

1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set the framework for all community engagement activities conducted by Toowoomba Regional Council.

Toowoomba Regional Council recognises that community engagement and participation processes are a fundamental part of local democracy, a good business practice and vital for good government.

For this reason, Council is committed to engaging with the community in meaningful public participation as part of its core business across the Region.

This policy demonstrates Council's:

- Ongoing commitment to connect and stay connected with all residents and communities in the Region;
- Aim to maximise opportunities for information sharing and genuine community input;
- Aim to develop and maintain robust, productive community partnerships, with a clear focus on long-term benefit or need; and
- Aim to provide a streamlined and co-ordinated corporate approach to Council's community engagement that maximises efficiency, avoids duplication and minimises consultation fatigue (where communities feel over-consulted on one or multiple issues).

This policy will:

- Assist with monitoring the effectiveness of Council's strategic direction and program delivery;
- Help inform Council's policy development and strategic approach by embracing local knowledge;
- Assist Councillors and residents to engage directly and assist Councillors to be accountable to the community for Council's performance; and
- Promote Council as accountable, effective, efficient and sustainable, in accordance with local government principles of democratic representation, social inclusion, meaningful community engagement, and transparent and effective processes and decision making in the public interest.

This policy is not intended to restrict Councillors in engaging with the community in informal or other settings but provides a structured framework for undertaking formal community engagement.

The policy also complies with Chapter 1 section 4 of the *Local Government Act 2009*.

1.1 Objectives

- That the Toowoomba Region community is well informed about issues, strategies or plans that may directly or indirectly affect them;
- That the people of the Toowoomba Region have the opportunity for genuine involvement in Council's decision making and policy development;
- To seek the views of a wide cross-section of the community, selecting engagement methods that are flexible, inclusive, recognise community diversity and hard-to-reach groups, acknowledge and provide for accessibility needs during consultation and are appropriate to those being engaged;
- That feedback and data received during consultation will be analysed to provide Council with an accurate assessment of community sentiment to aid in decision making;
- That Council will "close the loop" on consultation to advise residents how their feedback has been incorporated into project or service delivery outcomes, and, if not, outline the reasons why;
- That members of the community are given the opportunity to hear each other's opinions and to recommend appropriate solutions to community issues; and
- That Council is meeting its legislative requirements regarding community consultation in all areas of service delivery.

2 Scope and applications

This policy applies to all facets of Council's operations including corporate, strategic planning, financial planning, infrastructure planning and delivery and Council's day-to-day business activities.

It defines the principles underpinning Council's engagement activities, the role of Councillors and staff in engaging with the community and the methods which Council will use to engage with the community.

Council's engagement activities fall into the following non-exclusive categories:

- ongoing community/Councillor engagement;
- engagement linked to policy, planning and strategy development;
- engagement linked to service delivery programs;
- engagement concerning a specific issue;
- engagement around strategic and major projects and capital works; and
- statutory compliance.

3 Principles

This policy aligns with Council's 2024 - 2029 Corporate Plan focus area of performance and is guided by the following key priority:

- 4.6 Continuous improvement of business-processes and systems, including community consultation

In addition to upholding the Corporate Plan principle outlined above, Council is committed to upholding the obligations within the *Human Rights Act 2019* by giving proper consideration to the provisions of the Act when making decisions relevant to this policy.

3.1 Community Engagement Principles

Council takes a principle-based approach to its community engagement activities. This provides consistency and helps align Council's performance reporting requirements under the *Local Government Act 2009*. Taking a co-ordinated and consolidated approach to engagement across Council will ensure efficiency and minimise potential for consultation fatigue in communities.

Stakeholder engagement planning and implementation will optimise internal and external linkages, resources and systems to minimise duplication and costs and reinforce public perceptions of effectiveness and good value for money.

All engagement will be structured around the following principles:

1. Open and inclusive: Council will be open and honest about the scope and purpose of engagement and how the input will be used to inform Council decisions. Council will encourage involvement from a wide cross-section of the community using engagement processes that are accessible and inclusive and give due regard to the location of the engagement to ensure physical, social and cultural access.
2. Trust, respect and diversity: Council will treat all participants in the engagement process with respect and dignity, recognise the diversity in the Region, approach engagement from an impartial perspective and be accountable, accessible and ethical in all dealings with the community.
3. Timeliness: Council will seek to engage early and regularly involve the community in decision making. Council will outline the parameters and objectives of the engagement process to participants from the outset, including legislative requirements, Council's sphere of influence, policy frameworks and budget constraints.
4. Influence: Council will provide people with a genuine opportunity to have input and influence the outcomes of any engagement process.
5. Awareness: Engagement will be influenced by awareness of other projects and current consultations being delivered regionally throughout Toowoomba Regional Council.

6. Future planning: Council will engage with the community not only to learn about and respond to present needs, but also to gain a better understanding of the community's perspective on emerging issues that may affect the community's preferred future.
7. Flexibility: Council will use engagement approaches and technology appropriate to the circumstances.

3.2 Legislative context

The policy is in accordance with Queensland's *Local Government Act 2009* Section 4 which outlines the local government principles which underpin the Act as:

- transparent and effective processes, and decision-making in the public interest;
- sustainable development and management of assets and infrastructure, and delivery of effective services;
- democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement;
- good governance of, and by, local government; and
- ethical and legal behaviour of Councillors and local government employees.

4 Content

4.1 Community engagement framework and techniques

Council acknowledges that different techniques of engagement are appropriate for use in different circumstances and draws upon the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum framework, which is recognised as describing "best practice" community engagement.

IAP2 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM

Developed by the international association for public participation



	Increasing level of public impact				
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
OUR TECHNIQUES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doorknocks • Fact sheets/project updates mail outs and emails • Media releases • Print, radio and TV advertising • Websites • Social media • Information repository 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comment • Online consultation • Focus/reference groups • Surveys • Public meetings/consultation workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Deliberative polling • Online consultation • In-person surveys • Resident feedback registers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen advisory committees • Consensus building • Focus groups • Public hearings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ballots • Delegated decisions

This framework is not designed to limit community engagement techniques. Council will use techniques, including its corporate online consultation platform, that are tailored for the Toowoomba Region, as well as social media and traditional media promotion, to ensure the most effective and efficient engagement.

The spectrum helps with the selection of a level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The level of participation is normally selected when developing the engagement program methodology.

Within the legislative context of local government, final decisions are made by Councillors as the elected representatives of community. It will be rare for decision-making power to be devolved fully – for example, the Empower section of the IAP2 Spectrum - as Council will maintain final responsibility for decisions. Aspects of decision making may be devolved within clear parameters of a specific project or program subject to Council direction. The choice of a specific level of participation will depend on the goals, time frames and resources in the decision to be made.

In addition to the traditional community engagement techniques outlined in the table above, Council will use its corporate online consultation platform or other applications and other relevant and appropriate social media and digital solutions to engage with the community on specific projects and policies, and community issues and interests to enhance Council's reputation and commitment to engagement.

4.2 Supporting resources

This Community Engagement policy is supported by the Community Engagement Guidelines (DM#7467050) which outline Council's engagement objectives and the practical application of community engagement techniques and the Community Engagement Toolkit (DM#7466994) which outlines techniques for engagement and also provides self-help information for use across Council. Engagement channels for internal and external use also include SMS, disaster dashboard– including flood monitoring cameras – and live streaming of Council meetings.

5 Responsibilities/accountabilities

Councillors and Council Officers are to ensure that all engagement activities are consistent with this policy.

The Customer, Communication and Engagement Branch is responsible for administering this policy in leading community engagement on Council projects and initiatives.

6 Relevant laws

Local Government Act 2009

Local Government Regulation 2012

Planning Act 2016

7 Related policies/documents

Members of the public can access Council policies on Council's website. If a policy listed below does not appear on the website please contact 131 872 or email info@tr.qld.gov.au to request a copy. Staff may access policies via the [Policy Register and Review Schedule](#).

Council policies

2.13 Event Support Grant Program Guidelines

2.35 Media Policy

2.56 Entertainment and Hospitality Policy

2.64 Social Media Policy

4.03 Customer Experience Policy

Other documents

[Community Engagement Guidelines \(DM#7467050\)](#)

[Corporate Plan 2024 - 2029](#)

8 Related forms

Community Engagement Toolkit (DM#7466994)

9 Definitions

Term	Definition
Community Engagement	Is the broad term that includes a range of activities to inform, consult, involve, collaborate or empower the community to provide a mechanism for people to influence what happens in Council. It is a two-way process that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> involves citizens, communities and other stakeholders in the areas of policy development, planning and service delivery; and incorporates their aspirations, concerns, needs and values into Council’s decision-making processes.
Engagement Plan	Documents how the policy principles will be achieved, the activities that are planned and the measures used to determine success.
IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum	Assists with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in engagement activities. The spectrum shows that differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, timeframes, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made.

10 Policy details

Policy category:	Council Policy	Policy version number¹:	4.00
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Approval authority:	Council		

¹ Printed copies are uncontrolled. It is the user’s responsibility to ensure that any copies of policy documents are the current issue. Any delegations should be verified via the relevant Delegation Register as it takes precedence if there is a conflict. The Chief Executive Officer will, if necessary, be the sole arbiter in resolving any issues of conflict

Policy Owner:	Customer, Communication and Engagement
Contact officer:	Manager Customer, Communication and Engagement
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11 Revision history

Policy version	Approval date	DM Reference
1.00	15 February 2011	3790494v2
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