



MIDCOAST
council



ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

MidCoast 2030
Shared vision, shared responsibility



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Introduction

Our Community Strategic Plan

As a community it is important for us to have a document that expresses how we want to develop into the future.

We also need to define what we want and need as a community now and outline how we will move toward our desired future.

This document is called a Community Strategic Plan. This plan guides us all in how to achieve these goals and how we can tell if we are on track or not.

Developed in collaboration with the community for the community, the Community Strategic Plan (*MidCoast 2030: Shared vision, shared responsibility*) is reviewed every four years and is the guiding document for all of Council's plans and policies.

Although Council takes responsibility for leading the process for developing the plan, and has a major role in delivering the plan, the plan belongs to the whole community and everyone has a role to play in ensuring that we move forward toward our vision.

In order to achieve the best outcomes from the plan, it is essential that Council and the community take a shared responsibility in achieving this vision. Meaningful engagement, as well as strong partnerships with the community, is essential in ensuring the Community Strategic Plan works to our strengths to achieve our shared vision.

Gathering community input into the plan began soon after the merger with Council's "*What is MidCoast*" project and has continued throughout 2017. This Community Engagement Strategy sets out all of the ways that community voices will create the final Community Strategic Plan.

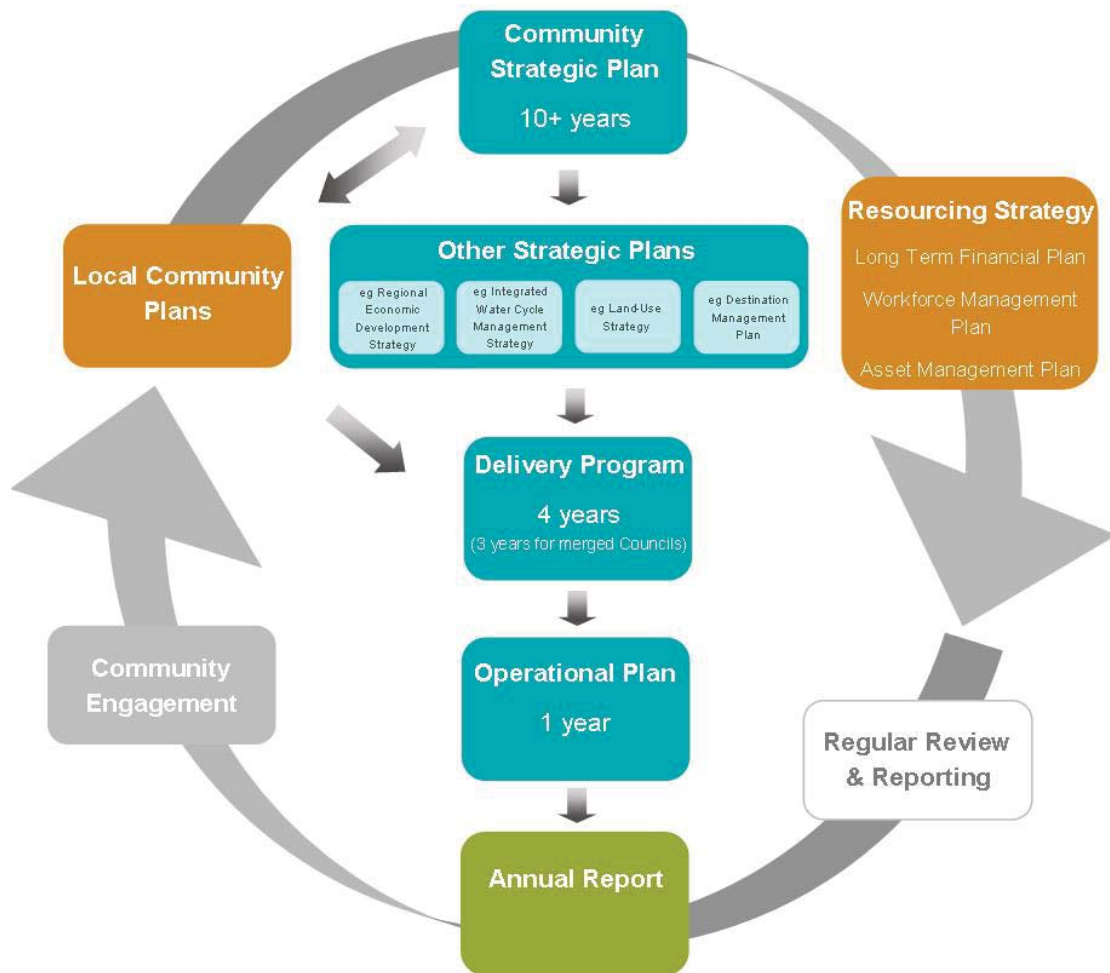
The future is not a place to which we are going; it is a place we are creating.

(Martha Cleary)

Why is a Community Strategic Plan important?

The Local Government Act 1993 requires NSW councils to develop a Community Strategic Plan to identify the main priorities and aspirations of the community, and provide a clear set of strategies to achieve this vision for the future. The Community Strategic Plan also provides a way for Councils to be accountable to the community and the State Government by reporting on how implementation is progressing.

From the MidCoast Community Strategic Plan, Council will develop a four year Delivery Plan that sets out the key strategies Council will use to deliver the Community Strategic Plan. An annual Operational Plan and Budget will also be developed. This document will provide a much more detailed view of how the Community Strategic Plan will be delivered during that period.



Principles that shape the Community Strategic Plan

Council is required to make sure that the Community Strategic Plan is based on the Division of Local Government's *Social Justice Framework*. This means that the plan must be based on:

Equity - everyone should have a fair opportunity to take part in the future of the community and our planning processes must protect the interest of people in vulnerable circumstances

Access - everyone should have fair access to services, resources and opportunities to improve their quality of life

Participation - everyone should have opportunity to genuinely participate in decision making which affects their lives

Rights - everyone should have the same rights, including people from diverse linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds, to participate in community life.

Council is also required to make sure that the Community Strategic Plan tackles the *Quadruple Bottom Line*. This means that the plan must consider issues around:

Social, environmental, and economic sustainability and civic leadership (governance).

Engaging with our community

Community engagement is an integral part of the development of MidCoast Council's first Community Strategic Plan.

This Engagement and Communications Strategy has been developed to ensure the Community Strategic Plan is shaped by our community and the vision is representative, realistic, flexible and aspirational.

We want to be confident that everyone who may be affected by or have an interest in the Community Strategic Plan has a chance to contribute toward it.

We also want our community to be confident that the Community Strategic Plan has been built on a sound and transparent process with fair representation from across the community.

This provides an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between Council and the community, and develop to a greater understanding of the role and responsibilities of each in delivering on the Community Strategic Plan.

Purpose of engagement

Ultimately, the purpose of engagement is to create a robust plan that reflects the vision and values of our community and underpins the Council's planning and reporting framework.

The objectives of the engagement strategy are to:

- Seek endorsement from the community that the draft Community Strategic Plan reflects the vision and values for the MidCoast region
- Understand what is important to the community to influence the development of Community Strategic Plan performance measures.
- Strengthen partnerships between Council and community stakeholders.
- Provide opportunities to engage with a broad cross section of the MidCoast demographic profile.
- Provide opportunities for hard to reach groups to provide feedback on the draft Community Strategic Plan, including Aboriginal people, youth, people with a disability and families.
- Educate the community on MidCoast Council's roles and responsibilities.

Level of engagement

As outlined in MidCoast Council's Community Engagement Policy, our Engagement strategy utilises the five- point framework developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

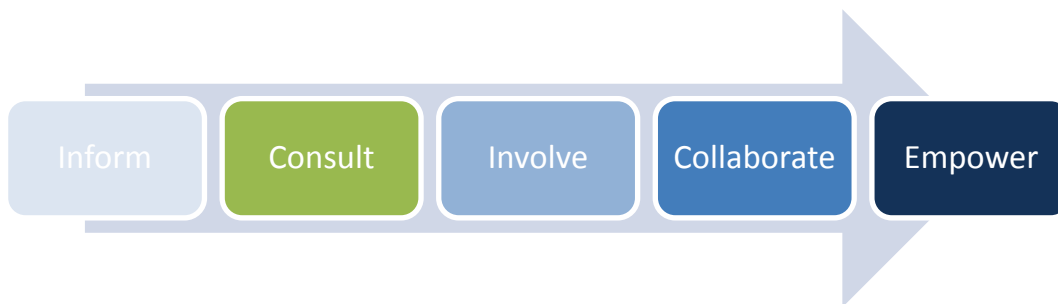


Figure 1: The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, where 'inform' is the lowest level of engagement, and 'empower' is the highest. More information on the spectrum can be found at www.iap2.org.au.

The proposed level of engagement for each stakeholder is:

- **Inform** - to provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, benefits and/or solutions
- **Consult** - to obtain public feedback on alternatives, projects and/or designs
- **Involve** - to work directly with the public throughout the decision-making process to ensure that community concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.
- **Collaborate** - to partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.
- **Empower** - where Council and community work in partnership to implement action and build community capacity

The methods outlined within this Engagement Strategy will be designed to ensure that each of the levels of engagement are achieved during the consultation process.

Flexibility

This Engagement Strategy outlines how Council intends to listen to our community. As new information is gained, the Engagement Strategy may be revised. We need to remain flexible enough to take advantage of opportunities and changing circumstances that may arise.

Who will we engage with?

As a long term strategic document for the MidCoast Council region, the Community Strategic Plan has a range of stakeholders. Below is a list of the people, groups and organisations who are important to us in the development of the Community Strategic Plan.

- Residents / Individuals / Rate Payers / Non-resident rate payers / Renters
- Groups of individuals, organisations, sporting groups, political groups, lobby groups, interest groups, support groups
- Business community / Developers
- Government Agencies – Federal and State
- Visitors / Tourists
- Other community providers (Public and private)
- Non-Government Organisations (NGOs)
- Councillors
- MidCoast Council staff

Engagement activities will encompass all of these groups. Specific types of activities and messages will be designed to target each stakeholder, as described further in this Strategy.

We acknowledge there will be some parts of our community that will be harder to reach than others. These stakeholders are outlined below.

While people who identify with these groups may choose not to participate in any activities, we need to make sure that the engagement activities used do not exclude people from the process either directly or indirectly. Any form of communication used during the engagement process will need to be flexible enough to provide opportunities for the following stakeholders to contribute:

People with disabilities	The uninterested / apathetic
Homeless people	Aboriginal community
Commuters	People with literacy issues
Children and Young people	Older people
Carers / parents	Tourists
Those who are transport disadvantaged	Property owners who do not reside in the area
Those who are socially or physically isolated	

Engagement program

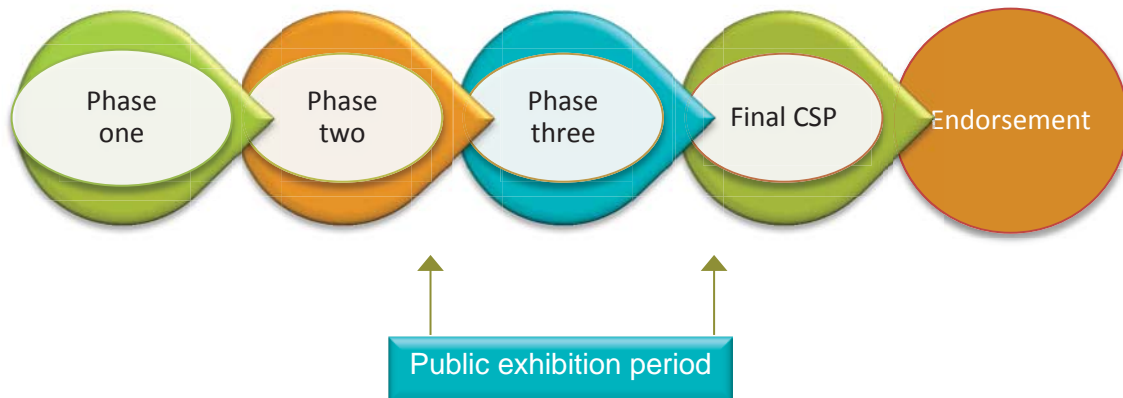
The community engagement aspect of the Community Strategic Plan has been designed in three distinct phases.

Phase one: What are our community aspirations and priorities?
October 2016-September 2017

Phase two: Testing and development of a draft plan
September 2017-December 2017

Phase three: Have we hit the mark? Are we hearing and interpreting our community accurately? How will we measure? Public exhibition and engagement period
January-February 2018

Finalisation: Incorporating feedback into a finalised Community Strategic Plan
For presentation to the March 2018 MidCoast Council meeting for endorsement



Phase 1: summary

Aim: Identification of community aspirations and priorities

Timeframe: October 2016 – September 2017

Phase 1 included an extensive engagement project to develop a shared vision and values for the MidCoast area, as well as conducting background research to support the development of a draft Community Strategic Plan.

Method	Description
"What is MidCoast?" project	An extensive engagement program was conducted between October 2016 and April 2017 that aimed to understand the needs and aspirations of the community. Outcomes of the project included the creation of a MidCoast Vision and Values to be reflected in the Community Strategic Plan and a new identity and brand for the MidCoast region. Engagement activities included online surveys, focus groups, community meetings, steering groups, social media campaign, media releases and radio interviews.
Analysis of MidCoast demographic profile	Utilisation of the Profile ID tool to develop both demographic and economic profiles of MidCoast Council Local Government Area.
Analysis of former Councils' Community Strategic Plans and other strategic documents	Identification of common visions, key focus areas and objectives within the current Community Strategic Plans of the former Council's including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great Lakes 2030 • Manning Valley Community Plan 2010 - 2030 • Growing Gloucester - 2014 - 2024 Other key strategic documents reviewed include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current MidCoast Council Operational Plan • Draft Destination Management Plan • Draft Regional Economic Development Strategy • Hunter Regional Plan • MidCoast Water Strategic documents • Existing local community plans

Method	Description
Analysis of consultation outcomes from key engagement activities post-merger	<p>Utilisation of data collected from previous engagement activities to identify key themes and common community values, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Satisfaction Survey • Wingham CBD Revitalization • Forster Main Beach masterplan • Tuncurry Pool repurposing • Coastal Zone Management Plan (CZMP) • Showground Masterplans • Boating Strategy • Destination Management Plan • Regional Economic Development Strategy; • Community briefing/ meet the Councillors; and • Local community planning in Coolongolook, Wootton, North Arm Cove, Coomba Park, Hallidays Point
Workshops with community networks and groups	<p>Opportunistic consultation with local community networks including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Services Network • Local progress Associations • Community Halls Network • Forster Combined Probus
2017 Community Satisfaction Survey	Confirmation of Values/Key Focus Areas
Analysis of MidCoast Water's Our Water Our Future consultation process	<p>MidCoast Water undertook an extensive consultation process for the development of their 30 year integrated water cycle management strategy Our Water Our Future. The feedback gained during this process was analysed to help inform the development of the draft Community Strategic Plan, particularly in the area of environmental values.</p>

Phase 2: summary

Aim: Development of draft plan

Timeframe: September - December 2017

Phase 2 encompassed the collation of data and information to formulate the draft Community Strategic Plan. This phase included internal consultation, Councillor involvement and testing of the draft vision and draft key focus areas with the community. This was achieved through a number of activities including:

Method	Description
Community update meetings	Presentations to the community outlining the purpose of the Community Strategic Plan, snapshot of draft vision and values and call to action once the public exhibition period opens.
One on one meetings with Senior Management and key staff	Internal meetings and workshops were held with Executive, Senior Managers and key staff to test the draft vision and values, seek feedback on draft objectives and strategies, identify potential indicators and create linkages with Delivery Program and Operational Plan.
Rates notice insert	Opportunity to build community awareness of upcoming engagement on draft Community Strategic Plan.
Internal council workshops	Workshops with councillors to test the draft vision and key directions and seek endorsement of the Community Engagement Strategy
Webpage	Educational tool on Council's website to provide information on what is a Community Strategic Plan, key contacts, timeline, Frequently Asked Questions and how to have a say. Online forum on webpage enables community to ask questions and put up ideas.
Follow up community satisfaction survey	Specific question included in the community satisfaction survey to test the Values/Key Focus Areas within the draft Community Strategic Plan.

Phase 3:

Aim: Public exhibition of draft Community Strategic Plan (*MidCoast 2030: Shared vision, shared responsibility*)

Timeframe: January-February 2018 (6 week engagement period)

This phase will present to our community the draft Community Strategic Plan and seek feedback on whether we have got it right and understand how the community would like this to be measured, to ensure the MidCoast region is improving. To achieve this we will conduct the following activities:

Method	Description
Online video – introduction to the CSP	Provide overview of why the Community Strategic Plan is important, introduce Values/Key Focus Areas and call to action to provide feedback.
Online survey	Targeted questions seeking in depth feedback on Vision, Values, and the content of the draft Community Strategic Plan.
Vox pop surveys	Quick surveys to seek feedback on Values/Key Focus area. Can be used at markets in shopping precincts and at events.
Static displays	Visual displays in key locations with suggestion boxes and dot boards for feedback. Potential locations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council offices • Libraries • Shopping Centres/precincts
Have your say – Council’s website	Central location for information on draft CSP and links to how to have a say. Information to be included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft CSP consultation paper • FAQs • Community Engagement Strategy • Key dates and project timeline • Key contacts

Method	Description
Online discussion board	Located on the Council draft CSP webpage, this tool enables online discussion of the Plan, as well as opportunity to ask questions
Targeted meetings with representatives of harder to reach groups	Hard to reach groups include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth • People with a disability • Families • Aboriginal people • Isolated older people
Direct contact with databases	Utilisation of existing email databases to distribute information and call to action for feedback on draft Community Strategic Plan.

Phase 3 engagement tools:

Tool	Description	Engagement level	Resources
Draft Community Strategic Plan consultation paper	Complete draft Community Strategic Plan combined with important information and survey tool. Paper to be distributed as part of all engagement activities, as well as distributed to key stakeholders seeking feedback.	Collaborate	Consultation paper Email networks and key government contacts lists
Pop Ups	Informal static displays attended by council staff. The public is encouraged to stop and chat, and submit their ideas and feedback via short surveys. Sited at local markets, events and shopping centres	Consult	Vox Pop surveys Display collateral Feedback forms
MCC Website/Have Your Say	Existing online community feedback forum	Involve	Webpage FAQs Links to external engagement tools
Internal Council feedback displays	Static displays in Council main and district offices. Similar feedback tools to be used as community static displays.	Collaborate	Display boards Display collateral Suggestion box Visual likert scale
Introductory Video	Background information to provide a context to assist participants in participating more fully in the online survey.	Inform	Digital videography
Targeted engagement with hard to reach groups	Meetings with young people and the Aboriginal community and other "hard to engage" groups to ensure their input is received	Involve	Staff time

Tool	Description	Level of engagement	Resources
Online Survey	Opportunity to provide in depth feedback on the draft CSP	Involve	Survey
Static Displays <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Libraries • Council offices 	Static visual displays set up in key locations, displaying plan. Feedback can be submitted by making a comment in the suggestion box and by placing a dot on how strongly they agree or disagree with the Vision and Values.	Consult	Display boards Display collateral Suggestion box Visual likert scale
Conversation kits	Information kits distributed to key staff, community leaders and hard to reach groups. Kits have a series of questions and an explanation on how to host a community conversation.	Collaborate	Conversation kits
Community Strategic Plan Postcard	Postcards distributed to community providing information on draft Community Strategic Plan, key dates, contact details and website. Postcard will also have space for feedback, which can then be returned to Council via post of drop in.	Consult	Postcard design Postcard
Question of the week	Series of six questions will be provided to frontline staff within Council, as well as promoted via the intranet. Over the six-week consultation period, staff will ask one question of the community and record the feedback.	Consult	Series of questions Intranet page Staff time

Communications program

This section of the strategy outlines how we will communicate these activities to our community to ensure there is an awareness of the process. It also outlines how members of the community will be kept informed about the development of the Community Strategic Plan and opportunities to be involved throughout the process.

Communication goals

The main goal of the communications program is to support the Community Strategic Plan engagement program by achieving the following overarching goals:

- To raise awareness in the community of the Community Strategic Plan and the engagement process
- To be informative and widely accessible
- To be adaptive to the needs and context of the engagement process as it evolves
- To support the building of positive relationships with members of the community

Audiences

The audiences the communications program aims to reach are aligned with the stakeholder groups identified in the engagement program.

Key messages

The key messages underlying each phase of engagement

- The Community Strategic Plan is an important document - it provides the long term vision and focus for Council and guides us in our future plans to deliver the services you need and want.
- You told us what was important to you when we went region-wide during the **What is MidCoast?** consultation. This feedback has provided the backbone to the development of the draft Community Strategic Plan. Now we want to know whether we got it right and how we can report this back to the community.
- This is the whole community's plan. While Council endorses the plan, everyone has a shared responsibility to work towards its objectives to make our vision a reality.
Shared vision – Shared responsibility

Communication tools

Tool	Description
Media releases	To be issued to all print, radio and television contacts across the MidCoast area in a timely manner to support the engagement program.
Rates notices	Rates notices are to be distributed to all MidCoast Council ratepayers during January. This will provide a direct communication with ratepayers at the beginning of the engagement process.
Newsletters	Utilisation of existing newsletters provided both in printed and electronic forms by a range of council sub-brands to deliver key messages and links for participation
Advertisements	Utilisation of existing newspaper advertising to advise the community of the exhibition period and the engagement program, along with the opportunities for the community to be involved.
Social media	Utilisation of Council's social media presence to inform the community of the engagement program, encourage participation and provide information on how people can become involved. Encourage cross-promotion on council sub-brand social media spaces.
Youtube video	Video created to promote the Community Strategic Plan and the engagement program. To be used on the website and social media.
Intranet	Provides details of engagement program on a regular basis to both involve and inform staff. This will assist staff to be advocates for the process in the community. Staff will also be asked to encourage those members of the community they are regularly in touch with to be part of the program.
Radio interviews	Provide an update to the community through our regular weekly radio spot to raise awareness and encourage participation.
Email updates to councillors	Regular updates to councillors to ensure they are kept up to date with the timing and location of engagement activities
Website	Cross promotion on a range of Council sub-brand websites back to the 'have your say', online survey and discussion board section of the main website

Evaluation

How will we know we've done a good job in engaging the community?

Engagement Tasks / Method	How we will know the process was successful	Evidence
What is MidCoast?	Input received	Draft vision and priorities documented
Online Survey	Number of participants	Number of completed surveys
Public Exhibition	All stakeholders are provided with the opportunity to contribute in accordance with the actions outlined within the strategy	Submissions received from a diverse range of stakeholders
Survey of selection of participants	Participants express that they felt listened to Participants expressed the engagement activity was well run Participants perception of the likelihood of outcomes implemented	Surveys returned