

Lismore City Council

Community Engagement Strategy 2019

Statement of acknowledgement of the Widjabul Wiabal people

Lismore City Council acknowledges the Widjabul Wiabal people of the Bundjalung Nation, traditional custodians of the land on which we work.

Council recognises Aboriginal people as an integral part of the Lismore community and highly values their social and cultural contributions.

Lismore City Council is committed to showing respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's First Peoples.

Council acknowledges the traditional custodians of country at all Council events, ceremonies, meetings and functions.



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Mayor's Foreword

Welcome to Lismore City Council's Community Engagement Strategy. You're reading this because you want to be involved in community decisions that affect you. Council looks forward to your contribution.

The Lismore Local Government Area is made up of a number of diverse and different communities. That means there are many points of view to be considered before making decisions.

So, what is community engagement?

Community engagement is information sharing, consultation and active participation between government and communities. There are a number of forms of community engagement. It may range from filling out an online survey or receiving a letter about a neighbour's development application to attending a facilitated workshop on a masterplan or project.

Council recognises that community members and other stakeholders have a lot to offer through their expertise, skills and experience, and we want to make the most of your knowledge when making Council decisions. Council has a responsibility and can influence matters that affect your lives, and we want your input on community issues. Council needs community participation to ensure that everyone has access to fair and informed decision-making.

Council welcomes the increased role that Councillors are expected to play in community engagement. As your elected representatives, we encourage you to contact us to discuss the future of your community.

This Community Engagement Strategy will help us to engage in robust and meaningful discussions with all members of our diverse communities. What we learn will help Council make the best decisions for you and our community into the future.

Cr Isaac Smith

Mayor – Lismore City Council



About this Strategy

The Community Engagement Strategy describes Lismore City Council's commitment to informing and engaging with the community about Council business.

This strategy documents what Council aspires to achieve and assists in guiding how Council communicates and engages with its community. There are some matters that Council is unable to consult on broadly, such as matters with commercial in confidence sensitivities. These exceptions aside, Council will always ensure that the community is informed and able to participate in decision-making.



Introduction

Lismore City Council is committed to genuine and effective engagement with our community. This strategy outlines a whole-of-Council approach to community engagement and describes how we enable our community to be informed and get involved in the things we do and decisions we make.

An engaged and involved community is one of the objectives outlined in Council's Community Strategic Plan 2017–2021. We actively encourage community participation in the governance and decision-making

process. We are committed to having open, respectful and honest communication with the community and encourage the community to do the same.

We have a mandate to provide a range of infrastructure, programs and services to meet the needs of residents and visitors to the Lismore Local Government Area (LGA). As part of our mandate, we are required to ensure good governance. Integral to good governance is a comprehensive and effective community engagement approach that contributes to informed decision-making.



Lismore City Council's online community engagement hub.

www.yoursay.lismore.nsw.gov.au

Your
Say
Lismore

This document is a publicly accessible document that:

- Outlines our approach to community engagement including requirements of both the *Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979* and the *Local Government Act 1993*.
- Includes the draft Community Participation Plan at Appendix 1 in accordance with Schedule 1 of the *Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979*.
- Will periodically be amended to incorporate statutory requirements.

What is Engagement?

Community engagement is a broad term that covers the interactions between Council, the community and other stakeholders. Community engagement provides community members with an opportunity to inform our decisions. Council commits to creating an inclusive environment in which feedback is embraced in decision-making.

Why do we Engage?

Community engagement is the foundation to good governance. By using best-practice community engagement approaches, we seek to involve the community in decision-making. It provides a valuable link between Councillors, Council staff and the community by:

- Enabling Council to gain a better understanding of local needs.
- Enabling the community to be informed.
- Reducing the level of misconception or misinformation.
- Ensuring greater community understanding of decision-making and outcomes.
- Encouraging the community to participate in engagement activities and put forward ideas.
- Helping to identify issues that the community feels are important and asking for solutions from those who are most affected.
- Acknowledging the basic human need for people to be involved in decisions that impact them.
- Enabling Council to make informed and sustainable decisions.

Not every decision before Council requires engagement. Local government councillors are elected by the community. They are elected to lead the strategic direction of Council on behalf of the community. Therefore, community engagement does not replace the statutory decision-making functions of Council. Rather, it informs and guides it.

What do we Engage About?

We engage with our community on matters including:

- Community strategic plans, delivery programs and annual budgets.
- Policies and strategic plans such as economic development strategies and sport and recreation plans.
- Planning matters including development control plans and the Local Environmental Plan.
- Major infrastructure and capital works projects.
- Capital works and maintenance programs.
- Development applications and planning proposals (see Community Participation Plan, Appendix 1).
- Events.
- Other issues that are of interest to our community and stakeholders.



Our Responsibilities

Section 402 (4) of the *Local Government Act 1993* requires councils to establish and implement a community engagement strategy for engagement with the community when developing their community strategic plans. The strategy must be based on social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights.



Equity

There is fairness in decision-making and prioritising and allocation of resources.



Access

All people have fair access to services, resources, and opportunities to meet their basic needs and improve their quality of life.



Participation

Everyone has the maximum opportunity to genuinely participate in decisions which affect their lives.



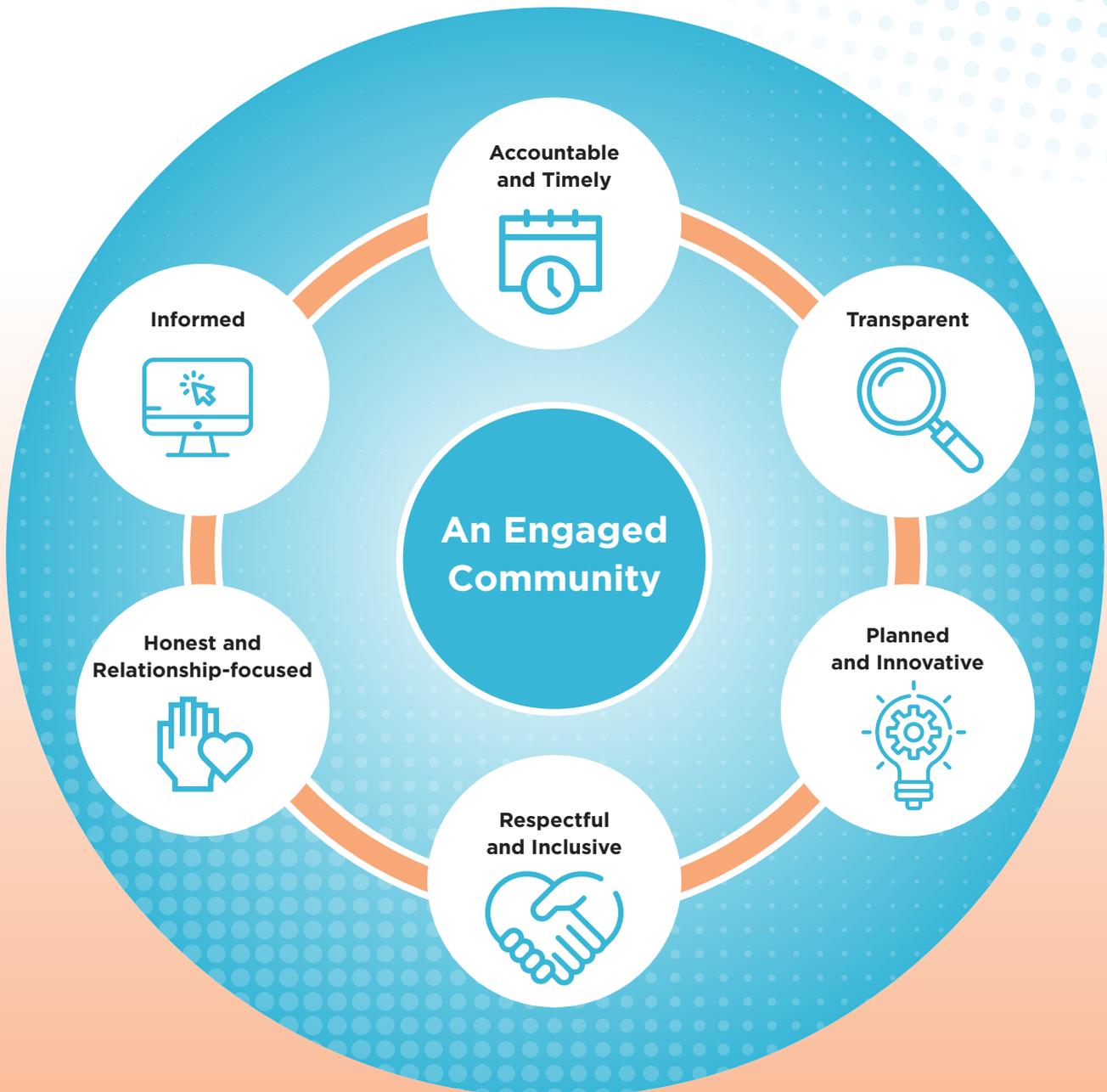
Rights

Equal rights and opportunities for everyone to participate in community life.

Recent reforms to the *Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979* require councils across NSW to prepare Community Participation Plans. This Strategy addresses the requirements set out by the Department of Planning and Environment in our Community Participation Plan (see Appendix 1).

Principles Underpinning our Engagement Approach

Creating an engaged community is at the centre of what we do at Lismore City Council. We have developed six principles that guide us in how we work with our community and we hold ourselves accountable to these principles.



Our Principles

1. Accountable and Timely



- 1.1. We forward all relevant information arising from community engagement to other areas of Council for further action.
- 1.2. We continually evaluate engagement activities and learn from past performance to improve future community engagement.
- 1.3. The timeframe for engagement is clearly communicated and we work within agreed timeframes for all activities.
- 1.4. Engagement activities are held at times that are appropriate and maximise the number of people who can participate.
- 1.5. We are mindful of not organising engagement activities during the Christmas/New Year period and when there are special events within the community.
- 1.6. If the matter we are seeking feedback about is delayed or extended due to unforeseen circumstances, we will keep our stakeholders and community updated.

2. Transparent



- 2.1. We are open and transparent about the intent and nature of any community engagement activity.
- 2.2. We demonstrate and explain to the community how their feedback will be considered in the decision-making process.
- 2.3. We provide all the necessary information relating to a project or decision that needs to be made and provide detailed answers to questions that arise from the community.
- 2.4. We provide feedback to our stakeholders in order to explain our decisions and let them know how their input has influenced the outcome.

3. Planned and Innovative



- 3.1. We are open to practical and innovative ideas.
- 3.2. We recognise that varying levels of engagement are required at different times across the range of Council services and operations.
- 3.3. Every engagement is appropriately planned with consideration being given to its purpose, scope, stakeholders, risk, level of participation, resources and timeframe.
- 3.4. We research the problem to ensure the community is able to make informed decisions.
- 3.5. We use a range of engagement and communication methods that suit the purpose of engagement and the community and stakeholders involved.
- 3.6. We collaborate across Council to ensure our engagement activities are coordinated.

Our Principles

4. Respectful and Inclusive



- 4.1. We treat all participants with respect, courtesy and honesty throughout the engagement process.
- 4.2. All people and groups who might be impacted by a decision will be given equal opportunity to be involved in the engagement process.
- 4.3. We are committed to being respectful of the diverse range of interests and views that may exist in our community around a particular issue.
- 4.4. All engagement activities are designed to ensure that views from a cross-section of the community are captured. We use appropriate methods to engage with hard-to-reach and minority groups when necessary.
- 4.5. We respect, acknowledge and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities in a culturally appropriate and respectful manner.
- 4.6. The type of engagement or contact that is made is considerate of each stakeholder or community group's needs.

5. Honest and Relationship-focused



- 5.1. We work with the community to understand their issues and interests to enable informed decisions to be made.
- 5.2. We are focused on building strong, honest relationships with our community and stakeholders.
- 5.3. We are clear about why, how and what we are engaging on when we work with the community and other stakeholders.
- 5.4. We support the application of the principle of 'free, prior and informed consent' when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on all matters that may affect their rights and interests.

6. Informed



- 6.1. We recognise the community has a right to be informed about all Council matters that impact it.
- 6.2. All information is presented in an easily understood and accessible format.
- 6.3. We will make all relevant information about the issue we are engaging on available to the community. The exception to this is information that is commercially sensitive, of a personal nature, or is the property of other agencies and information that, for legal reasons, is unable to be made available to the public.
- 6.4. We will describe the limitations of statutory requirements imposed upon us when we consult with the community.
- 6.5. We forward all relevant information arising from community engagement to other areas of Council for further action.
- 6.6. We continually evaluate engagement activities and learn from past performance to improve future community engagement.
- 6.7. The timeframe for engagement is clearly communicated and we work within agreed timeframes for all activities.
- 6.8. Engagement activities are held at times that are appropriate and maximise the number of people who can participate.
- 6.9. We are mindful of not organising engagement activities during the Christmas/New Year period and when there are special events within the community.
- 6.10. If the matter we are seeking feedback about is delayed or extended due to unforeseen circumstances, we will keep our stakeholders and community updated.

IAP2 Spectrum and Levels of Engagement

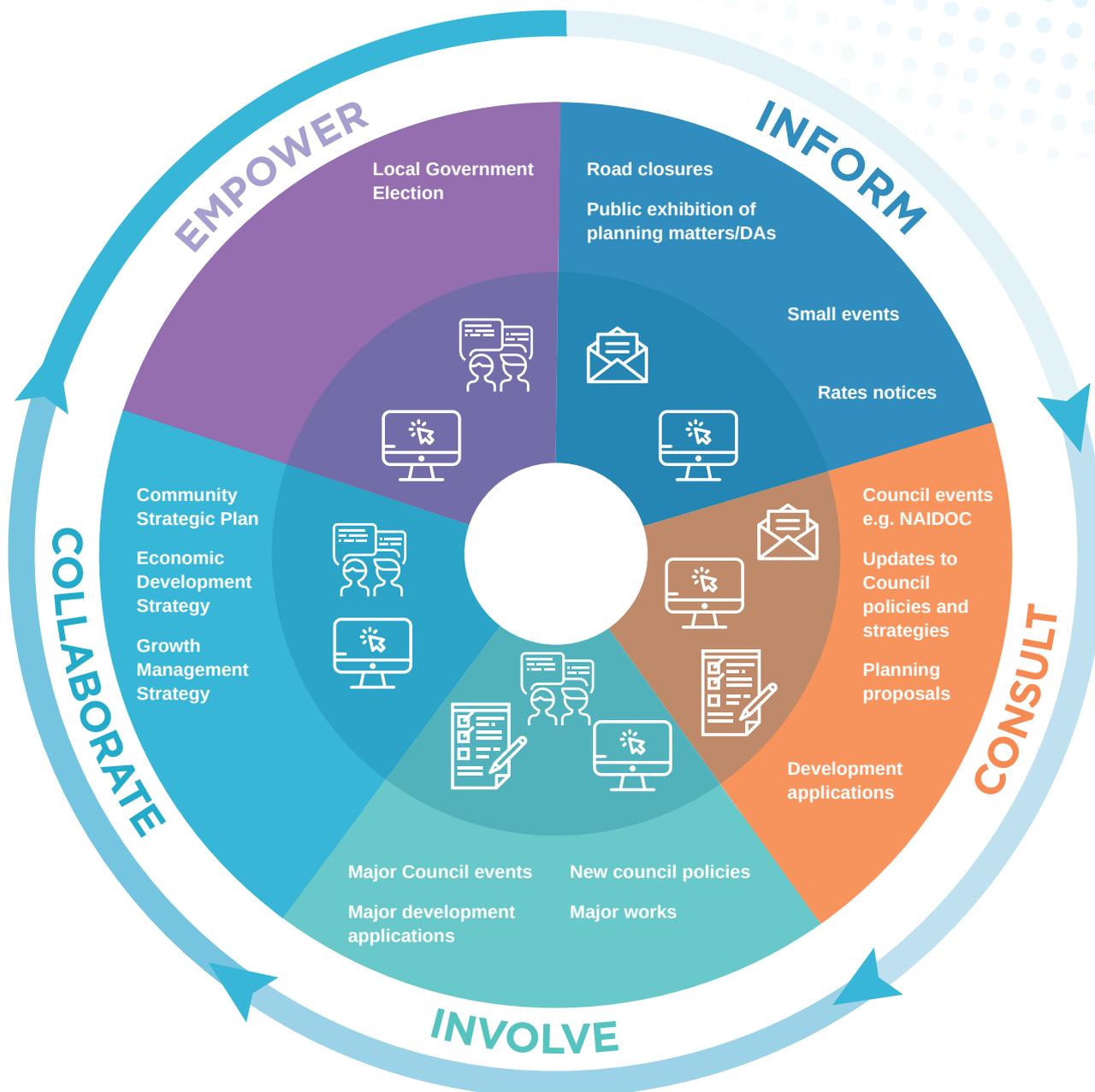
Our approach to community engagement is built upon a spectrum developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). IAP2 is an internationally recognised platform used to provide guidance to the public service, not-for-profit sector, private industry and communities.

The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum identifies that there are different levels of engagement from 'Informing' through to 'Empowering'. No single approach to engagement will serve every project. The spectrum requires that the level of engagement must be determined by considering the issue, problem or opportunity requiring engagement, the objectives to be achieved by engaging, and the extent that the community can assist us to make decisions.

| | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| <p>Inform</p> <p>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives and/or solutions.</p> | <p>Our Commitment</p> <p>We will keep you informed.</p> | <p>Level of Influence</p> <p>● ○ ○ ○ ○</p> | <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact sheets • Website information • Newsletters • Social media |
| <p>Consult</p> <p>To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or a decision.</p> | <p>Our Commitment</p> <p>We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</p> | <p>Level of Influence</p> <p>● ● ○ ○ ○</p> | <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written submissions • Focus groups • Surveys • Public meetings |
| <p>Involve</p> <p>To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.</p> | <p>Our Commitment</p> <p>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.</p> | <p>Level of Influence</p> <p>● ● ● ○ ○</p> | <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Expert panels • Forums • Online polls |
| <p>Collaborate</p> <p>To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of a preferred solution.</p> | <p>Our Commitment</p> <p>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.</p> | <p>Level of Influence</p> <p>● ● ● ● ○</p> | <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder advisory committees • Participatory decision-making |
| <p>Empower</p> <p>To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.</p> | <p>Our Commitment</p> <p>We will implement what you decide.</p> | <p>Level of Influence</p> <p>● ● ● ● ●</p> | <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens' juries • Ballots |

Lismore City Council's Engagement framework

We have developed a community engagement framework that defines our response to the needs of different individuals and groups depending on the issue or project at stake.



Methods and Tools

Listed below are some examples of the methods and tools we use when engaging with our community.

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| <p>Councillors</p>  | <p>You can contact any of your elected representatives to discuss issues or concerns. Contact details are available at www.lismore.nsw.gov.au or by phoning 1300 87 83 87. Councillors may also attend Council-facilitated community events in public places, giving community members the opportunity to raise issues with Councillors in person.</p> |
| <p>Local Matters and other newsletters</p>  | <p>Council produces a fortnightly publication called <i>Local Matters</i> for our residents and ratepayers. <i>Local Matters</i> is delivered fortnightly to around 23,000 homes and PO boxes in the LGA via Australia Post. <i>Local Matters</i> includes information on events, projects, meetings, development applications, items on public exhibition and lots more. It is designed to provide you with information that may affect you or your neighbourhood. Council also produces several online newsletters on a range of topics – the Lismore Biodiversity News, Building & Development News, and Business News. You can subscribe to receive any of these publications via email in the 'Subscribe' section at the bottom of our website at www.lismore.nsw.gov.au.</p> |
| <p>Social Media</p>  | <p>Lismore City Council has active Facebook and Twitter accounts which are updated regularly with Council news, events and other important information that the community needs to be made aware of. Please note, while people can make comments and engage in discussion, this information is unlikely to be included in Council's feedback mechanisms, such as formal reports to Council. Council does not engage in or condone discriminatory social media posts and will act in accordance with relevant policies to manage the unreasonable conduct of trolls.</p> |
| <p>Your Say Lismore</p>  | <p>The Your Say Lismore engagement platform is a multi-faceted site that allows members of the community to register and contribute to discussions on a range of consultation projects. It also provides a platform to keep the community informed on the progress of these projects. Community members can register at www.yoursay.lismore.nsw.gov.au.</p> |
| <p>Advisory Committees and Groups</p>  | <p>Council has many different committees, panels and advisory groups that provide input into Council decisions. Some are required by legislation and others act in an advisory capacity. Information about Council's committees and panels is available on Council's website at www.lismore.nsw.gov.au.</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Focus Groups or Workshops</p>  | <p>These are usually led by Council's community engagement team or an external trained facilitator and their aim is to explore a range of options available on a subject. Participants could be invited because they are residents or have an interest, involvement or stake in the subject.</p> |
| <p>Media Releases</p>  | <p>This involves issuing media releases and attracting coverage from local media outlets. If it is part of the engagement process, the Council spokesperson will indicate to the media representative that feedback from the community is valued. The media release will be forwarded to local media and is also available to the community at www.lismore.nsw.gov.au.</p> |
| <p>Letterbox Drops</p>  | <p>Council seeks feedback through unaddressed leaflets or fliers delivered to an affected area. The flier will summarise the relevant issues and advise of any changes that will affect the resident or business.</p> |
| <p>Local Neighbourhood</p>  | <p>Council on occasion promotes events on local noticeboards and in local newsletters and publications such as community and school newsletters. This may also include neighbourhood Facebook pages and other networks as a vehicle for communication.</p> |
| <p>Email</p>  | <p>Community members can contact Council at any time by emailing council@lismore.nsw.gov.au or contact Councillors via their contact details, which are available at www.lismore.nsw.gov.au.</p> |
| <p>Telephone</p>  | <p>Council has a Customer Contact Centre with an after-hours service available for emergencies. Contact us on 1300 87 83 87.</p> |

Keeping you Updated

An important part of community participation is demonstrating and reporting back on how feedback has been incorporated into the final decision or outcome. This is known as 'closing the loop' and it is important in maintaining an open and transparent engagement process.

We will ensure that the community understands how their input was considered and the reasons for the final decision. We will also inform the community of the expected timeframes for providing feedback.



Community Engagement Planning

The community engagement planning process is useful when staff are engaging stakeholders and the community in the development of Council strategies or the implementation of programs and projects. The process of planning and implementing the engagement plan is listed below.

| Step | Description |
|---|--|
| <p>Scope the project</p>  | <p>Determine the need for a community engagement plan and how the engagement will influence the project. Understand the needs and expectations of the decision makers and gain clarity on the scope of work including what aspects are negotiable.</p> |
| <p>Identify and assess stakeholders</p>  | <p>Identify and assess the relevant stakeholders considering what role they may play in the engagement process.</p> |
| <p>Determine level of influence</p>  | <p>Determine the appropriate level of engagement and clarify the specific engagement goals.</p> |
| <p>Techniques and engagement flow</p>  | <p>Determine which methods and communication activities are best suited to the stakeholders, engagement objectives and level of influence. Consider the resources needed to support the implementation of the engagement design.</p> |
| <p>Start engagement activities</p>  | <p>Undertake engagement activities as part of the integrated project plan.</p> |
| <p>Review and feedback</p>  | <p>Review and then provide feedback to decision makers, stakeholders and the community on the progress of engagement activities, outcomes and impacts for the work being done.</p> |
| <p>Final evaluation</p>  | <p>Complete the evaluation process.</p> |

**Your
Say
Lismore**

How to get in touch

Call: 1300 87 83 87

Email: council@lismore.nsw.gov.au

www.lismore.nsw.gov.au

www.yoursay.lismore.nsw.gov.au

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