



Griffith City Council

Community Engagement &
Communication Strategy
2020 - 2024





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introduction

The term 'Community Engagement' covers information sharing, consultation and active participation between government and communities.

This Strategy will guide Council's communications and engagement approach across the organisation and has been developed in association with Council's Community Participation Plan which details how Council informs and notifies the community around environmental planning functions.

These documents are requirements for Council under both the Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979 and Local Government Act 1993.

As well as meeting legislative requirements, the purpose of the Communications and Community Engagement Strategy is to provide staff and Councillors with a strategy to guide Griffith City Council's approach to informing and engaging with our community.

We believe it's important that the community is given the opportunity to help shape the decisions of Council.

objective

In accordance with s402 (4) Local Government Act 1993, 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). Each Council must prepare and implement a Community Engagement Strategy based on social justice principles for engagement with the local community when developing its Community Strategic Plan. The overarching plan for Council is the Community Strategic Plan which sits above all other Council plans and policies in the planning hierarchy.

informing this strategy

Griffith City Council currently uses a variety of engagement methods and activities which aim to provide the community with a broad range of opportunities to engage with Council about what matters to them.

During December 2019 and January 2020, a survey was conducted asking residents how Council could better engage with the community. In addition to the two Council Cafes held (at the Banna Avenue Kiosk and in Griffith Central), an online and hard copy survey was carried out to gather a view of what the community prefers in relation to engagement and consultation.

The survey was advertised online, in newspapers, on radio, at Council offices and the survey was taken to two Council Cafes to discuss with local people.

Council received 115 survey responses, offering insights into what works now and how we can improve. Responses were received from a cross-section of age groups. The results found only 31 per cent of those surveyed had attended an information event in 2019.

Importantly, we received some clear messages from our community.

Our community wants to:

- Have face-to-face communication in informal and relaxed settings with evening or lunch the preferred times for interactions
- Be heard on projects and issues that are important to them, and be kept up to date with progress
- Be informed about Council events and news in a

variety of ways such as social media, email newsletter, radio, website, print, information sessions and television

- Have a mix of Councillors, senior staff and other staff present at information sessions

They also said that Council needs to:

- be more responsive and explain 'why' we are doing what we do
- clarify in simple terms why the community needs to provide input by explaining the impacts
- explain how the feedback was considered in the decision-making process and if feedback did not influence the decision, why not?
- recognise and acknowledge feedback or input received.

The outcomes of Council's survey determined that we are on the right path with our engagement and communications principles, however there is room for improvement.



BUSHFIRE BENEFIT

BUSHFIRE BENEFIT

Council Cafe



CITY SURVEY 2020

what is community engagement?

Community engagement is the process of involving residents and stakeholders in decisions made by Council which affect them.

It involves the process of communicating with the community on a variety of levels to promote good decision making and shared outcomes for the Griffith Community.

how does Council decide when to engage?

Engagement can be used to share information, educate, gather views and opinions, develop options, or make decisions.

Not every program or project requires engagement; however, we have identified some of the main reasons that would trigger an engagement activity. These include:

- Council resolution - Council decides to change its services, regulations or initiate a major development, and would like to know the community's view on a matter.
- Statutory requirement - this includes planning, budget consultations or similar, which have clearly defined engagement requirements or methodologies. For example Annual Reports and Plans, Community Strategic Plan (CSP), End of Term reports and the like.
- Public exhibition – proposals relating to policy changes, development applications and strategic plans that impact on our region. These are placed on public exhibition so residents can provide comment and input.
- Projects and Major Projects – time-limited projects and initiatives of which Council seeks community views and input into plans, strategies, policy, projects and programs.
- Ongoing engagement – foster long-term relationships and partnerships and consistent connection through our programs and services.
- Community satisfaction – gain an indication of Council's performance in delivery of key services, e.g.

customer satisfaction surveys. This ongoing feedback ensures our services meet community needs.

- Community interest – in response to an issue or proposal where the community or stakeholders have indicated they have significant concerns, interests, or that issues have not been adequately considered.

There are many drivers for engagement, and a number of factors will influence the form of engagement undertaken.

Council has the responsibility of making decisions for and on behalf of the community, therefore, we are required to ensure that appropriate community input and/or statutory requirements are considered in that process. Collaboration and participation is a key priority for Council.

who are our stakeholders?

Our stakeholders include but are not limited to those groups broadly described in the list below:

- Children, young people and adults who live in Griffith including resident ratepayers and non-rate paying residents
- Community based and volunteer agencies
- Special interest groups/communities
- Local businesses
- Individuals who work in the Griffith Local Government Area (LGA)
- Individuals who visit Griffith
- Government agencies which have an interest in Griffith
- Non-government agencies
- Councillors and staff of Griffith City Council

When undertaking community engagement, Council will make every effort to reach a broad cross-section of the community including those who can be difficult to reach.

This will mean Council will consider alternative or additional means of seeking the views of all the community.



why engage?

Community engagement is the basis to good governance. By using best practice community engagement approaches, we seek to involve the community in decision making. It provides a valuable link between Councillors, Council staff and the community by:

- Enabling Council to gain a better understanding of local needs;
- Enabling the community to be informed;
- Reducing the level of misconception or misinformation;
- Ensuring greater community understanding of decision making and outcomes;
- Encouraging the community to participate in engagement activities and put forward ideas;
- Helping to identify issues that the community feel are important and asking for solutions by those who are most affected;
- Acknowledging the basic need for people to be involved in decisions that impact them;
- Enabling Council to make informed and sustainable decisions.

It is important to understand that not every decision before Council requires engagement. Councillors are elected by the community to lead the strategic direction of Council on behalf of residents. Therefore, community engagement does not replace the statutory decision-making functions of Council. Rather, it informs and guides it.



who does what?

councillors

As elected members, Councillors play a crucial role in community engagement.

Councillors listen to the views of the community and consider those views when making decisions.

Councillors then work together to make decisions about what Council will do to meet community needs and how money should be spent in the best interests of the whole community.

There are number of opportunities for our Councillors to engage with residents. These include:

- Council meetings
- Council Café (held on the third Thursday of each month)
- Involvement on Committees or Working Groups
- Public forums and workshops
- Face-to-face meetings with residents
- Councillor Column in The Area News
- Attending Council and non-Council events
- Conferences and networking

senior staff

The role of Council's Senior staff is to carry out the operational functions of Council, in order to deliver the aims and actions set out in the CSP. The General Manager and the Senior Management Team take the feedback provided by Councillors and put into action the decisions they make.

council staff

The role of Council staff members in community engagement is to organise and facilitate the discussion, record, provide feedback, evaluate the engagement and consider the community's views when making unbiased recommendations to Council.

committee and working group members

The role of Committee and Working Group Members in Community Engagement is to act as champions for the community they are representing on the committee or working group, and then to act as champions for Council to encourage residents to provide feedback and attend Information Sessions.

Council will ensure all Committee and Working Groups Members are included in any outgoing media such as Media Releases and eNewsletters, such as Council Opinion Group (COG), so they have access to up to date information and can help spread Council news.





how will council carry out community engagement

There are a number of ways in which Council may choose to carry out its community engagement process. The preferred method or methods of engagement will be determined by the plan or project and its possible impact on the community.

While some plans or projects require simple notification, others may require greater community consultation.

Council is continually working to improve its community engagement and communication strategies and activities.

Some of the following methods may be used for current community engagement:

- Informative letters
- Door knocking, signage and notification
- Community pop-up information booths – ie Council Café
- Drop-in sessions
- Online and traditional surveys
- Have Your Say online community consultation via the Council website
- Community workshops/forums/focus groups
- Social media platforms
- Radio, TV and print media
- Stakeholder meetings and roundtables
- Council Committee and Working Group meetings

IAP2 spectrum and levels of engagement

Our approach to community engagement is built upon a spectrum developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

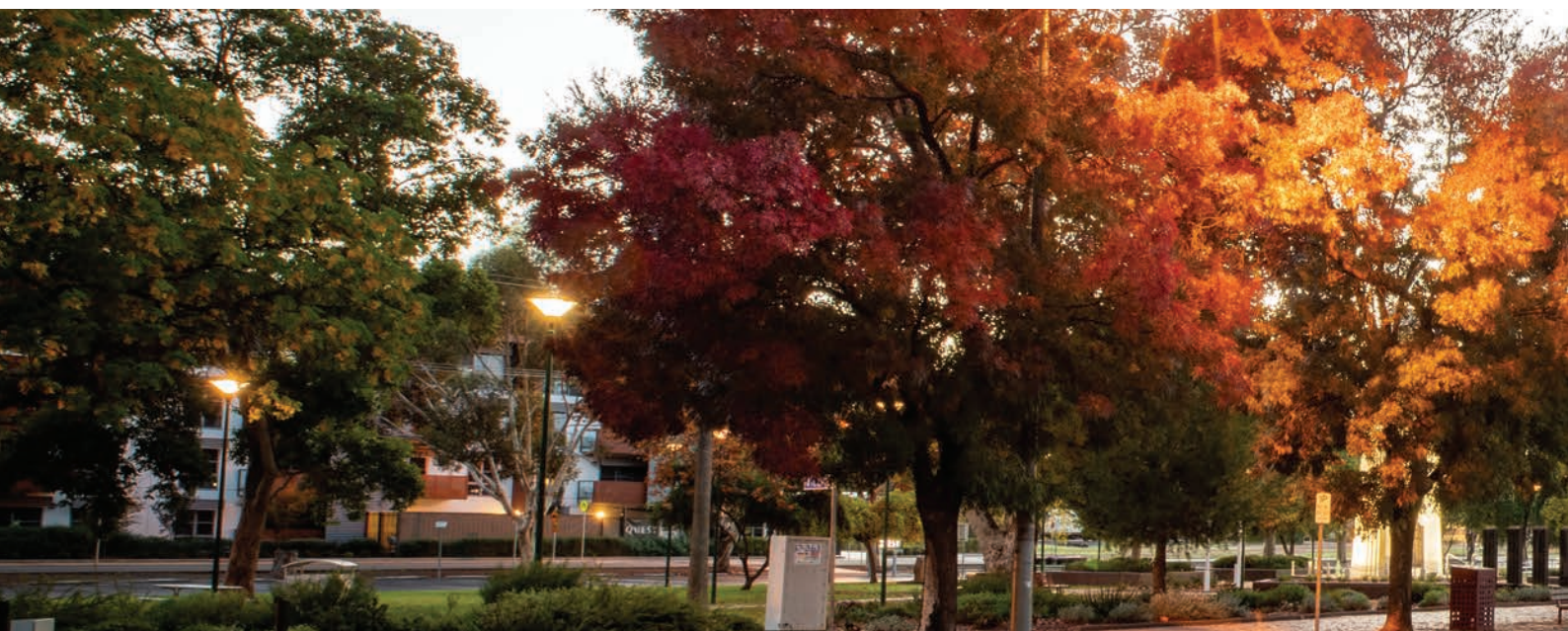
IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum identifies that there are different levels of engagement from Informing through to Empowering. No single approach to engagement will serve every project. The spectrum requires that the level of engagement must be determined by considering the issue, problem or opportunity requiring engagement, the objectives to be achieved by engaging and the extent that the community can assist us to make decisions.

Strategy	Application Examples	Goal	Commitment	Method
Inform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FAQs • Customer Service enquiries • Rate/Water Notices • The Area News 	<p>To provide stakeholders with appropriate information on Council, its decision making, services, events, projects and any associated issues.</p> <p>This is the primary form of community For a number of people, depending on the nature of the issue, this may be the only form of community engagement they want</p>	We will keep you informed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Media releases - Community newsletters - Online: website, email, social media, forums, e-newsletters - Distribution of in-house documents and publications - Notification letters - Public consultation - Letter box drops - Internal Communication/consultation - Official opening/launch - Displays

Consult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Applications • Council Policies • Planning Proposals 	<p>Actively seeks stakeholder's views and input into policy, plans and decisions.</p> <p>Council retains overall decision making responsibility.</p>	<p>We will listen to you, consider your ideas and concerns and keep you informed.</p> <p>Planning decisions should be made in an open and transparent way and the community will be provided with reasons for those decisions, including how community views have been taken into account.</p> <p>Workshops or Committees established to provide input into Strategic Documentation, will be compiled into a report that will accompany our Documents while on Public Exhibition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Media releases - Community newsletters - Paid advertising - Online: website, email, social media, forums, e-newsletters - Distribution of in-house documents and publications - Notification letters - Community meetings - Surveys and questionnaires - Public consultation - Letter box drops - Internal communication/consultation - Official opening/launch - Pre-application consultation re major Development Applications - Planning Forums - Displays
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Involve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery Program • Operational Plan • Planning Strategies • Major Projects 	<p>To work directly with stakeholders to ensure that ideas, concerns and aspirations are understood and considered. Involving a two way exchange of information that encourages discussion and provides an opportunity to influence the outcome. While 'involve' assumes a greater level of participation by stakeholders as they work through issues and alternatives to assist in the decision-making process, Council retains overall decision making responsibility.</p>	<p>We will work with you to ensure that your ideas, concerns and aspirations are considered and provide feedback. Planning decisions should be made in an open and transparent way and the community will be provided with reasons for those decisions, including how community views have been taken into account. Working Groups or Committees established to provide input into Strategic Documentation, will be compiled into a report that will accompany our Documents while on Public Exhibition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Media releases - Community newsletters - Paid advertising - Online: website, email, social media, forums, e-newsletters - Distribution of in-house documents and publications - Notification letters - Community meetings - Surveys and questionnaires - Committees - Public consultation - Letter box drops - Internal communication - Official opening/ launch - Displays
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Collaborate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Strategic Plan (CSP) • Community Committee • Major Projects 	<p>To work in partnership with stakeholders, incorporating their input and advice, jointly formulating solutions and/or options, and sharing agenda setting and deliberation of issues.</p> <p>Occurs when ownership of an issue is shared between Council and community stakeholders.</p> <p>May be some level of delegated decision making to community stakeholders, but Council retains overall decision making responsibility.</p>	<p>We will work together in seeking the best outcomes for Griffith City Council Working Groups or Committees established to provide input into Strategic Documentation, will be compiled into a report that will accompany our Documents while on Public Exhibition.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Surveys and questionnaires - Online: website, email, social media, forums, e-newsletters - Focus groups - Forums and Workshops - Media releases - Committees - Public exhibition - Letter box drops - Internal communication/consultation - Official opening/launch - Displays
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Empower	Very specific community projects where Council has the ability to delegate decision making authority.	To place final decision making in the hands of stakeholders. Empowered communities share responsibility for making decisions and accountability for the outcomes of those decisions. Legislative and policy frameworks may give power to communities to make decisions. The community may have the power to make a limited range of decisions (e.g. on a specified issue or for a limited time) or it may have extensive decision- making powers.	We will ensure the collective position of the community is an integral part of the decision making process.	By ensuring that the core principles of integrity, inclusion, deliberation and influence are evident in all community engagement.
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community participation plan

related to environmental planning functions

The Griffith Community Participation Plan (CPP) sets out when and how the community will be engaged regarding Council's planning related functions. The preparation and implementation of a CPP is a requirement of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979 (EP&A Act).

The CPP has been designed to make public participation in planning clearer for the community, by identifying, in one document, how and when the community can participate in the planning system.

The level and extent of community participation will vary depending on the location, scope of the proposal under consideration and potential impact of the decision.

The Griffith CPP sets out Council's planning functions and includes exhibition timeframes associated with all Development Assessments and Strategic Planning matters.

This document can be viewed online at www.griffith.nsw.gov.au

community engagement planning



communication tools

Method	Description
Media Releases	To be issued to all print, radio and television contacts across the Griffith area in a timely manner to support engagement.
Rates Notices	Rates notices are distributed to all Griffith City Council ratepayers quarterly. This may provide a direct communication with ratepayers at the beginning of the engagement process.
Newsletters	Use of existing electronic newsletters issued by a range of Council facilities or departments (ie Library, Theatre, Aquatic Centre, Visitors Centre, Economic Development etc) to deliver key messages and links for participation.
Special Publications	Brochures, fliers, notices which can be used in a variety of ways to promote the events or activities of Council.
Advertisements	Use of existing newspaper advertising to advise the community of the exhibition period and opportunities for the community to be involved.
Social Media	Use of Council's social media platforms to inform the community of the engagement, encourage participation and provide information on how people can become involved. Encourage cross-promotion on other Council social media spaces.
Video	A short video created to promote the Community Strategic Plan and other engagement activities. To be used on the website and social media.
Television	Television advertising to be used on an ad hoc basis for special projects, important notices and events to reach a wider cross section of the community.
Extranet	Provides details of engagement opportunities on a regular basis to both involve and inform staff. This will assist staff to be advocates for the process in the community. Staff will also be asked to encourage those members of the community they are regularly in touch with to be part of the process.
Radio	Provide an update to the community through our regular weekly radio spot to raise awareness and encourage participation.
Email updates to Councillors	Regular updates to Councillors to ensure they are kept up to date with the timing and location of engagement activities.
Website	Cross promotion on a range of Council websites back to the 'have your say', online survey and discussion board section of Council's main website.

evaluation

Griffith City Council will evaluate the effectiveness of Community Engagement activities by:

- Reviewing results of any surveys, feedback forms and public sessions
- The overall level of outreach achieved by community engagement across the community
- Measure and review Council performance against service standards related to engagement approaches
- Releasing the results where appropriate through reports, infographics and social media posts or via Council website
- Use the feedback and results to improve future Community Engagement activities and plans
- Council also commits to establishing a continuous improvement process to ensure the Community Engagement Framework is continually evolving.



Council proposes that this Engagement and Communication Strategy be reviewed annually and formally assessed three years after its adoption.

This Community Engagement and Communications Strategy has been prepared by Griffith City Council to meet the requirements of the Local Government Act 1993 and concurrently serve as a Community Participation Plan for the purposes of s2.23(4) of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979.



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