Central Coast Council

Engagement Framework

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Our Approach

Central Coast Council's Engagement Framework defines our approach to engagement with the aim to ensure that we do what we say we will do and that we apply engagement in a consistent way. The framework provides direction to effectively engage and communicate with our community and customers, and provides guidance on when and how to undertake engagement activities and what steps and processes should be considered.

This approach applies to all areas of Council, including staff and elected representatives who undertake engagement internally and externally, as well as Council's consultants and contractors, who are involved in the many programs, projects and activities we deliver.

Place-based engagement

Council is moving toward a more responsive, integrated and coordinated approach to delivering services and outcomes for our communities. The emphasis on a place-based approach will require us to work more closely and collaboratively as teams, and this engagement framework provides a practical basis for us to do so. This approach will ensure that we have a shared language that we use in our communications, and that we are guided by common principles as we identify the best way to plan and undertake our work for the community.

Balanced decision-making

Central Coast Council is committed to involving and collaborating with the community to ensure a balanced decision-making process. Council aims to get engagement right by building on existing practices, and undertaking the appropriate level of engagement at the right time, using a range of methods.

This will ensure that our engagement is consistent, simple and helps people both understand the issue and participate if they choose to.

While engaging with the community on every issue is not always possible, Council would like to ensure that the community is well-informed on major community impacting issues, plans and projects. This relies on us to provide the necessary information they need to form an opinion, and to create an understanding, ownership and empowerment with the way Council makes its decisions.

Council recognises that a range of issues can arise which limit the success of engagement. In particular, these include: conflict or competing interests between participating community members and stakeholders; lack of balance between weak and strong stakeholders; and disruptive stakeholders.

From time to time, we may also encounter issues where our community and stakeholders have divergent or conflicting issues. In these circumstances, we seek to engage those affected, understand these different and competing needs or expectations, so that we may determine a balanced and appropriate response.

By understanding our community and stakeholders, and using a variety of engagement methods, we can seek to mitigate these issues and ensure balanced decision-making.

Purpose

The purpose of this Engagement Framework is:

- ☐ To establish standard processes for engagement and ensure those processes are implemented by all who represent Council.

- ☐ To ensure relevant and balanced decision-making, which considers the outcomes learned through engagement processes, legislative requirements and other Council policies.

Council's approach to engagement is supported by series of tools, which provide guidance and direction to the overall planning of Council's engagement activities.

These tools can also be used for internal engagement; for example, when developing new policies and procedures which will change how we work together. It will also assist us in situations where we need to collaborate across teams to develop integrated approaches, which are in line with our place-based focus for delivering community outcomes and services.

Engagement is the key mechanism that helps to identify local values and needs, and facilitates a collaborative approach and working partnership that will assist Council in its decision-making and partnerships.

What is engagement?

Engagement refers to how we interact, negotiate and relate to each other, in order to inform or improve a decision. We engage with each other every day – in meetings, workshops as well as by email and phone. We also engage with our customers, communities, providers, contractors and suppliers, stakeholders and government agencies.

When we need to work with people on issues that will impact them, or in which they have an interest, it is helpful if we do this in a planned, consistent and transparent way.

Why is engagement important?

Benefits for communities
- Hearing other opinions;
- Helping Council understand complex issues;
- Learning from each other and working together;
- Strengthening community networks;
- Building information and skills;
- Valuing ideas and opinions; and
- Achieving sustainable outcomes

Benefits for Council
- Understanding community needs and aspirations;
- Increasing awareness/understanding of issues;
- Identifying challenges/opportunities/solutions not previously considered;
- Seeking public feedback for options;
- Developing consensus/trust; and
- Gaining local knowledge or opinion of what will/won't work.

Benefits for teams
- Identifying and understanding the priorities, needs and goals of other teams and projects;
- Providing a platform for collaboration and integration of goals and objectives;
- Assisting with better coordination and ultimately outcomes;
- Increasing efficiencies through reducing rework;
- Helping to build internal relationships based on trust, respect and integrity; and
- Creating a supportive environment with shared goals and aspirations.

When to engage

Engagement can be used to share information, educate or change behaviours, gather views and opinions, develop options, build consensus, or make decisions.

Not every program or project requires engagement; however, we have identified the six main reasons that would trigger the initiation of engagement activity. These include:

- **Council resolution** - Council decides to change its services, regulations or initiate a major development, and would like to know the community's view on a matter.
- **Statutory consultation** – this includes town planning, budget consultations or similar, which have clearly defined engagement requirements and / or methodologies.
- **Public exhibitions** – proposals relating to policy changes, development applications and strategic plans that impact on our region. These are placed on public exhibition so residents can provide comment and input.
- **Project engagement** – time-limited projects and initiatives. Seek community views and input into plans, strategies, policy, projects and programs.
- **Ongoing engagement** – foster long-term relationships and partnerships and consistent connection through our programs and services.
- **Community satisfaction** – gain an indication of Council's performance in delivery of key services, e.g. customer satisfaction surveys. This ongoing feedback ensures our services meet community needs.
- **Community outrage or frustration** – in response to an issue or proposal where the community or stakeholders have indicated they have significant concerns, or that issues have not been adequately considered.

There are many drivers for engagement, and a number of factors will influence the form of engagement undertaken.

Council has the very important responsibility of making decisions for and on behalf of the community, and as such, we are required to ensure that appropriate community input and/or statutory requirements are considered in that process. Operating as an 'open government' that prioritises transparency, collaboration and participation is a key priority for Council.

Community and stakeholders

'Community' is a collective term that includes all groups of people who live, work, visit, study and/or use services and facilities in the Central Coast Local Government Area. For example, this may include: residents, ratepayers, business owners and operators, government and non-government agencies, suppliers, developers, users of Council services, local community groups and associations, volunteer agencies, Council staff, and elected Councillors.

Stakeholders are the many different groups of people that have a vested interest in the community and local area. These groups include:

- People who live or own property on the Central Coast;
- People who work/study in or visit the Central Coast;
- Businesses that operate from the Central Coast;
- Community agencies that provide services to the people of the Central Coast; and
- Government agencies that provide services to the people of the Central Coast.

To provide an example a resident who lives in an area would be considered community, but may also be a stakeholder because of a role they have where they work or they may volunteer on a committee, etc..,

We seek to understand the profile and attributes of our community and key stakeholders, such as their:
- ☐ Type (government, NGO, etc.);
- ☐ Geographical location;
- ☐ Expectations of engagement with Council;
- ☐ Key issues of concern;
- ☐ Existing relationship with Council;
- ☐ Level of influence;
- ☐ Dependence (or otherwise) on Council;
- ☐ Capacity to engage (e.g. language barriers, IT literacy, disability);
- ☐ Legitimacy; and

☐　Relationships with our community and other stakeholders.

We use this information to ensure an equitable and balanced approach is taken to engaging with our community and stakeholders. It also assists us to ensure their views are represented; e.g., by ensuring that those with a strong interest but a quieter voice are included equitably in the engagement process.

Principles

The following principles are designed to support Council's values and guide its approach to all community engagement activities under the framework:

❯ RESPECT AND TRANSPARENCY

- We will consult when needed and use the information gathered in a meaningful way
- We will respect your time and listen to you
- We will engage at a level that is appropriate to the possibility to influence
- We will share the responsibility, trust and transparency

❯ ACCESS AND INCLUSION

- We will seek a diversity of views and perspectives
- We will provide feedback to the community as to how their input contributed to decision-making
- We will endeavour to identify and remove barriers to participation
- We will use a range of opportunities and techniques to encourage participation, and increase awareness and understanding for all who may be affected by or interested in the outcome
- We will work in partnership with relevant community groups, State and Federal government, local government partners, and / or other stakeholders internally within Council

❯ CLARITY

- We will have genuine and open dialogue with the community
- We will clearly communicate the intention, scope and outcomes of the consultation
- We will use plain language and avoid jargon to provide clear explanation
- We will make information available in accessible formats

❯ ACCOUNTABILITY AND IMPROVEMENT

- We will seek to maintain consistent standards and levels of quality
- We will share results internally and work together to avoid duplication and 'over consultation'
- We will evaluate engagement efforts and consistently seek to learn and improve practice

❯ CAPACITY

- We will build the community's capacity to contribute, by educating and empowering both the community and staff so that they may participate in meaningful, two-way collaboration.

Engagement Framework

At its highest level, Council's Engagement Framework is guided by key elements of, and in accordance with, the International Association of Public Participation, IAP2 Standard and AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard.

It consists of two main components:

1. **IAP2 Engagement Model** - which describes the relationship between the leader of the engagement and the community being engaged, and how this changes depending on the nature of the engagement. This practical tool, along with an Engagement Spectrum helps to understand the nature of the relationship of engagement, and consequently, its key risks, activities and goals.

   This model of engagement identifies that, for any given engagement, there is an organisation and a community and stakeholders. The 'organisation' could be Council, or a specific team or division within Council; the community could be the community of the LGA, a specific, place-based community, or a team or division within Council. 'Stakeholders' are the many different groups of people that may have a stake in the community.

   The outcomes of the engagement – behaviour change, community action and contribution, community advocacy or organisation implementation – dictate the nature of the engagement, and consequently, the relationships.

   The engagement model below helps us to understand the nature of these relationships, and consequently, their level of influence (on the Spectrum). It also indicates the types of activities that Council may need to use as it develops its engagement approach.

   Engagement Model
   Engagement is led by both organisations and the community.

2. **Engagement Spectrum** (Appendix 1) is then used to help decide the level of engagement, based on the community's ability to influence the outcome. This spectrum is an adaptation of the IAP2 Standard and AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard (AA1000SES 2015), and provides clear guidance on levels of engagement and relevant methods based on expected outcomes.

   Key levels of engagement are:

   - **Inform** – to provide information, education or give advice to the community, to let them know what happened or why we are doing something.

- **Consult** – to seek feedback about attitudes, opinions and preferences that will assist Council in its decision-making.
- **Active participation** – to partner and collaborate with the community.

Council's Engagement Framework aims to build a trusting and collaborative relationship with the community by ensuring that it is a valued partner in the decision-making process, and has a strong voice in the development of a shared vision.

With increased transparency, collaborative discussions and a range of engagement channels and opportunities, the community will feel a greater sense of empowerment and ownership of the decisions made by Council on its behalf.

Internally, Council teams and divisions will work better together, collaborating to deliver improved services while understanding the complex and competing priorities and needs of different projects and teams.

Measuring the success of engagement

The success of our engagement approach will be monitored based on reputational risk (which arises where there are differences between community' and stakeholders' current and emerging perceptions, beliefs and expectations relative to our current planned activities, performance and behaviours) using a range of indicators.

In addition, we conduct relevant research to seek direct feedback on the effectiveness of our engagement. This includes quarterly customer analysis, annual media perceptions audits and community satisfaction surveys and a range of other feedback processes during engagement activities.

At a project level, different indicators and evaluations may be chosen to measure the success of engagement dependent on the intended outcomes of that engagement and will be determined on a case by case basis.

References

Our engagement approach is based on a number of supporting documents:

- Central Coast Council Code of Conduct (2016)
- IAP2 Engagement Standard and Principles (2015)
- AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard – AA1000SES (2015)

Community Engagement Spectrum

Increasing level of community impact →

Level of Community Participation →

PURPOSE →	INFORM	EDUCATE	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Goal	To provide the community with information to assist their understanding of the issue, problem, opportunities or solutions.	Provide the community with the knowledge and skills to enable them to make an informed decision.	To obtain feedback and information about attitudes, opinions and preferences that assist Council in its decision-making processes.	To work on an ongoing basis with the community to ensure their concerns, ideas and hopes are listened to and understood.	To partner with the community in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives, sharing of resources, and the discovery of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the stakeholders.
Commitment	We will keep you informed.	We will equip you with a new, shared understanding of the issues.	We will listen to and acknowledge your concerns and hopes, and provide feedback on if or how your input influenced the decision.	That the community will have a role in shaping the project, and input into decisions, which will be visible throughout the process.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions, and incorporate this into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Scope	We will plan our engagement early to ensure there is time to participate, so that we can identify issues, impacts and risks on those affected. We will use a variety of methods to enable those who wish to participate to do so.					
Methods	• Fact sheets • Website and Intranet • Mobile apps • Face to face • On the phone • Exhibitions • Media releases • Social media i.e. Facebook, Twitter • Newsletters • Emails • Events	• Workshops • Factsheets • Field visits • Events • Community based programs	• Community ThinkTanks • Events • 'Out and About' pop-up • Listening posts • Surveys • Workshop/focus group • Community groups and networks • Council, 355 and Committees of Council • Conversations • Online discussion blogs, forums, social media • Online 'Your Voice, Our Coast' engagement • Community meetings	• Project steering groups • Volunteer groups • Community partnerships • Intranet • Working groups • Liaison groups • Online involvement blogs, forums	• Local partnerships • Community partnerships • Neighbourhood matching funding • Place-making projects	• Ballots • Dedicated decision-making • Referendums
Evaluate	We will **continue to improve and find the best ways** to inform, consult, and undertake active participation with our community so that we understand the best and most practical way for them to participate. We will **make feedback clearly visible** to encourage users to participate. Adapted from: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation and AA1000SES					

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