



GOULBURN MULWAREE COUNCIL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Council and community - connected and collaborating

Version 1.1 – June 2023

Table of Contents

GOULBURN MULWAREE COUNCIL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY.....	1
Council and community - connected and collaborating.....	1
Version 1.1 – June 2023.....	1
Introduction	3
What do we mean by ‘community engagement and ‘consultation’?	4
Our engagement aims.....	4
When will community engagement occur?	5
Principles for Effective Community Consultation and Engagement	5
Inclusiveness and Diversity	5
Openness, Respect and Accountability	5
Leadership	5
Purpose.....	6
Information Sharing	6
Feedback and Evaluation	6
Resourcing and Timing	6
Councillors’ role in the community engagement process.....	6
Model of Community Engagement.....	7
Examples of each level of Community Engagement	9
Inform:	9
Consult:	9
Involve:.....	9
Collaborate:	9
Empower:	9
How we will consult & encouraging participation	9
Consultation methods	10
Engaging difficult to reach target groups	11
Implementation: Community Engagement Toolkit	11

Introduction

Goulburn Mulwaree Council's Community Strategic Plan (CSP) calls for meaningful, informed, and genuine community participation in decision-making at all levels of government. Goulburn Mulwaree Council aims to do this through effective engagement, involving the local community in the preparation of strategies, plans and policies and the implementation of projects and Council activities. In short, Council wants to engage the community to participate in decisions which will affect their lives.

Council's move to embed community engagement as part of our regular business practices will be cultivated through the application of this strategy at all levels of the organisation. Community engagement will become an important component in our decision-making processes, using the outcomes of consultation to inform what we do, and establishing collaboration between government and community.

While the Community Engagement Strategy demonstrates Council's commitment to actively engage the local community, it also sets out Council's approach by identifying a set of principles that shape how we effectively engage.

Community consultation is a vital component in the preparation of a variety of Council's strategic and corporate documents and plans, and the delivery of Council's programs and services.

The role of Council staff in the process is to perform consultation in order to inform Councillors of the community views on issues relating to strategies, plans, policies and projects. Councillors are committed to supporting the process and genuinely listening to the community and stakeholder views, and at times, will assist staff in the consultation process where appropriate.

What do we mean by 'community engagement and 'consultation'?

"Community engagement is achieved when the local community is and feels part of the overall governance" (VLGA 2006: 5). The International Association of Public Participation defines community engagement as: *"any process that involves the public in problem-solving or decision-making and uses the public input to make more informed decisions"*.

For the purpose of this strategy, '**community engagement**' is used as an inclusive term to describe the broad and ongoing range of interactions between Council and the community. These interactions are two-way in nature and are different to corporate communications which we regard as one-way provision of information on the services and activities of Council.

Engagement with the local community is a regular and important part of Council's service as a Local Government organisation and involves the interaction of Council and stakeholders in a variety of settings and circumstances. It is expressed in the CSP and in the adopted corporate ideals that engagement should be considered at all levels of the organisation; from customer service right through to executive management and councillors. Our ideal pertaining to engagement is, **engagement and communication**: *we value the contributions all members of the community and our staff make to Council's policies, plans and programs, actively seeking contributions to our decision-making.*

Our engagement aims

Goulburn Mulwaree Council aims to build a cohesive and sustainable community through meaningful, informed, and genuine participation that is active in decision making at all levels of government. We as Council must make certain that contemporary models of community engagement will be utilised to ensure local decision-making processes are in keeping with community expectations.

The overall aims of this strategy are to:

- Establish a framework to ensure meaningful, informed, and genuine community participation is active in Council's decision-making.
- Establish an environment in which Council and the local community can exchange views, ideas and information.
- Provide a consistent approach across Council and ensure that all consultation processes and community engagement activities are focused and effective.
- Strengthen partnerships between Council, the local community, local organisations, government stakeholders and service providers.
- Be proactive and open to new and innovative ways to consult and maintain ongoing engagement with the whole of the community.

When will community engagement occur?

Council is seeking to make community engagement a part of our core business, creating a situation in which community opinion is embedded in our decision-making processes. Council is committed to engaging with the community in the following:

- Strategic and corporate planning
- Policy development and implementation
- Service planning
- Site or stakeholder specific plans
- Significant projects
- Notification of legislative requirements

Principles for Effective Community Consultation and Engagement

Goulburn Mulwaree Council's Community Engagement Strategy is based around a set of principles that must be embedded in the consultation processes that Council implements to effectively engage with the local community.

To be effective, consultation programs must be based on openness, trust, integrity, and mutual respect for the point of view of all participants.

Inclusiveness and Diversity

Council recognises and values the diversity of its local community and the different strengths each group and individual are able to bring to the implementation of Council projects and activities, as well as the preparation of Council strategies and policies.

Council will work to promote equality of opportunity and empower people to have their voices heard through effective, appropriate consultation practices. Council aims to proactively reach out to better engage with the whole of the community and seek to widen participation by taking steps to be accessible and inclusive.

Openness, Respect and Accountability

Goulburn Mulwaree Council aims to ensure consultation processes and engagement with the local community is approached in an open and respectful manner with clear lines of accountability.

To maintain the integrity of all Council's consultation processes, it is vital that the outcome of any consultation is not predetermined.

Leadership

Leadership in relation to community engagement is the ability to support and facilitate discussion to represent the wider community interests and ensure that recommendations do not only represent specific sectional interests. Leadership also involves taking the initiative for the activity and seeking support and partnerships.

Purpose

It is critical that a clear purpose is established for all community consultation activities. It provides a sound foundation for the planning, review, and evaluation of all projects, and ensures that the types of consultation methods employed are appropriate to the desired project outcomes.

Information Sharing

Providing clear, 'jargon-free' information in a timely manner is the basis of quality engagement and effective consultation. Well communicated information can motivate, increase interest, and create a willingness to become engaged in a specific project.

Feedback and Evaluation

Providing participants with feedback is important in respecting the partnership and maintaining ongoing engagement with the local community.

Candid evaluation at the conclusion of each consultation program will ensure that Council continues to improve how consultation is carried out in the future. Evaluation should include questions regarding the values of the process; whether the stated objectives and purpose was clear and achieved, and whether the methods used were suitable.

Resourcing and Timing

Building capacity may take time, particularly in engaging those who are "hard to reach" and disengaged. Council and the local community may require time to develop relationships, and the consultation methods and approach must consider this.

Consultation processes should have a fixed timeline whenever possible, and it is important that the community is informed of this from the outset.

Councillors' role in the community engagement process

The Councillors' main role is to be an advocate of the engagement process, as well as undertake consultation when engaging with the community. Councillors can prove to be a key tool in encouraging participation in engagement initiatives.

Councillors must be informed of all consultation activities; most importantly the time frame, consultation methods and how participation and feedback will be used to inform the project, strategy, or plan.

At times Councillors will be invited to take part in relevant engagement processes, this may include events and meetings. It is also important for Councillor's to encourage community participation in surveys or other consultation methods.

Model of Community Engagement

The level of community engagement required differs depending on the task being undertaken. The Public Participation Spectrum developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) identifies the possible methods of consultation relative to the level of impact that the community would have on decision-making.

The five types of engagement this strategy focuses on are informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering. The tables below highlight the type of engagement, the engagement purpose or promise and some examples of consultation methods that could be used to achieve the goals and promises.

Level 1	Inform	Providing information to the local community
Level 2	Consult	Seeking feedback from the community
Level 3	Involve	Working directly with the local community
Level 4	Collaborate	Creating partnerships with the local community to produce recommendations and solutions
Level 5	Empower	Putting the final decision making in the hands of the local community

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Goal	Goal	Goal	Goal	Goal
To provide the public with balanced, objective information to assist understanding of a strategy, plan, or project	Two-way communications designed to obtain feedback on ideas, alternatives, and proposals to inform the decision-making process.	To work directly with the community throughout the process to identify issues and ensure public concerns and ideas are understood and considered.	Work together with the community in each aspect of the project, plan or strategy including consideration of alternatives and decision making on final solutions.	Placing the final decision directly in the hands of the community.
Promise to the Public	Promise to the Public	Promise to the Public	Promise to the Public	Promise to the Public
We will share information and keep you informed at all stages.	We will keep you informed, and listen to concerns and feedback	We will work with you to ensure that your ideas, concerns, and aspirations are reflected in the alternatives developed	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions wherever possible.	We will implement what you decide if it has appropriate community support.
Example Techniques to Consider	Example Techniques to Consider	Example Techniques to Consider	Example Techniques to Consider	Example Techniques to Consider
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goulburn Post weekly advertisement • Mayoral Column • Fact sheets • GMC Website • Social Media • Weekly Radio Advertisements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite Public comment • Surveys • Public meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Focus groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working parties • Consensus building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working parties given the chance to make final decision
Role of Community	Role of Community	Role of Community	Role of Community	Role of Community
Listen	Contribute	Actively Participate	Partner	Decision Maker

Examples of each level of Community Engagement

Inform:

- Providing information on road works and possible road closures.
- Informing the public of Aquatic Centre closure due to maintenance.

Consult:

- Organising a public meeting to discuss an upcoming project.
- Distributing a survey to gather community feedback regarding a project

Involve:

- Holding a workshop to brainstorm ideas for a project.

Collaborate:

- Setting up a working party to be involved in the development of a project; for example, the rail Trail Steering Committee.

Empower:

- Putting the decision in the hands of a working party; for example, choosing the final location within a park for a dog off-leash area.

How we will consult & encouraging participation

Council will utilise a range of consultation methods to engage with the community. This also includes ensuring that effective internal consultation occurs. The engagement toolkit will become the basis for planning for effective consultation.

Informed communication with Councillors is also important to achieve more effective consultation. Local Councillors are a vital link between the local community and Council. Council officers must ensure that Councillors are informed about the policies, plans, strategies, and projects that Council are consulting on and the plan for engagement with the community and stakeholders.

Goulburn Mulwaree Council is committed to encouraging participation of all members of the local community. Community groups, local organisations, advisory groups and societies often represent many local residents, landowners, business owners and workers. Building partnerships with these types of groups allows for greater inclusion and can reach people that may not have otherwise been engaged.

Council acknowledges that there is a need to specifically reach out to people who are less likely to participate in conventional methods of consultation or have been traditionally 'hard to reach'. Using legitimate local groups and community organisations to reach individuals, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds is an effective approach.

Consultation methods

There are several consultation methods appropriate for each level of engagement. Below are a number of examples; these can be used individually or collectively depending on the level of engagement required.

Online	Face-to-Face	Other
Social Media	Public Meetings	Public comment (letters)
Surveys	Workshops	Fact sheets
Website	Committees	Surveys
Email submissions	Community forums	Newspaper advertisements
Targeted email correspondence	Workshops	Media Releases
Mayoral Column	Focus Groups	Brochures/Leaflets
	Onsite meetings	Letter Box Drop
	Engagement booths at events	Advertisements and Public Notices
	Information session	Village Newsletters
	Interviews	
	Site/Tour meeting	

Engaging difficult to reach target groups

Target Group

Consider

Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear & simple language - Use of web-based tools - Informal nature of engagement - Avoid potentially intimidating techniques and venues
Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider incentives - Informal nature of engagement - Utilise youth engagement services (Be Seen, Be Heard; Youth Council and events) - Internet based tools e.g. Social Media - Go directly through schools
Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider family and work responsibilities when planning time of activities - Utilise community groups and sporting groups to get in touch
Older people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use factsheets, newspaper and mayor's column - Advertise through 2GN and community radio - Utilise existing relationships, also use accessible venues for events
People with a disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider information formats; use of graphics, large print and easy to read font - Use existing relationships – Challenge Foundation, Crescent School, Valmar Support Care etc.
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilise existing relationships; Pejar Lands Council for example - Use onsite meetings if practical and relevant
Culturally Diverse Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use graphics and clear, simple language in case of language barriers - Consider dietary requirements for meetings/events - Contact community groups; especially Goulburn Multicultural Centre
People without Internet access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Factsheets and Newsletters; letterbox drops - Press releases, Community Newsletters, Newspaper advertising and Radio advertising