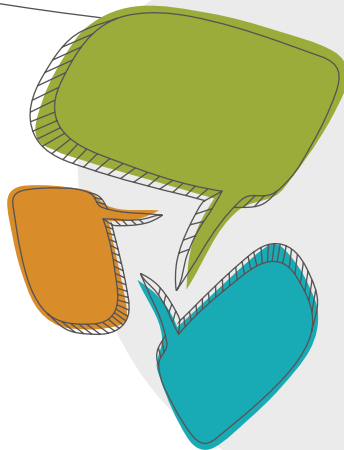




MIDCOAST
council



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

April 2019

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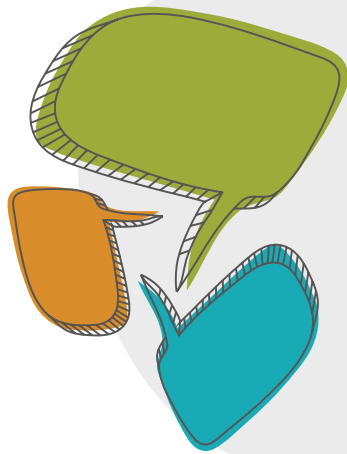
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OUR VISION

We strive to be recognised as a place of unique environmental and cultural significance. Our strong community connection, coupled with our innovative development and growing economy, builds the quality of life we value.

OUR MISSION

We deliver benefits for our community in a way that adds value and builds trust.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

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This Community Engagement Strategy has been created in keeping with the requirements of Section 402 of the Local Government Act 1993.

Version: April 2019



ABOUT THIS STRATEGY

MidCoast Council is committed to engaging with our community in a meaningful way to develop relationships with our community while delivering benefits in ways that add value and build trust.

We are committed to engaging not only to support decision making and plan for community projects, but to also build relationships and strengthen communities.

This **Community Engagement Strategy** seeks to improve our engagement processes and outcomes through encouraging a consistent approach and continued improvement through evaluation.

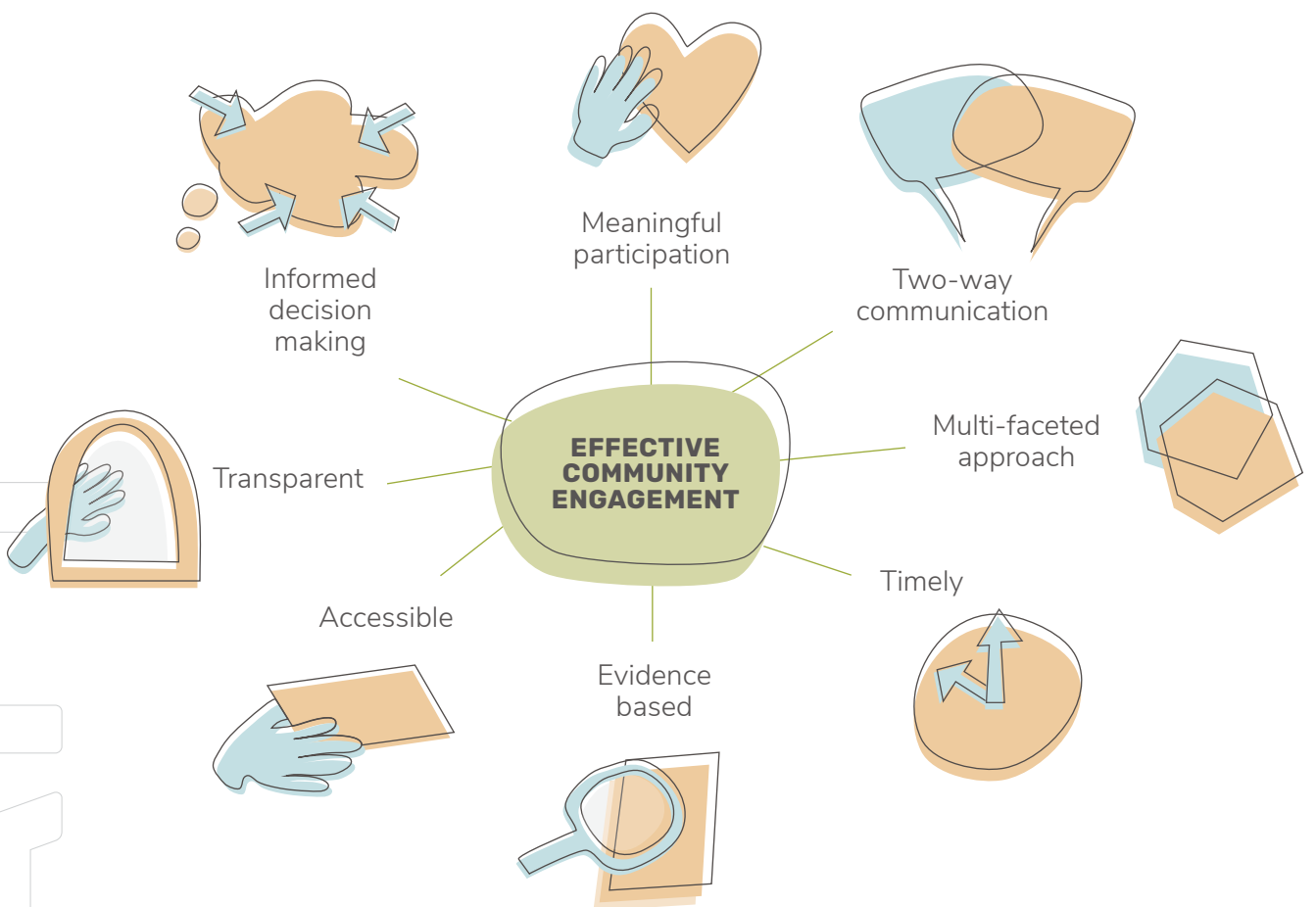
Successful and meaningful engagement with our community is the responsibility of all Council staff. For us to deliver on our commitment to build trust and add value to our community, we should be ensuring engagement is integrated, where appropriate, across our activities.

Engagement happens from small to large projects in specific communities to across the MidCoast region. This framework sets out how we engage in a range of circumstances, and provides a structure to support the delivery of meaningful engagement.

To ensure effective application of engagement principles and processes outlined in this document, an **Engagement Toolkit** provides support.

MidCoast Council is committed to the development of a culture that values and delivers community engagement in accordance with our principles and objectives.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



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DELIVERING OUR VISION AND MISSION

The delivery of effective community engagement is crucial to the realisation of our organisational vision and mission.

As a community we have a vision – set out in our community strategic plan **MidCoast 2030: Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility** – to be recognised as a place of unique environmental and cultural significance where our strong community connection, coupled with our innovative development and growing economy, builds the quality of life we value.

To support our community in achieving this vision, we need to deliver on our mission to deliver benefits for our community in a way that adds value and builds trust. Engaging with our community in a genuine and open way will help deliver benefits in a way that adds value for our community.

Building trust is the overarching principle under which all engagement activities should be delivered.

The engagement functions of Council are also aligned with our community strategic plan, **MidCoast 2030: Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility** which outlines our values as:

- our unique, diverse and culturally rich communities
- a connected community
- our environment
- our thriving and growing economy
- leadership and shared vision

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WHAT OUR COMMUNITY HAS TOLD US

In developing this strategy and our approach to engagement, we have taken on board the feedback we have received from our community on the way we engage.

Over the past three years there has been a number of large community engagement projects we have been able to draw on for advice from our community on what is important to them.

The projects included our **What is MidCoast?** identity engagement, the development of our community strategic plan **MidCoast 2030: Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility**, the office centralisation project and the results of two community satisfaction surveys.

While these projects were designed to gain feedback on a range of specific projects, valuable information was provided by the community on their expectations and frustrations with our engagement approach.

Community feedback has helped shape our principles, objectives and approach.

An analysis of feedback tells us the most important elements of engagement should be:

CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Community are asking Council to be clear at the start of the process about the purpose and the level of influence the community has in the decision making process

GENUINE FEEDBACK

Ensure the questions Council ask community draw out genuine feedback to enable a balanced view to be provided to decision makers

EARLY ENGAGEMENT

Undertake engagement early in the project, before decisions are made

TRANSPARENCY

Community want to have access to balanced, unbiased information in order to inform their input into an engagement process

TRUST

Community need to feel a sense of trust to have constructive conversations with Council. Engagement outcomes need to be followed through and if this isn't possible clear and timely explanations need to be provided about why a decision might have changed

Providing engagement participants with a timely and transparent summary of feedback collected and how this has influenced the final outcome, is also important in building trust with our community.



OUR PRINCIPLES



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TIMELY

Early in the project prior to key decisions being made

ACCESSIBLE

Open and available with strategies in place to reach across the community

BROAD

Strategies for ensuring representation from across the entire community

ACCURATE

Feedback collected, interpreted correctly and reported clearly

MEANINGFUL

It is clear how input has contributed to decision making

TRANSPARENT

Community understands the process and sees how their input is used

GENUINE

The input sought has a purpose and is used to inform decisions

RESPONSIVE

Community dialogue continues throughout the process, to outcome



OUR OBJECTIVES

MEANINGFUL

To create appropriate and meaningful opportunities for community engagement

ACCESSIBLE

To provide a broad range of accessible engagement avenues to encourage community participation in council decision making processes

CONSISTENT

To embed a consistent approach to community engagement across Council

VALUED

To foster an organisational culture in which community engagement is well understood, planned, implemented and valued

ONGOING

To develop our engagement practices so they become an ongoing two-way conversation with our community

CONVERSATIONS

To provide opportunities to develop new conversations with broader audiences

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

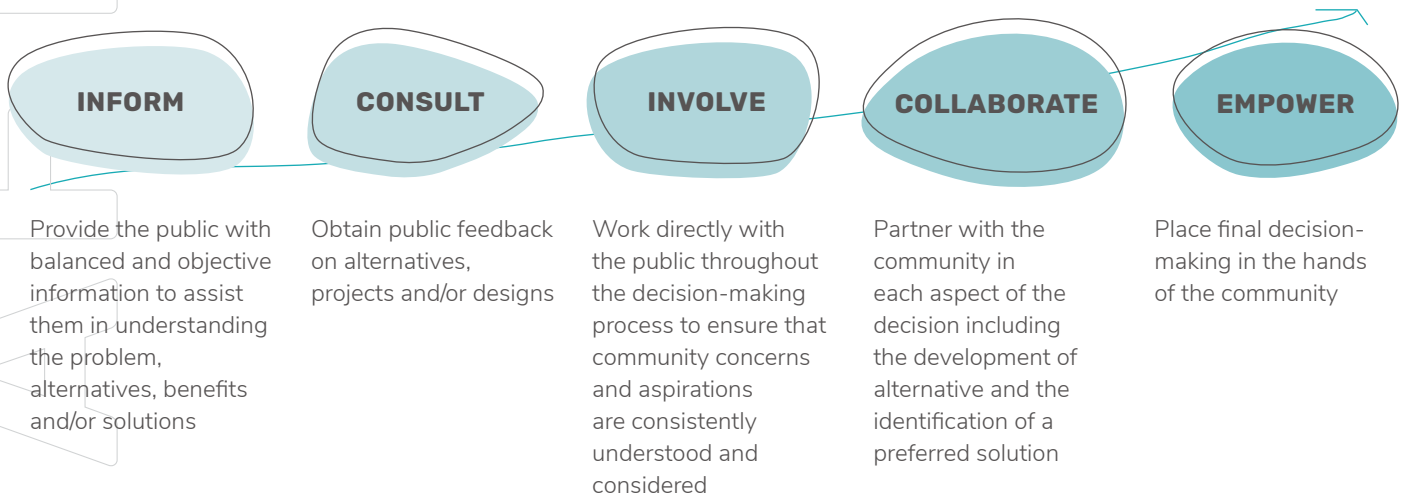
We are committed to undertaking ongoing and meaningful engagement with our community and stakeholders, and in doing so is guided by our Community Engagement Policy.

Our Community Engagement Policy is built on the core values and levels created by the **International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)** and states we will 'engage with our community in an effective, timely and transparent manner to foster collaboration, cooperation and increased understanding on issues that affect our community and to ensure that community views are considered in the decision making of Council.'

It goes on to say we recognise the level and extent of engagement must vary according to the nature, complexity and level of impact of the decision in question, and our engagement will be guided by the level of impact the decision may have on the community.

In undertaking engagement activities we also aim to build positive relationships with the community we serve and increase community understanding of our role through improved relationships and communications.

The IAP2 spectrum guides our approach. The five levels of engagement in the spectrum are:



About the IAP2 Spectrum

IAP2 is the international leader in promoting public participation in decision making. They provide a range of best practice tools and training to support the industry, including core values for public participation and the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum.

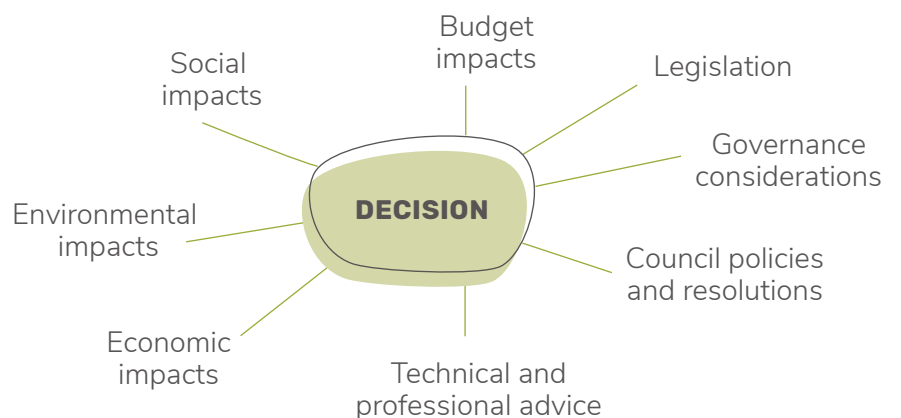
This spectrum is applied individually to each project, depending on the level of influence the community can have on the final outcome or decision. Each level along the spectrum represents an increased degree of community engagement in the decision making process. 'Inform' is the lowest level of engagement, and 'empower' is the highest. Participants can expect a level of feedback relative to level of engagement within the IAP2 spectrum. More information on the spectrum can be found at iap2.org.au



ENGAGEMENT AND DECISION MAKING

The feedback we receive from our community is an important element in the Council decision. While engagement is undertaken to gain the views of the community, it is not always the case that decisions will be made solely on community feedback.

There are a range of other elements that need to be taken into account in good decision making, and community feedback does need to be balanced alongside a number of important considerations, including:



Ultimately the decision is made by our elected representatives. When decision making is the purpose of an engagement activity it must be clearly identified that the final decision rests with MidCoast Council.

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WHY DO WE ENGAGE?

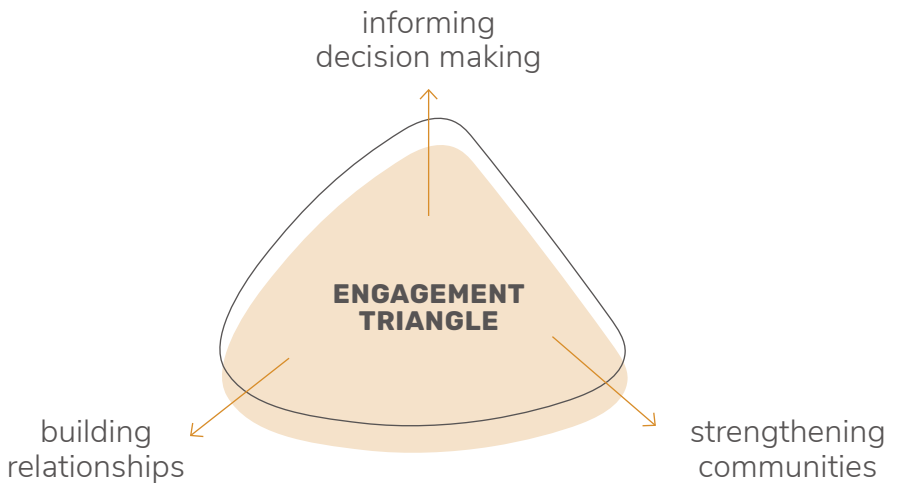
Effective community engagement is about connecting with our community to deliver real benefits, by better identifying the priorities, needs and aspirations of those who live in our region.

Engaging with our community in a meaningful and genuine way ensures Council is transparent and informed in its decision making which will demonstrate integrity and build trust with our community.

Effective engagement delivers us a range of community perspectives to help us make informed decisions, allows us to develop strong relationships and create sustainable outcomes. For the community, participation in engagement can create a sense of belonging, connection and involvement, leading to greater ownership of decisions.

The MidCoast Council engagement framework is underpinned by the engagement triangle model as a way of ensuring our engagement activities work towards our organisational mission by:

- Informing decision making to add value to our community
- Building relationships to build trust with our community
- Strengthening communities to add value and deliver benefits



The benefits of effective community engagement include:

- Increased awareness of Council's services programs and planning
- Improved decision making
- Building relationships and trust
- Develops capacity of individuals and organisations
- Change more likely to be successful if community is involved in the process
- Improved longer term outcomes for the community

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Our engagement framework

WHO DO WE ENGAGE?

The MidCoast region has a diverse community with a great mix of people that share geographic locations, characteristics or interests. Each person in our community has the potential to be a stakeholder in our engagement activities at some time.

Each engagement targets specific stakeholders – community groups or individuals – who are directly impacted by, involved with or interested in our decision making, relationship building or community strengthening processes.

When we are engaging with our community we are mindful that we are not dealing with one group of people, but rather a complex and diverse range of stakeholders. All these stakeholders are important in different ways, and at different times, to the delivery of council services.

As we plan our engagement activities we will think of our audience in terms of segments and primary and secondary priority targets to fine-tune our activities and help determine which methods will work best in any given situation.

In any community a number of different stakeholder groups exist, all of whom have different needs and expectations, while it is not always possible to meeting all of these it is important to ensure our engagement activities have a good balance.

In identifying our stakeholders we are mindful to take into account the extent to which the individual or group will either be impacted, or will perceive they are impacted by the issue to be addressed.

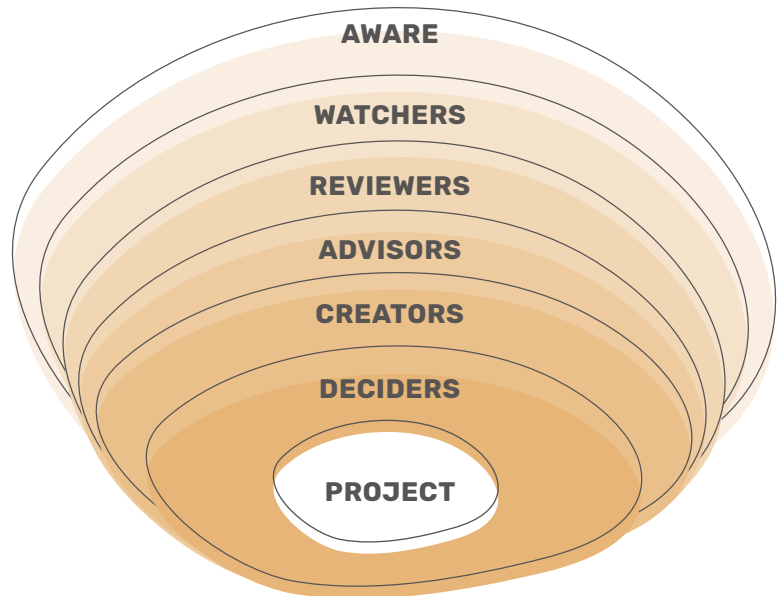


Our engagement framework

Orbits of participation model

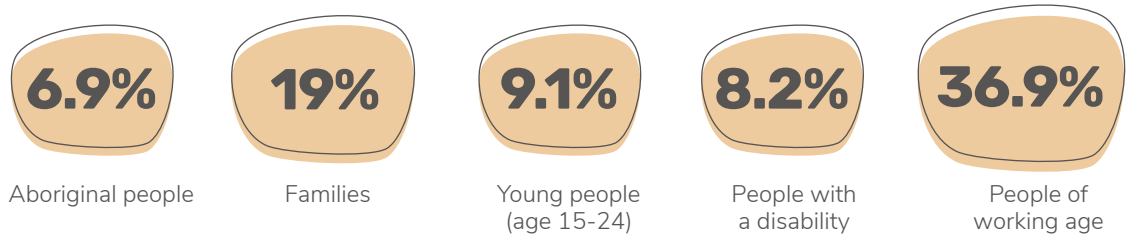
In the orbits of participation model people and groups move between the various orbits based on their level of interest, awareness, availability and changing priorities.

This recognises that some members of our community will be extremely engaged in an issue, some will comment occasionally and others may know of the process but do not take part.



Participation

MidCoast Council's community engagement must also ensure all groups, particularly of those considered hard to reach groups, are considered in our engagement activities. These groups, with percentage of population, include:



A comprehensive analysis of our stakeholders is provided in the **Engagement Toolkit** to assist in identifying stakeholders for a particular project.

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WHEN DO WE ENGAGE?

Engagement can take place at various stages of projects, particularly when a change in service, activities or infrastructure is being considered, when an issue is raised or when more information is required, when significant policy development or change is proposed, where decisions of interest to or impact on the community are to be made.

In deciding when to consult about an issue, consideration should be given to several factors, including if it is a new issue, a complex issue and the scale and impact of the issue.

We will engage with our community when we are:

- Proposing a change to a Council activity or strategic direction that may significantly impact the community in terms of the economy, lifestyle, environment
- Developing new or reviewing existing policies, strategies or plans
- Introducing a new service, discontinuing a new service, or changing or reviewing a service
- Proposing a change to the way a public space looks, is used or enjoyed
- Wanting to gain community opinion on an issue that requires a decision and there are likely to be competing interests
- Planning and developing major projects, including public buildings, infrastructure
- Considering urban development/redevelopment proposals, such as structure plans, that may significantly alter the area
- Needing more information or evidence to make an informed decision
- Helping identify community needs
- Responding to community interest

Other reasons we may engage include times:

- Where community input can improve a project or enhance decision making
- When the outcome will have a significant social, environmental and/or economic sustainability impact
- When required by law or by agreement with a government agency or statutory body

If engaging with the community on a project (or aspects of a project) will help to deliver benefits, add value, or build trust with our community – then engagement should be considered.



Mandatory engagement

The **Local Government Act**, the **NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act**, and other legislation, sets minimum requirements for consultations on a range of matters.

Each of these requires consideration on an individual basis. In some instances Council will go above and beyond the minimum requirements to gain a strong understanding of our community's desires to ensure we are achieving the best possible outcome for the community. Some of these matters include:

- Adopting Council plans, budgets and rates
- Adopting policies
- Planning decisions

A key technique used to encourage community participation in some of these matters is formal exhibitions. During an exhibition we make available relevant documents that may include a draft of a policy, plan or proposed development that we are seeking community input on. A checklist for exhibitions will be provided in the **Engagement Toolkit**.

In areas of planning, submissions do often need to meet guidelines, and community feedback is considered as one of many factors in the decision making process.

The way community members can be part of planning decisions will be outlined in the **MidCoast Community Participation Plan** statement, an appendix to this framework (to be developed).

The times we don't engage

While we look to engage our community when and where appropriate – there are times when engagement will be limited and Council will only inform the community of our decisions and actions. This will occur in cases when:

- Public health and safety is at risk
- An immediate resolution is required
- Technical or other expertise is required
- An initiative involves confidential or commercial information
- There are clear and defined legislative responsibilities that must be met
- Developing or reviewing internal policies
- Council is responding to an emergency
- There are legal constraints
- When change is needed quickly

When decisions are made without engagement, the community should be informed of why the decision was made.

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Our engagement framework

PRIORITISING OUR ENGAGEMENT PROJECTS

In determining the priority of various engagement projects, to allocate resources and to plan for delivery, a number of factors will be taken into account.

An overarching factor to be taken into consideration when plotting engagement projects on the engagement matrix will be how important the project is to fulfilling our organisational mission of delivering benefits to our community in a way that adds value and builds trust.

The **Engagement Toolkit** includes a prioritisation checklist that assists the engagement team to plot individual projects on the matrix by looking at a range of variables including the opportunity to build community relationships, the value of the project to the community, links to the community strategic plan, number of the community impacted, geographical area impacted and the range of community groups that may have an interest.

Also taken into consideration is the potential for loss of trust with our community, potential financial and reputational risk and the potential for loss of community amenity and the risk of not delivering on our mission.

Engagement matrix





HOW DO WE ENGAGE?

Each engagement process is unique and will require a variety of methods to meet the needs of both the community and the circumstances the engagement is looking to inform.

It is crucial to plan the engagement process to develop a clear guide to the engagement parameters, the level of engagement and decision making required.

The process has six steps, and our supporting Engagement Toolkit provides resources, templates and checklists to support the development and delivery of engagement plans and programs:

- Step 1 Planning
- Step 2 Delivering
- Step 3 Analysis and reporting
- Step 4 Decision making
- Step 5 Sharing
- Step 6 Evaluating the process

STEP 1

Planning

A plan will be developed for each engagement that clearly outlines the following:

- The purpose of the engagement
- Background of the engagement project
- The objectives of the engagement
- How it links to our CSP and Delivery Program & Operational Plan (DPOP)
- Roles and responsibilities
- The negotiables and non-negotiables of the project
- The stakeholders to be engaged
- The level of engagement
- The engagement tools to be used
- The communication channels to support the engagement
- Risk management identification
- Budget
- Evaluation, feedback and reporting

The detail provided in an engagement plan would be relative to the 'level' of the engagement.

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Our engagement framework

STEP 2

Delivering

We deliver our engagement process by talking to the identified stakeholders about the engagement, where they can find out more information, how they can participate, timeframes and how feedback will be acted upon. In each engagement project, consideration is given to a range of tools currently in use by Council.

Different tools are used for different purposes, depending on the subject of the engagement, the community in which we are engaging, the resources available and the breadth of the engagement required. The higher the project is on the engagement spectrum, the more information needs to be provided to the community to enable the gathering of informed and considered feedback, and tools are selected to encourage a deeper conversation. This is to ensure we gain the appropriate level of information from the community to inform the decision making process.

While people with a disability are considered a hard to reach group, all engagement activities should be inclusive to ensure that people of all abilities can participate.

STEP 3

Analysis and reporting

All the feedback gained through the engagement activities are reviewed and analysed, and an engagement report is written summarising the feedback and presenting key themes and findings.

The level of detail provided in the report is dependent on the level of engagement determined in the prioritisation stage. This is presented to our elected Council to inform the decision making process.

STEP 4

Decision making

Feedback from the community gained during the engagement process goes into the decision making process. Other things to be considered along with the feedback are:

- Budget impacts
- Legislation
- Council policies and resolutions
- Technical and professional advice
- Economic, environmental social and governance impacts



Our engagement framework

**STEP
5**

Sharing

Information gained through the engagement, and how it has impacted on decision making, will be shared with both those stakeholders who took part in the engagement process and the wider community.

This will be done in a timely and accessible way so participants understand how their involvement influenced the process and the eventual outcome or decision. In the case of lengthy processes, we should report back to the community periodically so they remain engaged.

**STEP
6**

Evaluation

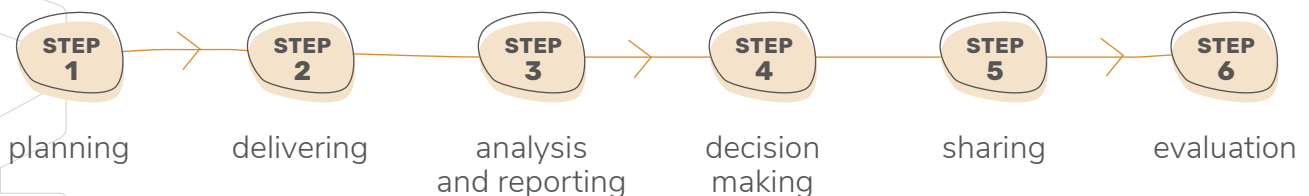
Evaluating engagement is a continuous process, so plans and activities can be adjusted should an aspect not be working well. These lessons learnt will be shared across Council and inform improvements to the process. Evaluation considerations may include:

- Number of people involved in the process
- Quality and usefulness of the information obtained in the process
- Influence of the engagement on decision making process
- Level to which the engagement objectives were achieved

Evaluation of community engagement activities should take part before, during and after the delivery of activities to ensure they are meeting the needs of the community. The scope of the evaluation activities will vary depending on the scale of the community engagement activity and the purpose of the evaluation.

The Customer Satisfaction Survey is a bi-annual opportunity to benchmark and measure the community's overall satisfaction with Council's engagement with the community.

Engagement process



ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Engaging with our community is a core process considered by Council in the delivery of any service, development of any project or building of relationships as we strive to deliver our mission of delivering benefits for our community in a way that adds value and builds trust.

It is a responsibility of the whole organisation to value and identify engagement with our community.

Councillors

Councillors are welcome to attend community engagement opportunities undertaken with the community. At these engagements the Councillors' role is to listen, discuss and record community feedback for their own purposes to help in their decision making.

Community engagement provides valuable opportunities for councillors to hear and gain a deeper understand the voice of the community and ensure this voice is properly represented when council meet and make resolutions which impact the future of our community.

General Manager

The General Manager advises Council on appropriate forms of engagement in different situations and works with Directors and Councillors to determine when engagement is required to be undertaken.

Directors/Managers/Project Owners

Directors and managers have a role in actively considering whether engagement may be necessary for or beneficial to projects being undertaken in their area of responsibility – and that it is carried out in partnership with the engagement team and in line with the MidCoast Council Community Engagement Policy and this framework.

Consultants employed to deliver engagement activities are required to do so in accordance with the MidCoast Council Community Engagement Policy and this strategy and framework to ensure a consistent approach across all Council engagement activities.



Our engagement framework

Engagement team

Council's engagement team is responsible for coordinating and supporting engagement activities on behalf of MidCoast Council.

This support will range from minimal for level one engagement activities, as per the engagement matrix to leading level four engagement projects.

The team will provide planning, support and advice functions to teams within Council, depending on their capability levels and the level of the project.

The engagement team also lead the ongoing engagement programs implemented within the community such as community conversation workshops, reference panels, pop-up programs and other activities to support relationship building and community capacity building.

This team also has an important role to play in driving an engagement culture across Council and in the implementation of education programs to support understanding and application of engagement across the organisation.

The engagement team will also continually look for new opportunities to drive improvements in the way we engage with our communities.

They also keep a constant watch on emerging ideas in the engagement space to assess them and see if they can work for us. They continue to seek out partnerships both within our community to drive positive engagement outcomes.

Council staff

Council staff are responsible for identifying engagement opportunities in their areas of work to inform decisions in a way that delivers benefits for our community, to build relationships and trust and to add value by strengthening the community.

They are then required to work with the Engagement team to develop the appropriate engagement approach.

Any Council staff member taking part in an engagement activity in any capacity should be mindful they are responsible for providing clear and unbiased information to the community, and for applying the feedback received, as appropriate, to their area of work.

The community

Our community has a very important role in supporting the principles and are encouraged to actively participate in engagement activities and contribute to decision making processes as presented.

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EVALUATION, REVIEW AND MONITORING

This strategy will be reviewed in line with Integrated Planning and Reporting timeframes to ensure it continues to reflect the principles and objectives of MidCoast Council and deliver on the engagement needs of our community.

This strategy is supported by an action plan (Appendix A), which sets out a range of activities and associated timeframes to deliver on the objectives identified.

The action plan is designed to be a living document that is reviewed and adjusted annually to take into account new ideas and opportunities for effectively engaging with our community.

Items listed in this plan will be monitored and reported to the General Manager on a quarterly basis.

Many of the actions will also form part of our integrated planning and reporting processes, which are reported on a six monthly basis to both Councillors and our community.

Our engagement approach will also be monitored in line with our bi-annual community satisfaction survey and index score results of the core performance measures of decision making in the community's interest, informing our community and community consultation.

This survey provides a snapshot of the community's overall satisfaction with Council's engagement with the community. It rates how important the community views engagement and how they view our performance of engagement. Our aim will be to narrow the gap between the two scores.

Other performance measures will include the number of engagement activities undertaken on an annual basis, the number of the community engaged in those activities and the influence of the engagement on the eventual decision.

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**COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT
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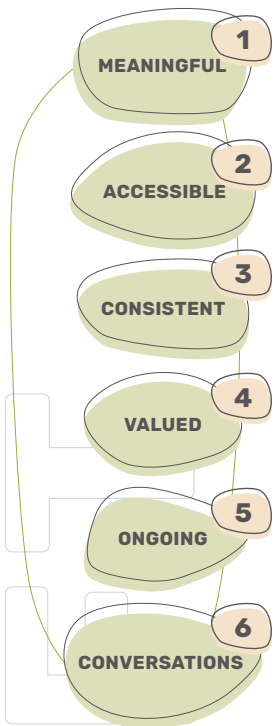
April 2019



ACTION PLAN

The following action plan has been developed to deliver on the objectives of the **MidCoast Community Engagement Strategy**. This action plan plots a range of actions against timeframes that align with the Deliver Program and Operational Plan cycle to ensure continuous development of our engagement activities and resources.

Action	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	Objectives
Develop an Engagement Toolkit to support the consistent delivery of engagement activities across Council	●			1 3 4
Develop an internal education program to raise awareness of the MidCoast Engagement Framework within Council	●			3 4
Develop a MidCoast Community Participation Plan in line with NSW Government requirements	●	●	●	1 3
Develop an engagement database to map and track engagement activities happening across Council		●		1 3 6
Develop database of community members who wish to be updated on Council's engagement activities	●			1 2 6
Develop resources to support community members to make effective submissions to Council on matters of interest		●	●	2 5
Improve marketing and promotion to raise community awareness of engagement activities	●			2 6
Continue to develop and deliver the Community Conversations program across the region on a biannual basis	●	●	●	1 2 5 6
Develop proactive program of formal and informal engagement opportunities to gather general feedback on Council services and build relationships		●	●	1 2 5 6
Investigate online engagement platform options, including apps and interactive tools		●		2 5 6
Develop partnership opportunities with community leaders, groups and other agencies to help increase participation			●	2 5 6
Establish formal feedback process for all feedback received from the community	●			5
Implement Local Community Plan program	●	●	●	1 5 6
Develop regular standard reporting on the effectiveness of engagement activities	●	●	●	3 4
Embed engagement into planning phase of projects to ensure all projects with a high community impact receive appropriate engagement	●			1 2 6
Implement engagement as a success factor for annual reporting for all relevant areas of the business			●	3 4
Introduce knowledge sharing opportunities within Council to evaluate engagement programs and share lessons		●		1 3 4
Continue to research our diverse community and what this means for engagement			●	1 2 6



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