



COUNCIL POLICY

Community Engagement and Communication

Date	April 2017
Council Resolution Date	28 August 2017
Clause Number	CCL17/122
Responsible Officer	Manager Communications and Stakeholder Engagement
Position	Manager Communications and Stakeholder Engagement
Branch	Communications and Stakeholder Engagement
Division	Economic Development and Business
Version	
TRIM Reference Number	ED17/106215
Review Period	
Review Date	
Consultation	Executive Staff/Managers

Document Revision History	
Description	Date
To ensure that councils participation processes are appropriate, accessible, well planned and adequately resourced and that all community participation is undertaken in accordance with the principles of this policy	22/09/2016
Retitled from Community Participation in Decision making to better reflect purpose of policy. Simplified policy and aligned to new Community Engagement and Communication Strategy	12/4/2017
Notes	
Updated to new Dubbo Regional Council Template	

POLICY

PURPOSE

To ensure that Dubbo Regional Council (DRC) conducts appropriate community engagement and communication which, at a minimum, meets legislative requirements and encourages community participation in Council's decision making.

This policy clarifies an open and transparent processes for informing, involving and engaging the community and the role of the Communications and Stakeholder Engagement branch (Communications team) and other Council staff.

BACKGROUND AND RELATED LEGISLATION

Related Legislation

Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979 and Regulation
Local Government Act, 1993

Related Council Policies

Dubbo Regional Council mage Policy
Dubbo Regional Council Media Policy

SCOPE

This policy applies to all Council operations and functions. This extends to all Council representatives and staff involved in the process of community engagement and communications.

DEFINITIONS

Community engagement is the process of DRC and groups of people working cooperatively around an issue prior to DRC determining a decision or a direction on that issue.

Engagement can include:

- Gathering and provision of information
- Consultation
- Participation

Communication is a process for informing the community about Council services, programs and decisions. Communication may be formal and structured or informal and less structured to meet the needs of a particular audience. Communication is a vital component of community engagement.

Community refers to all stakeholders including but not limited to residents, ratepayers, interest groups, organisations and individuals with an interest in the Dubbo Regional Local Government Area and the services, functions and future direction of Dubbo Regional Council.

POLICY

Dubbo Regional Council recognises that effective community engagement and communication has benefit to Council and the community. Such benefits include:

- Better outcomes through understanding needs and views of the community and customers
- Outcomes that are broadly supported by the community
- Increased satisfaction with Council services, operations, staff and elected officials
- Increased awareness, understanding and acceptance of decisions made
- Development of solutions to local issues through Council/community partnerships
- Increased community understanding of Council processes and responsibilities

Community engagement planning will be informed by the Public Participation Spectrum developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) which outlines five levels of public participation; inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower.

Council will consider the level of impact and complexity of a project prior to conducting a community engagement process and prepare a community engagement plan and determine appropriate methods for engagement that align with the determined level of impact.

Council will utilise Council owned channels and platforms to inform the community of opportunities for community engagement and to communicate Council services, programs and decisions.

Principles

The following principles will underpin Dubbo Regional Council's approach to community engagement and communication. Dubbo Regional Council will:

- inform the community about Council's decision-making processes about long term planning, asset management and service delivery;
- ensure that participation processes are clear about the decision to be made and the level of influence the community can have on the decision;
- communicate clearly the context and objectives of community engagement processes;
- provide community members with all appropriate and relevant information about the background to the issue, including existing policies, legislative requirements, opportunities and constraints;
- use community engagement methods appropriate for the targeted community groups;
- ensure allocation of adequate resources, including time and skills as well as funding, to participation processes;
- be respectfully curious about community views and perspectives, free from bias; and
- where appropriate, report on, consider, respond to and act on community input received as part of Council decision-making processes.

When Council should engage

Different issues under consideration by Council will have varying requirements for community engagement. Council representatives and staff are responsible for determining if, and to what extent community engagement is required as appropriate to their role and function.

Council will undertake a formal community engagement process in the following circumstances:

- Where there is a legislative/statutory requirement
- When Council resolves to undertake community consultation
- On issues that have the potential to affect the delivery of services or facilities that contribute to community well-being, growth and prosperity
- When identifying and understanding the needs and priorities of the community for the purposes of strategic planning
- To monitor and evaluate community satisfaction with Council or Council services

Under the Local Government Act 1993 Council is required to publicly exhibit certain information for a set period of time. Notification in respect to Development Applications is governed by the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979. Any statutory obligation must be adhered to.

Preparing a Community Engagement Plan

Council staff will ensure the following steps are followed when planning and undertaking community engagement. Council's Communications team is to be informed of new community engagement programs and will provide advice on preparing and implementing engagement plans.

1. Define the project
2. Determine the level of impact and influence
3. Determine type of participation
4. Review stakeholder and select appropriate engagement methods (participation methods must consider accessibility for intended audience)
5. Develop timeframe and resources
6. Consider Feedback, reporting and evaluating

Compliance with Council Policy and Respective Legislation

To comply with Council Policy and respective legislation the following special considerations apply:

1. Submissions

In circumstances where Council requires members of the public to make written submissions all submissions received will be regarded as public and available for general access unless the writer specifically requests that they want their personal details to be suppressed.

Written submissions include correspondence received in person, email, completion of online form or other paper based submission form.

Submissions must be addressed to the General Manager.

2. Surveys

Use of surveys including online surveys, polls and questionnaires are to be undertaken in line with the Privacy Act and Council's Information Management Policies. This includes:

- Securely storing recipients personal information
- Disclosing how and why personal information is being collected and how it will be used
- Clearly identifying the survey as being undertaken by or on behalf of Dubbo Regional Council
- Developing and publicising any terms or conditions for the award of participation incentives
- When utilising online collection tools action should be taken to restrict multiple entries from the same user
- Telephone surveys must be completed in accordance with the 'do not call register'.

The results of Customer surveys undertaken by individual branches are to be forwarded to Council's Communications team to maintain a central repository of survey results.

The Communications team is to provide assistance to other branches in respect of the development of customer and community surveys where necessary.

3. Public Exhibition

Changes to relevant council procedures, policies, and tenders must go on public exhibition in accordance with the relevant legislation.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Council Managers and staff undertaking community engagement and communication are responsible for:

- Informing DRC's Communications team in respect of information being communicated to the community or undertaking community engagement
- Prepare communications plans as part of planning processes for projects which impact the community
- Undertake training and development in community engagement to build capability
- Advise all relevant internal stakeholders (such as customer service, Communications, Executive staff) before commencing community engagement, communication plan or campaign
- Comply with Council's relevant policies including Brand Guidelines, Media Policy and Community Engagement and Communication Policy, Social Media (Management) Policy

Communications team are responsible for

- Maintaining organisational accountability for Community Engagement and overseeing compliance with Council policy
- Maintaining a register of customer and community surveys undertaken by branches and divisions across Dubbo Regional Council
- Providing advice and assistance in the development and implementation of community engagement and communication plans
- Undertaking an annual Community Satisfaction Survey