



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Policy 31/2024-2028

DATE

- Ordinary Meeting of Council 6 February 2024 and 26 November 2024

POLICY NO:	31/2024-2028
LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Local Government Act 1993 No 30 ch 13 pt 2 section 402A</i> • <i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 No 203 pt 2 div 2.6 section 2.23</i>
RESPONSIBILITY:	CUSTOMER COMMUNITY SERVICES
OBJECTIVE:	To establish the requirements and responsibilities of The Hills Shire Council in the practice of Community Engagement.
REVIEW	<p>Within the first 12 months of each term of Council or as required.</p> <p>Within 3 months of the Local Government Elections as required by the Office of Local Government via the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework.</p>

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1. Introduction: Community Engagement, Policy Purpose, and Underpinned Documents

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) guides the practice of community engagement and is recognised internationally as the peak body for ideal community engagement and practice standards.

The IAP2 defines Community Engagement as “*an intentional process with the purpose of working in inclusive and respectful ways to shape decisions, actions, impacts or change*”.

The purpose of the Community Engagement Policy is to outline and establish the requirements and responsibilities of The Hills Shire Council in the practice of community engagement.

Community engagement is conducted in local government for a variety of reasons. It is sometimes required by legislation, but mostly it is conducted when Council wishes to seek the views of the community on a particular issue. This can include the introduction of, or changes to facilities, services, or policies. The input received from the community should support Council in its decision making.

Effective community engagement will strengthen Council’s relationships and enhance reputation.

This policy underpins the Community Engagement Strategy, Community Engagement Toolkit, and Community Participation Plan (CPP).

The Community Engagement Strategy is designed to provide information on Council’s community engagement process.

The Community Engagement Toolkit is a document to be utilised by staff and is designed to provide guidance in planning their community engagement process, helping develop meaningful and timely engagement.

Council’s CPP outlines when and how the community can expect to participate in planning matters that affect them. It applies to plan making and development assessment matters within the Shire, including applications and proposal that need to be assessed and determined by Council as well as planning matters within the Shire that need to be assessed and determined by local or regional planning panels.

Community engagement is a fluid process and will continue to develop over time. Council will strive to consistently progress its community engagement practices, with the aim of effectively using the community’s input in its decision-making process where appropriate and required.

2. Policy Statement

The Hills Shire Council is committed to planning and delivering consistent and effective community engagement with our community. Council's community engagement practice is shaped by the IAP2's Core Values laid out in section 4 of this policy.

Five (5) engagement principles are adhered to when planning and delivering community engagement:

1. **Informed**
The Community engagement process has a clearly defined objective and scope. Activities are informed, intentional and led by the Community Engagement Strategy.
2. **Fair**
Community engagement is proactive with participants having access to objective, relevant and timely information to generate effective outcomes and results.
3. **Inclusive**
Community engagement is open and inclusive. Engagement activities and processes strive to provide a safe environment where all feel comfortable, welcome, and confident to participate.
4. **Accessible**
Participants are provided with accessible information to support their participation. I.e. plain English text, translated materials, graphics and visual stimuli.
5. **Adaptable**
Efforts will be made to ensure that Council's engagement is effective and inclusive and is undertaken with a goal of strengthening its relationship with the community.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

Council is required to adhere to the following legislative requirements:

Local Government Act 1993 No 30 ch 13 pt 2 section 402A

- Requires that “A Council must establish and implement a strategy (called its Community Engagement Strategy) for engagement with the local community when developing its plans, policies and programs and for the purpose of determining its activities (other than routine administrative matters).”

Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 No 203 pt 2 div 2.6 section 2.23

- States the requirements to be met when preparing a community participation plan.

Council is required by the Office of Local Government (OLG) to create a strategy for how it will engage the community in creating and reviewing its plans, policies and programs, including its Community Strategic Plan (CSP).

This policy relates to everyone as we all have a role to play in democratic decision making. Responsible team members will develop a planned approach to their engagement and report against it. A community engagement section will be included in Council Reports, where appropriate, to provide information on any engagement activities and outcomes.

The Community Engagement Team is available for advice and assistance by project managers and teams. The Community Engagement Team must be made aware of complex projects and matters of high impact and interest.

This policy will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it aligns with current relevant legislation and community engagement practices.

Situations where community engagement may not apply

Community engagement may not be possible in the following circumstances:

- Council is not the project lead - it is a project led by another organisation such as a NSW Government Department
- An immediate resolution and decision are required
- Specialist or technical advice is needed
- The project/matter involves confidential or commercial information
- The issue or project is bound by legislation
- Development and review of internal policies and procedures is required
- There is a risk to public safety.

4. IAP2 Community Engagement Spectrum & Core Values

Council's community engagement aligns with the IAP2's Core Values, as well as the use of its Community Engagement Spectrum.

Community engagement is a fluid process with several factors that influence the depth of engagement and the methods carried out for it.

IAP2 Core Values

Being the international leader in public participation, the IAP2 has developed seven core values for use in the development and implementation of community engagement, defining the expectations and aspirations.

The IAP2 Core Values are as follows:

1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involve of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

IAP2 Community Engagement Spectrum

The community engagement spectrum is designed to help select the level of participation that details the public's involvement and role in a community engagement program.

Inform

To provide the community and stakeholders with easy-to-understand information to assist them in understanding the project or matter, including alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

Consult

To obtain the opinions and feedback of the community and key stakeholders on the project or matter, including alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

Involve

To work directly with the community and key stakeholders throughout the process of the project or matter, ensuring that their concerns and aspirations are consistently heard and considered.

Collaborate

To partner with the community and stakeholders in each stage of the project or matter, including the development of alternatives and identification of preferred outcomes. Ultimately, Council makes the final decision, but the opinions and suggestions provided significantly shape it.

Empower

To provide the community and key stakeholders the ability to make the final decision. It is important to note that this will rarely ever occur as The Hills Shire Council is a government organisation that exists to serve and execute decisions on behalf of the public's best interests.

5. Policy Implementation and Application

The Community Engagement Policy applies to all Council staff and is to be used to define their roles and responsibilities in effective and meaningful community engagement.

The policy will be actioned through Council's Community Engagement Strategy, along with the assistance and guidance of the Community Engagement Toolkit.

6. Related Documents

- ❖ Community Engagement Strategy
- ❖ Community Engagement Toolkit
- ❖ Community Participation Plan