

Policy Number: SVC -EXE-PO-017-01

Purpose of Policy

To outline Snowy Valleys Council's commitment to timely, consistent and genuine community engagement that will inform responsible decision making for the benefit of the community.

This policy also outlines the approach to community engagement conducted by Snowy Valleys Council as part of Council's decision making processes.

This policy forms part of a consistent framework for community engagement for Snowy Valleys Council. This framework is based on the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum and aims to enhance both the capacity of Council to engage with the community and of the community to engage Council.

Policy Statement

Snowy Valleys Council recognises that community engagement and participation processes are a vital part of local democracy. It aims to strengthen the trust between Council and the community and build confidence in Council's ability to plan and make decisions that will respond to the present and future needs of the community.

Community engagement is about involving the community in decisions which affect them by capturing and considering the diverse interests, opinions and aspirations of our community.

It is critical in the successful development and implementation of acceptable policies and decisions and for improving services by being responsive to the needs of the community.

It involves seeking broad informed agreement and the best possible solution for Council and the community, however it does not necessarily mean achieving consensus.

This policy emphasises that the community should be kept informed throughout the consultation process and receive feedback that demonstrates how their input has influenced the decision. This feedback is referred to as "closing the loop".

Community engagement does not replace the decision making responsibility of Council. Rather the implementation of Council's community engagement framework is designed to ensure that Council has access to a range of information about community needs, opinions and options prior to making decisions.

Effective community engagement builds a strong foundation for understanding and working with our community, and promotes a shared responsibility for decisions and trust in the decision-making process.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following working documents:

Community Engagement Strategy
Community Engagement Action Plan

Objectives

1. To confirm Council's commitment to conducting quality consultation and its willingness to actively engage the community in its decision making processes.
2. To clarify the role that Council will take to engage our community in decision making.

3. To develop a framework that ensures a consistent approach is undertaken by Council staff in relation to projects, plans and activities requiring community consultation.
4. To embed community engagement into our organisational culture and build staff capacity that ensures community engagement processes are seen in a context of adding value, being best practice and good governance.
5. To provide opportunities for our community to participate in the decision-making process ensuring outcomes that benefit our community.
6. To develop sustained relationships, collaboration, partnerships and new ways to involve and empower the community.
7. To increase the community's understanding of Councils operations through improved relationships and communication.
8. To ensure that our community is well informed about issues, strategies, projects or plans that may directly or indirectly affect them and have the opportunity for genuine involvement in decision-making and policy development.
9. To seek the views of a wide cross-section of the community, selecting engagement methods that are flexible, inclusive and appropriate to those being engaged.
10. To meet Council's legislative requirements regarding community consultation in all areas of its service delivery (excluding Development Applications which are covered under separate legislation).

Scope

This policy applies to Councillors, Council staff, contract workers, consultants and all people who engage with the community on behalf of Snowy Valleys Council.

As part of the Community Engagement Framework, this policy underpins Council's commitment to engaging with its community on a range of matters by defining the role of role of councillors and staff in engaging with the community and the methods which Council will use to engage with the community.

Community engagement guidelines for private development are outlined in the relevant planning documents and Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979. The DA process is not within the scope of this policy.

Community engagement is multifaceted and requires a standard of consultation that appropriately responds to the nature, complexity and impact of the issue/s involved. The range of methods and techniques used may vary depending on the resources that are available.

Council's approach to community engagement is based on the spectrum of engagement activities as advocated by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

The five levels of public participation are shown on the table below:



	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Goal	One way communication to provide balanced and objective information to assist in understanding something that is going to happen or is about to happen	Two way communications designed to obtain feedback on ideas, alternatives and proposals to inform our decision making	Participatory process where we work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that concerns, aspirations are understood and considered prior to decision making	Working together in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of a preferred solution for joint decision making	To place final decision making and/or devolved budgets in the hands of the public
The SVC promise	We will openly share information about a decision, direction, event, activity or program.	We will explore options, gain feedback and an understanding of your concerns and preferences	We will work with you in the process so that your ideas, concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed	We will collaborate with you so that your advice, innovation and recommendations are included in the final decision we make together	We will implement what you decide
Community /stakeholder role	To listen	To contribute	To participate	To partner	To decide
Engagement technique examples	Advertisement Community noticeboards Community events Website Fact sheets Brochures Information sessions Displays Letters Newsletters	Briefings Comment/ feedback forms Drop in sessions/popups Focus groups Forum Interviews Online discussions Public exhibition call for submissions	Community reference panel Focus group Personal briefings Stakeholder meetings Tours and field trips Workshops	Chambers of Commerce Community progress associations Reference group S355 committees Strategic Advisory committees Steering/project	Citizen jury Elected councillors Placemaking Community progress associations Youth Council S355 committees

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
	Newspaper Media releases Community radio Report Signage/posters Social media Stakeholder briefing	Public meeting Surveys Workshop		committees Working party	

It should be noted that the 'empower' level on the spectrum has limited application in Local Government as the elected Council is the decision-making body. However there may be occasions where non-financial empowerment may occur.

Community Engagement Principles

Effective community engagement is built on trust, respect and goodwill. Council's commitment to community engagement is governed by the following set of principles that underpin our engagement processes:

1. Integrity and transparency

Engagement involves trust and transparency. The levels of community influence will be clearly communicated. Consultation and higher forms of engagement must be genuinely purposeful and not tokenistic. Council will carefully consider and accurately portray the community's role in the decision making process and provide feedback on how the community has influenced its decisions.

2. Respect

Council will value contributions made by way of experience, skills, knowledge and values and respect any time given to the engagement process. Timely feedback on the results and the influence of specific consultation and active engagement to the community is a critical part of the process. This information needs to be given directly to those who contributed as well as made widely available so those who may have an interest can access it.

3. Inclusivity

Council will use a range of opportunities and techniques to encourage participation and awareness of all people who may be affected by or interested in the outcome. It will ensure a diverse and representative range of stakeholders are engaged (e.g. geographical location, age, gender, disability, culture, language, literacy and interest in the project).

4. Informative

Effective engagement requires all parties to understand the relevant legal, statutory, strategic and local context. Council will encourage the disclosure of all information relevant to the public's understanding and evaluation of a decision.

5. Shared learnings

Council will establish ongoing internal partnerships and communications to share skills, knowledge and community engagement evaluation findings.

6. Well planned

Community engagement requires informed judgement and planning in its approach and implementation in order to be effective, practical and suitably resourced.

7. Meaningful

The community will have multiple opportunities to participate in community engagement processes that are clearly articulated in relation to project constraints, the scope of community influence, and Council's decision making process. Community members will understand their role within this process.

8. Feedback

Closing the loop on engagement is important in maintaining an open and transparent process. Council needs to ensure that the community understands how their input was considered and the reasons for the final decision. Council should also inform the community of the expected timeframe for providing feedback.

9. Part of our culture

Council will, through its commitment to internal capacity building and organisational culture, foster a proactive, positive attitude towards community engagement. Community engagement will be built into our decision making processes and project plans, and adequately resourced in budgets and timeframes.

10. Efficiency and value for money

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

11. Innovation and continuous improvement

Council will explore new and innovative ways to listen to and engage with members of our community. Council will continue to improve its community engagement practices and capacity through regular review and improvement mechanisms.

12. Privacy

Council will take all reasonable and appropriate steps to protect the privacy of individuals as required by the relevant legislation. Project teams must ensure they use correct collection notices and privacy statements on all online and hardcopy consultation materials that capture any identifying personal information. The way information is collected, stored and used must also comply with the legislation.

Key Considerations

The Community Engagement Framework consists of this Community Engagement Policy and the following supporting documents:

Community Engagement Strategy
Community Engagement Action Plan
Community Engagement Toolkit (under development)

The level of community engagement undertaken relates directly to the level of community involvement required, and should always be appropriate to the nature, complexity and impact of the issue, plan, project or strategy.

All community engagement activity is to be undertaken in accordance with the principles of engagement.

Statutory requirements are a minimum and this policy encourages Council to engage the community in addition to statutory requirements providing that any legal timeframes are met.

Staff will advise elected local representatives of community engagement activities in advance.

The recommended period for community feedback is 28 days. However this may vary depending on statutory requirements.

The timing of community engagement activities will take into account key dates, notably the Christmas and New Year period, other public holidays, school holidays and any special events that may impact on the community's availability.

For high impact projects or issues that affect the whole of the Snowy Valleys Council (eg Community Strategic Plan, Destination Management Plan, etc) engagement activities are recommended at sites across the Local Government Area (LGA).

In circumstances where the level of involvement requires members of the public to make submissions to Council, content received may be regarded as public and available for general access.

Prior to any decision Council will ensure that it is well informed of the advantages and disadvantages of alternative decisions on matters before them, including accurate reporting of community comments and recommendations that reflect all sides of the debate.

Council will provide feedback to all participants involved in a project by closing the loop.

Who is responsible for implementing this Policy?

Directors, Managers, Project Managers and all Council appointed consultants

Document owner

General Manager

Related Council Documents

Community Engagement Strategy
Community Engagement Action Plan
Community Engagement Toolkit (in development)

Legislation and references

Local Government Act 1993 to ensure that community input is a part of the decision making process.

International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)

Definitions

For the purpose of the implementation of this policy and the Community Engagement Framework, the following definitions will apply:

Community Engagement

“Any process that involves the community in problem solving or decision making and uses community input to make better decisions” International Association of Public Participation (IAP2).

Consultation

A process of community engagement that seeks to inform the community or draw out the views and preferences of the community. These views are used to inform decision makers and should provide a guide to decision making.

Community

The term community is used broadly and extends beyond the view of residents in a neighbourhood. A community can be defined as a group of people united by at least one common characteristic such as geography, shared interests, values, experiences, or traditions. For example, with the community engagement for the upgrade of a traffic roundabout, the community could include the users (motorists and pedestrians), those in the immediate work zone (businesses, residents and schools) and those interested in the diversion of an associated creek/storm-water channel (fauna protection and property owners).

For each community engagement project there will be those who are more impacted or interested than most and these are identified as stakeholders.

Stakeholder

A stakeholder is anyone who has the ability to influence a project's outcomes (either positively or negatively). Stakeholders include identified subsets within the community. These subsets may comprise individuals and/or organisations from across the community that are directly involved in, or significantly affected by the project. Stakeholders may have an interest if the project has specific change implications or has lifestyle, social, environmental or economic impacts. For most projects there are likely to be a number of internal stakeholders across Council. Other levels of government and their departments may also be considered as stakeholders.

Communication

Generally refers to the exchange of information from Council to the community, and can also include the exchange of information or views from the community to Council.

IAP2

International Association of Public Participation (www.iap2.org.au)

Project

A planned undertaking (including strategy and policy development) that builds, enhances and maintains Council assets or enhances Council services in order to achieve a desired outcome, within a defined scope and funding requirements.

History table:

Version Control No	Development /Amendment Date	Approval Date	Resolution Number	Activity log
0				To be presented to Policy Review Committee
0		22/6/2017	M80/17	Presented to Council for Public Exhibition
1		24/08/2017	M135/17	Adopted Ordinary Council Meeting