated by Council. This will ensure that the expectations of everybody are made clear and the meeting can be productive and positive for all concerned. The list will be displayed at the venue and the meeting facilitator will articulate the protocols as part of facilitating the meeting.

The Engagement Protocols:

- Show respect for each other
- Listen to understand
- One person speaking at a time
- Focus on the issue in question, not individuals
- Speak honestly
- Articulate hidden assumptions
- Be brief and meaningful when voicing your opinion
- Seek common ground and understanding (not problems and conflict)
- No recording of the meeting without everyone's prior permission
- No alcohol to be served or consumed at the venue

6   Community Engagement Planning
The Community Engagement Matrix (shown at Section 9 in this Strategy) is relevant to all staff that engages with our community.

The Community Engagement Matrix aims to guide staff in their interactions with our community and ensure appropriate levels of community engagement for a range of

projects, services and activities. In some cases requirements may be imposed by the State Government and may override the policy and matrix.

It should be noted that community engagement and consultation for the Development Approvals Process is dealt with separately in the Community Engagement Policy. These processes are detailed in Council's Development Control Plan, the NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 and the Environmental Planning & Assessment Regulation 2000.

It is recognised that there is diversity in the activities and projects across Council, and the type of engagement undertaken should vary accordingly. As such a flexible approach has been adopted in the design of the Community Engagement Matrix, enabling staff to determine the potential impact of a situation, and therefore the appropriate level of community participation.

The Community Engagement Matrix should be used at the commencement of all projects or reviews of services, and also as part of day to day operations, to ensure that appropriate engagement is identified and undertaken and included in the Community Engagement Plan.

A Community Engagement Plan provides guidance and support to ensure that all key elements are considered and addressed early in the project planning stages. In addition, staff should ensure that Councillors are aware of community engagement activities, for high impact projects, prior to occurrence.

6.1   Community Engagement Planning Steps

Step 1 - Purpose and objectives?
- ➢ Detail the background to the project or issue including what has happened to date.
- ➢ What is the purpose of the engagement?
- ➢ What are the objectives and desired outcomes?
- ➢ Identify any key issues
- ➢ Consider any legal or statutory requirements

Step 2 - Determine who should be involved?
- ➢ Identify the stakeholders and community members that should be included. (see section 4)
- ➢ What are the potential impacts?
- ➢ Are there any special groups / needs? How will you ensure fair and equal opportunity to provide input?
- ➢ Undertake stakeholder analysis (template included in Toolkit)

Step 3 - Assess Level of Impact
- ➢ Determine the likely 'level of impact' of the project, issue, service or action, using the assessment criteria contained within Section 9 of this Strategy.

Step 4 - Determine level and method of Community Participation
- ➢ Determine the desired level of community participation/involvement. For example whether the community needs to be informed or whether they should have the opportunity to be involved in decision making.
- ➢ This will be influenced by the degree of impact and the desired outcomes. Use the guidelines in Section 6.3 to make this decision,
- ➢ Consider legislation or other Council Policy requirements.

Step 5 - Determine Methods and Tools
- ➢ Use the Matrix in Section 6.3 to determine the type of engagement that should occur in relation to the level of impact and the desired community participation.

Step 6 - Timeframes and resources
- ➢ Develop a timeline of the key engagement activities during the project
- ➢ Develop an estimated budget required to complete the engagement plan
- ➢ Determine what skills are required and what resources are available

Step 7 – Feedback and reporting
- ➢ Detail how and when each stakeholder group (participants, community, council and staff) will receive feedback during the project and the outcomes
- ➢ Define the outcomes that are expected from the approach and how the final outcomes will be documented and circulated.

Step 8 – Evaluation
- ➢ Complete an evaluation summary including – summary of process and key outcomes, and provide to participants and publish on website

6.2 Project Objectives – What is the purpose?

The first step of any engagement plan is to clearly identify the objectives of the engagement.

This should also include a summary of the background to the project or issues and what has happened to date.

Questions that need to be answered include:

- What is the purpose of the community engagement?
- What questions would you like the engagement activities to answer?
- What do you want the engagement to achieve?

Key issues also need to be identified along with any statutory requirements. In determining the project objectives the Principles of community engagement detailed in Section 5 should be considered to ensure that community values, needs and aspirations are understood.

In addition it is useful to consider at this stage the level of internal commitment. This will include identifying:

- Who are the decision makers?
- What is their view on Community engagement?
- Clarification of the scope of decision
- Who are the preliminary stakeholders and issues?

6.3 Guide for Determining Level of Participation

Use the following chart to assist in determining the appropriate level of community participation relative to the likely 'level of impact' of a project, issue, service or action. The level of impact is defined below;

Level or Impact	Criteria (one or more of the following)	Examples
Level 1 **High Impact–Bellingen Shire**	✓ High level of real or perceived impact or risk across Bellingen Shire. ✓ Any significant impact on attributes that are considered to be of high value to the whole of Bellingen Shire, such as the natural environment or heritage. ✓ Any impact on the health, safety or well being of the Bellingen Shire community. ✓ Potential high degree of controversy or conflict. ✓ Likely high level of interest across Bellingen Shire. ✓ Potential high impact on State or regional strategies or directions.	✓ Council's Strategic Community Plan ✓ Local Environmental Plan (Bellingen Shire Wide) ✓ Plans of Management (district or regional) ✓ A change to land categorisation, i.e. community to operational land ✓ Strategy Plan, e.g. Culture, Youth, Aged ✓ Removal of a facility or service catering across Bellingen Shire, e.g. library services ✓ Provision of a district or regional facility, e.g. skate park, indoor sports centre ✓ Key changes to a Bellingen Shire wide service, e.g. Beach Services, Waste Management ✓ Changes to or impact on natural bush land or waterway (where the natural values could be affected)
Level 2 **High Impact–Local**	✓ High level of real or perceived impact or risk on a local area, small community or user group/s of a specific facility or service. ✓ The loss of or significant change to any facility or service to a local community. ✓ Potential high degree of controversy or conflict at the local level.	✓ Local Environmental Plan (localised change) ✓ Removal or relocation of a local playground or significant landscape feature ✓ Change to or loss of valued activity or program, e.g. local youth activity ✓ Re-development of a sports ground ✓ Local street road closure ✓ Increase or removal of car parking in local shopping centre
Level 3 **Lower Impact – Shire Wide**	✓ Lower, although still some real or perceived impact or risk across Bellingen Shire. ✓ Potential for some controversy or conflict. ✓ Potential for some, although not significant, impact on State or regional strategies or directions.	✓ Improvements to a Bellingen Shire wide service, e.g. Emergency Services, Library Services ✓ Upgrade of a district or regional facility, e.g. Dorrigo Swimming Pool ✓ Changes to Customer Service processes, e.g. payment of rates ✓ Most changes to fees and charges (unless contentious) ✓ Provision of a community wide event ✓ Review of community needs, e.g. Annual Survey, recreation needs assessment
Level 4 **Lower Impact – Local**	✓ Lower level of real or perceived impact or risk on a local area, small community or user group/s of a specific facility or service. ✓ Only a small change or improvement to a facility or service at the local level. ✓ Low or no risk of controversy or conflict at the local level.	✓ Upgrade of a local playground ✓ Local street or streetscape upgrade ✓ Changes to a local activity program, e.g. timing or venue/ location

As highlighted by the table above, more than one level of participation will generally be required. It should be noted that the order of undertaking the different levels of participation will vary with each project. For example, it may be appropriate to seek information before informing the community.

For high impact projects or issues that affect the whole of Bellingen Shire e.g. Community Strategic Plan or the Growth Management Strategy, engagement activities should be considered to include areas across the LGA.

The table below indicates matters that should be considered in the context of the level of impact, provided in the table above.

Level of Impact	Level of Participation Generally Required	Considerations
Level 1 High Impact– Shire Wide High level of impact on the whole or a large part of Bellingen Shire.	Inform Consult Involve Collaborate	In exceptional circumstances, it may not be feasible to involve the community or seek information prior to action. A formal collaboration approach may not always be appropriate. This will only be essential where an ongoing involvement and community commitment is sought.
Level 2 High Impact – Local High level of impact of a local nature, e.g. a local area, specific community or user group.	Inform Consult Involve Collaborate	In exceptional circumstances, it may not be feasible to involve the community or seek information prior to action A formal collaboration approach may not always be appropriate. This will only be essential where an ongoing involvement and community commitment is sought.
Level 3 Lower Impact – Shire Wide Lower level of impact on the whole or a large part of Bellingen Shire.	Inform Consult Involve	It will not always be necessary to involve the community. For example, a review of needs may only require a survey, particularly if the community has been involved previously.
Level 4 Lower Impact – Local Lower level of impact of a local nature, e.g. a local area, specific community or user group.	Inform Consult	There will be times when staff will want to involve program or activity participants in planning or deciding on changes (to achieve a sense of ownership). At times it may be advisable to involve a local community in planning or decision making to avoid the risk of a project or action becoming a greater issue.

It should also be noted that there may on occasion, be exceptional circumstances which may mean that the processes outlined in Council's Policy & Strategy cannot, unfortunately be followed. Examples may include situations where time constraints are imposed by others but Council <u>must</u> respond, situations where consultation cannot occur, for instance during a flood or other natural disaster or where substantial public funds may be at risk.

If this approach was necessary it would be noted in any advice and/or report to Council, along with the rationale.

6.4   Level of Community Participation

Having decided on the 'level of impact', the next step is to determine the level of community participation that is appropriate for the particular project, issue, service or action. Not all 'high impact' projects or issues will require a high level of community involvement or collaboration, although some will.

Due to the diversity of activities in Council, staff will need to have flexibility in making this decision. It then becomes the responsibility of staff to fully understand the impact of their project or issue on the community and to select the appropriate level of community participation to match the situation.

Four (4) levels of community participation have been developed, based on the level of involvement of the community. These levels are based on the community engagement approach outlined in Section 3.3:

Inform	One way communication providing balance and objective information to assist understanding about something that is going to happen or has happened	- Advising the community of a situation or proposal. - Informing on a decision or direction. - Providing advice on an issue. - No response is required, although people are free to seek a further level of participation.
Consult	Two way communications designed to obtain public feedback about ideas on rationale, alternatives and proposals to inform decision making	- Undertaking market research to identify needs or issues. - Seeking comment on a proposal, action or issue. - Seeking feedback on a service or facility. - Requiring a response, but limited opportunity for dialogue. - Option for people to seek a further level of participation.
Involve	Participatory process designed to help identify issues and views to ensure that concerns and aspirations are understood and considered prior to decision making.	- Involving the community in discussion and debate. - Ensuring informed input through briefings and information. - Adopting a more personal and innovative approach through personal contact and meetings/sessions that encourage participation. - Involving at different times in the planning process, i.e. keeping informed and enabling further comment.

Collaborate	Working together to develop understanding of all issues and interests to work out alternatives and identify preferred solutions	• Establishing a structure for involvement in decision making, e.g. committee. • Enabling ongoing involvement and keeping informed. Allocating responsibility in achieving initiatives.

To ensure the appropriate level of community participation, staff also need to consider specific legislative requirements and other relevant Council policies.

6.5   Methods and tools for engagement

The Community Engagement Matrix in Section 9 is designed to assist with decisions in relation to the specific types of engagement that are appropriate for the chosen 'Impact Level' and for the desired level of community participation.

The Engagement Matrix seeks to assist in identifying the most appropriate methods and tools in developing the engagement plan. It should be noted that the plan will vary depending on the nature, complexity and impact of the issue or project and the selection of appropriate tools will vary accordingly.

The Matrix is divided into Four (4) sections linked to the level of participation, that is:
- Inform
- Consult
- Involve
- Collaborate

Appropriate engagement types/tasks are listed under each level of participation. Symbols have then been allocated firstly for the overall level of participation, i.e. inform, consult etc, and then for each of the engagement types/ tasks.

It should be noted that the recommended engagement approach for a 'level of participation' will not necessarily match the specific tasks. For example, if a level of participation such as 'informing' is designated as essential, this does not mean that a specific task will also be essential. Instead it means that 'in general' the level of participation must be undertaken and that one or more of the specific tasks must be selected by staff to achieve this.

Specifically, when using the Engagement Matrix
1. Select the desired level/s of participation in the left hand column.
2. Move to the appropriate Impact Level column.
3. Be guided by the symbol in that column.

The symbols are intended to have the following meaning:

☺☺☺   Essential - the task must be undertaken
☺☺   Desirable - the activity will be considered and selected as appropriate
             in the development of a flexible and tailored engagement plan
☺   May be Appropriate - task may be appropriate depending on the situation

6.6   Future Engagement Activities

This Community Engagement Strategy and specifically the Engagement Matrix seeks to provide guidance for consultation and engagement with our community. The matrix sets out processes and tools that may be used.

Some of the options for consideration may not be in place at this time, such as Social Media.

7   Evaluating the Engagement

Evaluation is an important part of continuing to develop and improve community engagement processes. Feedback and monitoring should be encouraged throughout the entirety of the engagement process. The evaluation should focus on both the outcomes and process of community engagement.

An evaluation summary should be completed for all major, high impact projects including a summary of the project, the process and key outcomes. This summary should be provided to participants through appropriate dissemination means such as Council's website.

8   Toolkit

The Community Engagement Toolkit will provide an outline of the methods of engagement outlined in this document.   It is essentially the procedures guide for Council staff and will provide a number of templates for documentation based on an adopted style/ branding. This will provide our community with a visual prompt for instant recognition that the communication is from Council. The toolkit will provide a template for a communication plan for staff to use for larger projects providing direction and a checklist for effective communication.

9 Engagement Matrix

	Level 1 High Impact–Shire Wide	Level 2 High Impact – Local	Level 3 Lower Impact Shire Wide	Level 4 Lower Impact Local
INFORM	☺☺☺	☺☺☺	☺☺☺	☺☺☺
Personal Telephone Contact	☺	☺☺	☺	☺
In Person Meeting	☺	☺☺	☺	☺☺
Written Correspondence, mail out	☺☺☺	☺☺☺	☺	☺
Fact sheet, brochure	☺		☺	
Letter Box Drop	☺	☺☺	☺	☺
Notice / Advert in Local Paper	☺☺☺	☺	☺☺	☺
Notice in Newsletter	☺	☺	☺	☺
Media Release	☺☺☺		☺	
Site Display	☺☺	☺☺	☺	☺
Displays (e.g. shopping centre)	☺☺	☺	☺	
Information Sessions / briefings	☺☺	☺☺	☺	☺
Email - Community Contacts Register	☺☺☺	☺☺	☺☺	☺☺
Web site – information / updates	☺☺☺	☺☺☺	☺☺	☺☺
Banners / Posters / Signs	☺☺	☺☺		
Social Media Posting (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)	☺	☺	☺	☺
CONSULT	☺☺☺	☺☺☺	☺☺☺	☺☺
Suggestion box		☺	☺	☺☺
Telephone Survey	☺☺	☺	☺	☺
Written Survey	☺☺	☺	☺	☺
Hotline/ Phone-in	☺	☺	☺	
Letter / Media Promotion inviting Submissions	☺☺☺	☺	☺	
Public Exhibition	☺☺☺	☺	☺	
Interview	☺	☺☺	☺	
Focus Group Session	☺☺	☺☺	☺	☺☺
Public Meeting ***	☺	☺	☺☺	
Feedback form	☺☺	☺☺		
Online Discussion Forum	☺	☺	☺	☺
Social Media (e.g. blog, Facebook, etc)	☺	☺	☺	☺
INVOLVE	☺☺☺	☺☺☺	☺☺	☺☺
Meetings with key Stakeholders	☺☺☺	☺☺	☺☺	☺☺
Meetings with target community groups e.g. parents, youth, aged	☺☺	☺☺	☺☺	☺☺
Workshop Session	☺☺	☺☺	☺☺	☺
Site Tour / Meeting	☺	☺☺	☺	☺
Public Art session				
Community forum / debate	☺	☺	☺	☺
Community Committees	☺	☺	☺	☺
Deliberative Polling				
Social Media (e.g. blog, Facebook, etc)	☺	☺	☺	☺
COLLABORATE	☺☺	☺	☺	☺
Community Summit	☺			
Strategic Reference Groups	☺☺	☺☺	☺	☺
Working Party / Panel / Task Force	☺☺	☺	☺	
Joint Advisory Committees	☺☺	☺☺	☺	☺
Social Media (e.g. blog, Facebook, etc)	☺	☺	☺	☺

☺☺☺ - Essential   ☺☺ - Desirable   ☺ - May Be Appropriate

Where there is no symbol, this means that the type of engagement may not be appropriate for the Impact Level. It may also mean that the tool is still subject to consideration and/or development. This list includes the main tools and techniques that Council intends to use for community engagement. There are many other tools and techniques that can also be considered and these may be incorporated and used over time.

Not all of the Level 1 and 2 methods identified in the Engagement Matrix will be used for the development of Local Environmental Plans, e.g. written correspondence to all landowners in the Shire.