

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

Community Engagement Strategy 2020-2024



South Gippsland
Shire Council



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Related Strategies

Community engagement has the potential to relate to many of Council's strategies and key documents.

This is dependent on the projects and services identified for these areas.

The most common community engagement activities are undertaken in relation to community assets and facilities.

As such the following strategies have been identified to have strong links to the Community Engagement Strategy 2020-2024:

- Asset Management Strategy 2017
- Community Strengthening Strategy 2018 - 2022
- Council Plan 2020-2024
- Long Term Financial Strategies
- Paths and Trails Strategy 2018
- Road Management Plan
- Social Community Infrastructure Blueprint
- South Gippsland Health and Wellbeing Plan

South Gippsland Shire Council is dedicated to its community and recognises the importance of their input in the decision making process.

Community engagement is widely used to capture community comment on key issues. This provides a better understanding of all key components of an issue before a decision is made.





Introduction

South Gippsland Shire Council is committed to understanding the needs of its community and actively seeks the input of community members when significant decisions are required to be made.

Council recognises the value in diverse views and actively seeks differing opinions in order to tailor services for the community it serves.

The Community Engagement Strategy 2020-2024 is included in a suite of engagement documents that govern how Council interacts with the community and strives for engagement best practice.

The strategy outlines the importance of community engagement, when community engagement is appropriate, Council's ideas of success and goals to achieve an effective community engagement approach and required actions.

The strategy has been developed as a result of the Council Plan 2020-2024 that recognises community sentiment for sharing their views and making an impact on how Council operates.

Our Engagement Framework

Council has developed a suite of community engagement documents to ensure a consistent and effective approach is applied to community engagement.

Community Engagement Policy

The Community Engagement Policy is Council's overarching document for community engagement. It clearly defines Council's expectations for community engagement and when to engage.

Community Engagement Strategy 2020-2024

The Community Engagement Strategy 2020-2024 outlines Council's objectives in relation to community engagement and provides actions required for a successful community engagement approach.

Community Engagement Guidelines

The Community Engagement Guidelines is an internal document for Council staff that provides resources to assist with the development of engagement plans for a successful project campaign.



Background

What is community engagement?

Community engagement is a planned process with the specific purpose of working across organisations, stakeholders and communities to inform the decisions or actions of the members of the community, stakeholders or organisation in relation to a problem, opportunity or outcome.

Council understands the importance of community engagement and encourages community members to be involved in government. It is expected that community members should feel they have sufficient opportunities to share their views.

When should we use community engagement?

Council will consider undertaking community engagement when:

- There is a high risk of community members or Council being impacted
- Community feedback will enhance the decision or action required
- A situation has a significant budgetary impact or a level of sensitivity
- It is compulsory under any legislative requirement

Community engagement activities can be scaled to an appropriate level according to the number of those potentially affected and the resources available.

How do we create community engagement opportunities?

Community engagement is a fluid process and works best when engagement opportunities are identified at appropriate times. Successful community engagement activities are well planned and tailored to each individual situation.

Council actively utilises materials from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) which is an international leader in public participation that seeks to promote and improve the practice of community engagement.

In order to create successful opportunities all engagement plans will consider:

- Context
- Project Statement
- Stakeholders and Community
- Purpose and Goals
- Influence Analysis
- Principles and Approach
- Resources
- Activity Schedule
- Evaluation

Council staff have the Community Engagement Guidelines, IAP2 engagement templates, OurSay engagement software and online newsletters to help assist in developing such engagement plans.



Determining Success

Successful community engagement activities are subjective as their performance is largely determined by personal expectations. Each and every single person involved in an engagement activity will have a different picture of what a successful campaign looks like.

Ultimately Council must try to meet all of these expectations in order to create harmonious environments for community members to participate in. Without addressing these expectations community engagement efforts can be misled or community members will lose trust in these processes.

In order to meet some of these expectations Council considers its principles to be the guiding factors for success. If these principles are addressed in the planning and implementation of a community engagement campaign then it will be deemed as a success.

Our Principles

Council will have regard to the following principles outlined in the *Local Government Act 2020* when conducting engagement activities to ensure public participation:

- A community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope.
- Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.
- Participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement.
- Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.
- Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.

Further consideration will also be required in relation to the IAP2 principles in order to maintain good practice:

- Is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision making process.
- Includes the commitment that the public's contribution will inform the decision made by Council.
- Promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
- Seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by, or interested in, a decision.
- Seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
- Provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
- Communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

Council will also ensure that community engagement activities seek community feedback as early in the process as possible and are proactive when it is feasible.



Objectives

In order to be successful in community engagement the following outcomes will be strived for.

Key Themes	Desired Outcomes
<p>Consider Feedback Please listen to what we are saying to you.</p>	<p>Value the contribution made by everyone; to listen to you and each other.</p> <p>Value individual diversity, act with respect and professionalism in our interactions with you and each other, and never seek to undermine, mislead or undervalue any one.</p> <p>Value constructive criticism that helps us understand how and where we need to improve.</p>
<p>Collaborate Work with us - we want to get involved in what you're planning and doing that affects us, we also have things we want to achieve that will benefit our communities.</p>	<p>Value the community spirit, vibrancy and unique character of each of our towns and rural areas.</p> <p>Value the depth and breadth of creative thinking and outcomes that can be achieved from working closely with our communities, businesses, supporting agencies, government agencies and other councils.</p> <p>Embrace and encourage community engagement, work collaboratively with others and establish partnerships that benefit our communities and the wider region.</p>
<p>Communicate Communicate what you are doing - open up and be more transparent about what you've based your decisions on.</p>	<p>Value our reputation in the community and the region, and acknowledge that we are the guardians of community information.</p> <p>Respect the trust placed in us by seeking to be as open and transparent in our decisions as the law allows, to help the community understand the decisions Council makes.</p>

Our Action Plan

The following actions will be completed to ensure that Council meets its desired outcomes in relation to community engagement.

Outcome One - Value the contribution made by everyone; to listen to you and each other

Actions

- 1.1 Every piece of feedback provided during community engagement opportunities will be considered and presented to decision makers.
- 1.2 Each individual who provides feedback will be acknowledged through the medium they have chosen to provide feedback through.

Outcome Two - Value individual diversity, act with respect and professionalism in our interactions with you and each other, and never seek to undermine, mislead or undervalue anyone.

Actions

- 2.1 Ensure a range of engagement methods are utilised for engagement projects to ensure a wide breadth of community members have the opportunity to participate.
- 2.2 Utilise relationships built across the organisation (such as Community Strengthening, Children and Families, Aged and Disability) to promote engagement with harder to reach groups.

Outcome Three - Value constructive criticism that helps us understand how and where we need to improve.

Actions

- 3.1 Feedback from community members will be sort as part of the evaluation process for community engagement activities.
- 3.2 Feedback on engagement activities and projects will be shared between staff to ensure Council can learn from it's interactions and improve.

Outcome Four - Value the community spirit, vibrancy and unique character of each of our towns and rural areas.

Actions

- 4.1 Tailor engagement projects to each individual location they are held. Ensure that key players from these areas are involved and where appropriate can help with designing engagement activities.



Outcome Five - Value the depth and breadth of creative thinking and outcomes that can be achieved from working closely with our communities, businesses, supporting agencies, government agencies and other councils.

Actions

- 5.1 Ensure all potential stakeholders are considered in engagement project planning and be open to collaboration opportunities when they arise.
- 5.2 All feedback provided will be considered as a valid option and will be compared against negotiables and non-negotiables identified when planning projects.

Outcome Six - Embrace and encourage community engagement, work collaboratively with others and establish partnerships that benefit our communities and the wider region.

Actions

- 6.1 Strengthen our Community Engagement Framework and ensure all staff understand their requirements under the Community Engagement Framework.
- 6.2 Community engagement will be considered as a solution for complex community issues and provided as an opportunity for the community to determine future action.

Outcome Seven - Value our reputation in the community and the region, and acknowledge that we are the guardians of community information.

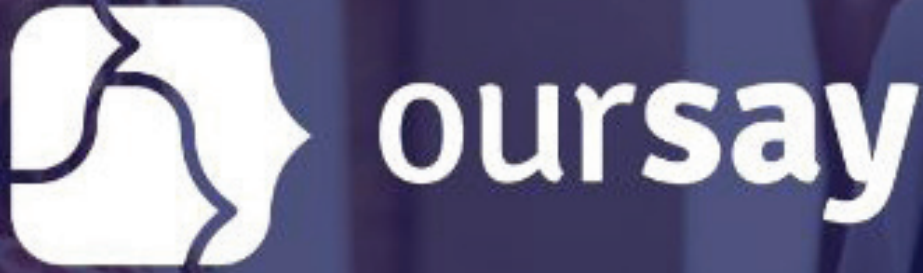
Actions

- 7.1 Make positive connections with the community through Council's engagement e-newsletters In The Know and Council Meeting Update.
- 7.2 Ensure relevant Council departments are available to answer questions from the community during engagement activities.
- 7.3 Ensure staff respond to feedback and concerns from community members as soon as possible to mitigate the risk of incorrect information being provided.

Outcome Eight - Respect the trust placed in us by seeking to be as open and transparent in our decisions as the law allows, to help the community understand the decisions Council makes.

Actions

- 8.1 Ensure all engagement projects are closed by providing feedback to participants and the wider community about how feedback received has influenced decision making.



Next Steps

Council will continuously review its community engagement processes and ensure the Community Engagement Framework is serving both Council and the community. Due to the nature of engagement it is expected that within the next four years our approach may need to be adjusted in order to stay current with community expectations and the theory in this space.

The Community Engagement Strategy 2020-2024 will be regarded by each member of Council staff when designing community engagement activities to ensure we remain on target and relevant to our community.