

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

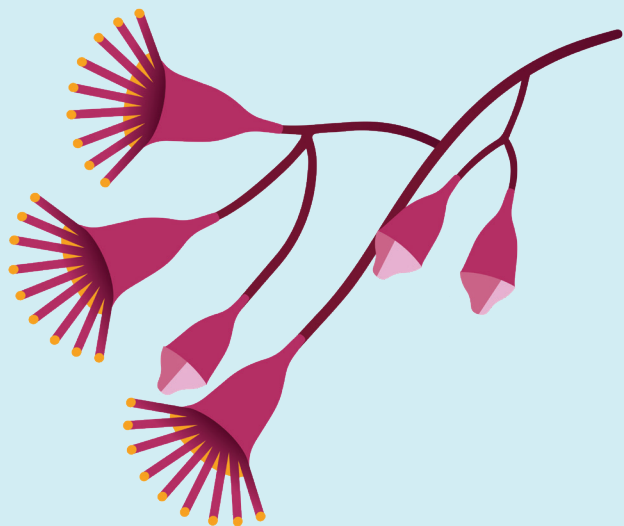
# Community Engagement Strategy 2026 - 2029



*South Gippsland*  
Shire Council

## *Acknowledgment of Country*

*We acknowledge the Bunurong and Gunaikurnai people as the Traditional Custodians of South Gippsland and pay respect to their Elders, past, present, and future, for they hold the memories, traditions, culture, and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia.*



# Purpose of this document

The Community Engagement Strategy translates our Policy commitments into action. It sets out how Council will listen to and work with the community to guide decisions, build trust, and achieve shared goals.



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# Introduction

This strategy sets out how South Gippsland Shire Council will put its commitment to community engagement into practice. As the operational component of our Community Engagement framework, this document translates the high-level principles of our *Community Engagement Policy* into a clear and practical approach for the next four years.

It is designed to address the key challenges and opportunities we face, ensuring our engagement is more consistent, inclusive, and effective. It responds directly to community feedback and our legislative requirements to build a more transparent and trusting relationship between Council and the community we serve.

The *Council Plan 2025-2029* acknowledges that we are operating in a challenging financial environment, meaning we cannot always deliver on everything our community would like. To ensure Council remains financially viable, we must navigate tough decisions together, especially regarding the future of our assets. This Strategy provides the framework for this partnership, ensuring that even when faced with difficult choices, we are working collaboratively to find the best possible outcomes for South Gippsland.

## What is Community Engagement?

We engage with the South Gippsland community in lots of ways every day. This includes our day-to-day interactions with residents and community groups, through to more formal feedback processes. While all of these interactions help us better serve the community, this Strategy is about the more formal, structured ways we engage.

In this context, community engagement is a planned process that brings together organisations, stakeholders, and the community to help inform decisions and actions in response to a problem, opportunity, or outcome.

At its heart, community engagement is a partnership between Council and the community. It's a two-way process where we listen to your ideas and concerns, and you have a real opportunity to influence decisions and actions that affect our region. We are committed to this partnership because we know that we make better decisions and are more likely to achieve our shared goals when we work together.



# 1. Our Approach

To ensure a consistent and high-quality approach to all engagement we undertake, we have established a clear approach to guide our planning and delivery.

## The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

South Gippsland Shire Council uses the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation (Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, Empower) as the core framework for defining the level of community influence in our projects. This helps set clear expectations for staff and the community from the outset.

| Level              | Our Goal                                                                                                                                                  | Our promise to you                                                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Inform</b>      | To provide the community with balanced and objective information to help them understand the issue, alternatives, and/or solutions.                       | We will keep you informed.                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Consult</b>     | To obtain community feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions.                                                                                 | We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals, listen to and acknowledge your concerns, and provide feedback - where applicable - on how your input influenced the decision. |
| <b>Involve</b>     | To work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.       | We will work with you to ensure your input is directly reflected in the alternatives developed.                                                                                   |
| <b>Collaborate</b> | To partner with the community in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. | We will use your advice in the decisions to the maximum extent possible.                                                                                                          |
| <b>Empower</b>     | To place final decision-making in the hands of the community.                                                                                             | We will implement what you decide.                                                                                                                                                |

## How we prioritise engagement

Council has limited resources and cannot engage on all issues with the same level of intensity. To ensure our efforts are transparent, consistent, and directed where they are most needed, this Strategy establishes a clear process for guiding the allocation of our time and budget.

This approach helps us determine the appropriate level and scale of engagement for any given project or decision. Projects with statutory engagement requirements will always be the highest priority. For all other projects, we will assess them against the following criteria:

### **Impact:**

How many people will be affected by the decision, and to what degree? Will it have a significant effect on their daily lives, finances, or access to services?

### **Geography:**

Does the issue affect a single township, a specific geographic area, or the entire Shire?

### **Risk:**

What is the level of political, social, financial, or reputational risk to the community and Council if the engagement is not managed well?

Based on the assessment against these criteria, the Communications, Engagement and Advocacy team will determine the appropriate engagement approach and provide coordination and support according to the identified needs.

## **Deliberative engagement**

As required by the *Local Government Act 2020*, we will use deliberative engagement practices to inform the development of key strategic documents such as the Community Vision and Council Plan,

## **The toolkit**

We are committed to developing and maintaining a practical, internal *Community Engagement Toolkit*. This will be an essential, living resource for staff, providing templates, checklists, and step-by-step guides to support them in planning and delivering engagement independently, particularly for lower-priority projects.



## 2. Strategic Priorities (2025 - 2029)

Over the next four years, our engagement work will be guided by four key priorities that respond directly to issues identified through recent consultations and Council activity.

### **Engaging on 'what's possible'**

This is the most fundamental shift in our approach. A significant focus for our engagement over the next four years will be to build a shared community understanding of the financial realities facing Council, particularly regarding services and assets. The focus will be on gathering informed community input that helps Councillors make necessary and difficult strategic decisions.

### **Targeted engagement**

Where appropriate, and depending on the consultation, we will take a proactive and tailored approach to engage sections of the community that have historically been harder to reach—for example, agricultural communities and younger people—ensuring their perspectives are actively sought and considered on projects that significantly affect them.

### **Building trust through transparency**

We will implement actions that make our engagement processes more transparent and accountable. This includes undertaking consistent communication and by investigating a more structured and predictable approach to when consultation is undertaken.

### **Improving online engagement and in person opportunities**

We will work to ensure our engagement is accessible to all residents in the most cost-effective way possible. We will continue to improve the quality and promotion of our online engagement, recognising that for many people it is a convenient way to provide feedback at little cost to Council.

We will also strengthen our commitment to providing meaningful and accessible in person options for participation in all major projects. We recognise that face-to-face conversation is often the most effective way to explore complex issues and understand diverse perspectives. Our goal is to remove barriers to participation, ensuring every resident can contribute in a way that works for them.





## 4. Measuring our Success

To ensure this strategy is delivering on its commitments, we will track our performance against a set of clear key performance indicators (KPIs) and Actions. These targets establish a benchmark for success and will be reviewed annually.

### Key Performance Indicators

Our success will be measured by indicators including, but not limited to:

- Participant satisfaction with the engagement process.
- The reach and diversity of participants in our engagement activities.
- The completion rate of our mandatory processes (planning, closing the loop, evaluation).



## 5. Action Plan

### Engaging on 'what's possible'

| Action                                                                                                                                                       | Year 1                                                                            | Year 2                                                                            | Year 3                                                                              | Year 4                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Establish a baseline of communication channels for engagement and promote opportunities through these channels.                                              |  |  |  |  |
| Ensure engagements - where applicable - highlight financial implications and challenges to build community understanding of financial realities.             |  |  |  |  |
| Implement engagement plans for all community engagement activities to ensure each is well-considered, properly resourced, and has a clear purpose and scope. |  |  |  |  |

### Targeted engagement

| Action                                                                                                                                                                                        | Year 1                                                                              | Year 2                                                                              | Year 3                                                                                | Year 4                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Introduce and deliver targeted and tailored engagements to encourage a range of voices that are representative of the people and groups affected by the matter at hand.                       |  |  |  |  |
| Analyse participation data to understand the number of people engaged and the demographic profile (e.g., age, location).                                                                      |  |  |  |  |
| Engagement activities will include consistent questions that will support Council to undertake Gender Impact Assessments where required, and as outlined, in the <i>Gender Equality Act</i> . |  |  |  |  |

## Build trust through transparency

| Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Year 1                                                                              | Year 2                                                                              | Year 3                                                                               | Year 4                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Begin a process to assess participant satisfaction through post-engagement surveys, asking whether participants felt heard and found the process worthwhile, with an initial target of achieving an average rating of "satisfied." |                                                                                     |                                                                                     |    |    |
| Commence and implement a "closing the loop" report for engagements, providing participants with an overview of results and, where applicable, engagement outcomes.                                                                 |                                                                                     |    |    |    |
| Implement an internal review of all formal engagement projects to ensure planning, closing the loop, and evaluation are completed.                                                                                                 |                                                                                     |                                                                                     |  |  |
| Co-design significant community engagements with Councillors by presenting a menu of engagement options for consideration.                                                                                                         |  |  |  |  |

## Improving online engagements and in-person opportunities

| Action                                                                                                                                     | Year 1                                                                              | Year 2                                                                              | Year 3                                                                                | Year 4                                                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Investigate enhancements to Council's online engagement platform to make participation easier and encourage greater community involvement. |                                                                                     |  |                                                                                       |                                                                                       |
| Review in-person engagement opportunities annually and trial new methods for capturing participant feedback.                               |  |  |  |  |
| Review Council's engagement schedule annually to identify opportunities for aligning activities and increasing community participation.    |                                                                                     |                                                                                     |  |  |

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