

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

Community Planning Guide



South Gippsland
Shire Council

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Introduction

Welcome to the Community Planning Guide – a practical resource designed to support communities to help shape their own futures.

Strong, thriving communities don't just happen – they're built through collaboration, shared vision and inclusive planning.

This Guide is here to help you navigate the process of community planning with confidence. It offers tools and tips to bring people together, identify shared priorities and turn good ideas into action. It's built on the belief that local people are the experts on their own communities and that inclusive, well-facilitated planning can create powerful and lasting change.

You'll find advice on:

- **The benefits of developing a Community Plan;**
- **How to gather input from community members;**
- **How to set priorities;**
- **How to create action plans; and**
- **Checklists for success.**

Whether you're just starting out or refreshing an existing plan, we hope this helps you create a process that is empowering, inclusive and genuinely community-led.



Note: A **Community Plan** is created by and for local residents. It focuses on shared goals, values and aspirations such as social connection, wellbeing, events or advocacy for improvements.

In contrast, a **Town Strategic Plan** is developed by councils or authorities to set long-term priorities particularly in regards to growth, land use and services.

An **Infrastructure Plan** is more specific again, outlining practical investments in physical assets like roads, utilities and facilities to support future needs.

The Community Planning process encourages you to think about projects community groups can achieve, without getting into the detailed planning found in the other two Plans.

Why Develop a Community Plan?

Communities engage in community planning to create a shared vision for their future, ensuring that development and changes reflect the needs and aspirations of residents.

By participating in the community planning process, community members can:

- Share their vision with Council and other authorities.
- Identify local challenges.
- Prioritise projects that they believe will make their community better.
- Foster a sense of ownership and empowerment.
- Encourage individuals to voice their opinions and contribute to decision-making.
- Promote volunteer opportunities.
- Strengthen social ties.
- Build community resilience.
- Promote inclusivity.

A Community Plan is a valuable tool for communication between the community and Council. It:

- Helps Council identify community needs and provide effective support through resources, grants, promotions and advocacy.
- Supports alignment between Council Plans and Community Plans.
- Informs Council's advocacy to other bodies (such as the Victorian Government)
- Serves as a resource for Councillors - helping to give additional insights into the needs and priorities of their communities.



Community Plans can help Council understand the community's aspirations and goals. To make sure your Plan truly reflects the community, it should:

- Include input from at least 10 per cent of your town's population during the planning process.
- Show that a diverse range of community members have been represented.

What is a Community Plan?

A Community Plan is a document developed by residents for their community.

It focuses on what the community wants for itself, outlines common goals, identifies what's important to the people living there and lists projects and actions based on these priorities.

Creating a Community Plan means talking with residents and other important groups to understand what matters most to them. The goals in the Plan should be practical, address community needs and be able to be carried out over time (usually within three to five years). The Plan should also build on your community's strengths, existing resources, knowledge and relationships. Every Community Plan is different and will reflect the unique character and needs of your area.

Setting Expectations

While Council will carefully consider the Plan and how it aligns with the Council Plan, Capital Works Program and key strategies, it's important to recognise that actions requiring Council funding, works on Council-managed land, or Council to act as an auspicing body may be more difficult to deliver. Initiatives that are community-led and community-funded are generally more straightforward to progress.

As noted in the introduction, a Community Plan is different from an infrastructure plan. Council's Capital Works Program is highly prioritised and carefully balances the needs of the entire municipality.

What Happens When the Plan is Completed?

Once it has been endorsed by the community, the Community Plan is presented to Council. Council can use the Plan to help guide decisions, but is not required to carry out the actions in the Plan.

Community Plans serve as a guiding framework for local development and improvement efforts.

Typically, Community Plans are used to:

- Guide the implementation process for local groups who work on initiatives outlined in the Plan.
- Secure funding or grants.
- Encourage ongoing community involvement, ensuring that residents continue to have a voice in future decisions.
- Foster development and positive changes that align with the interests and needs of residents.

It is good practice for you to review key Council documents to align your goals with Council's. Key documents include the:

- **Community Vision.**
- **Council Plan.**
- **Current Strategic Plan for your town.**



The Community Planning Process

The community planning process has three steps, shown below. We'll explain each step and share extra resources to help you carry out the planning process throughout the rest of this Guide.

If at any time during the process you would like assistance, please feel free to contact the Community Development team on 5662 9200.

Planning is important as it sets the foundation for success.

1. Preparation

Establish a Planning Group

Understand who your community is

Consult the community

Analyse the data

Prepare a Draft and present to community

Finalise the Plan

2. Implementation

Action projects and review their impact

Monitor projects

3. Review

Review the planning process

Review the Plan regularly

Step One: Preparing for Community Planning

When a group takes the time to plan, they can set clear goals, identify what's needed and work out the best way to get there.

Good planning helps everyone stay focused and allows for others to join more easily as the plan is clear. Good planning turns good ideas into great results. Some steps to prepare include:

Establishing a Planning Group

Community Plans are developed by a core group of people who coordinate and lead the process. This could be an existing group, a subcommittee of a current group, or a new group altogether. This group will also lead the implementation of the projects or actions in the Plan or seek volunteer project leaders to do so.

To establish the community planning group, you'll need to consider the following:

- **Membership – at least five people.**
- **Diversity of members – do we reflect our community?**
- **Group administration**
- **Information storage – where will your information sit? Google Drive, SharePoint, other?**
- **How often you meet.**
- **Skill sets needed – for example project planning, grant writing, finance or social media.**
- **Knowledge and connections within the community – when it comes time for engagement do we have some connections or knowledge to help us?**
- **Succession planning – who will continue on our great work?**

Most funding bodies require community groups to be incorporated or be auspiced by an incorporated group to distribute funds. If your group is not an incorporated body, it might be worth exploring what business structure will work best for you. You can use the resources below as a starting point.

Resources

- 1.1.1 Essential Group Information.
- 1.1.2 Questions to Consider in Preparation for Community Planning.
- 1.1.3 Skills Audit for Community Planning.
- 1.1.4 Developing a Community Vision.
- Choosing a business structure for your group: www.consumer.vic.gov.au/clubs-and-fundraising/incorporated-associations

Understanding Who Your Community Is

The next step is to learn more about your community. You probably already know a lot about it already, but it's also important to gather data that backs up what you know. There are various tools you can use to find accurate information about your community, alongside your own knowledge.

Mapping your community will give you recent data which can support your case for projects and can also be used in grant applications and media content. It will also help you with your communication strategy e.g. what communication tools will be most effective or do you need to provide your information in another language.

Resources

- Shire and Community Statistics: www.southgippsland.vic.gov.au/shirestatistics
- Spotlight on Small Towns: www.southgippsland.vic.gov.au/spotlight-small-towns
- Census Data: www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/search-by-area
- Community Directory: www.southgippsland.vic.gov.au/communitydirectory
- South Gippsland Shire Community Profile: profile.id.com.au/south-gippsland
- 1.2.1 Community Asset Map.
- South Gippsland Regional Profile: <https://www.southgippsland.vic.gov.au/regionalprofile>

Community Engagement

Consult the Community

Consulting the community is essential for community planning. It gives residents the opportunity to share their insights in relation to their needs and challenges. Involving the community helps build trust, which can foster stronger collaboration.

Engaging as many community members as possible also increases buy-in for projects, as they are more likely to support initiatives they helped shape. Including diverse perspectives promotes inclusivity and addresses the needs of various groups within the community. This leads to more sustainable decisions that reflect residents' values and priorities.

Key questions to consider when planning community consultation include:

- What vision does our community have for itself?
- Why are we engaging with the community?
- What do we want the Community Plan to achieve?
- How will we engage the community?
- When is the best time?
- What do we want to ask the community?
- What does success look like?
- Is there already a Community Resilience and Emergency Preparedness Plan available? What will building community resilience and preparing for an emergency look like for your community? How can this be factored into a Community Plan?
- What key groups within the community do we need to connect with?
- How will we connect with the hard-to-reach residents?
- What skills do we need? (e.g. facilitation of meetings, event management or publicity)
- What are our limitations?
- What resources do we have available?



There are many ways to consult with the community. Using a variety of methods can make it easier for residents to share their feedback. Some examples include:

- Surveys – paper and online.
- Community forums.
- One-on-one conversations.
- Focus groups.
- Using a variety of communication platforms such as social media, newsletters, eNewsletters, and pop-up sites to keep the community informed ongoing.

Resources

- 2.1.1 Designing a Media Release.
- 2.1.2 Designing Effective Survey Information.
- 2.1.3 Community Planning Survey Sample.
- 2.1.4 Communications and Social Media Plan Template.
- 2.1.5 Community Engagement Ideas.

Analyse the Data

After you have learned about your community and listened to their ideas and concerns, you can start looking at the information you've gathered and begin writing a plan that shares your community's story.

Completing this step is a major milestone. You have established a group to lead the community planning, researched the people and characteristics of your community and consulted widely to understand the goals and aspirations of your town. Now, it's time to bring all of that work together and create the written plan.

Resources

- 2.2.1 Priorities and Drivers.

Developing the Plan

Prepare the Draft Plan

Once you have collated the information gathered through the consultation process into a draft document, it is time to go back to the community. The document doesn't need to be very long, but it should explain how you created the Plan, who you consulted and what the outcomes are. It's especially important to show that you talked to a wide variety of community members, included different perspectives and accurately reflected their ideas and suggestions. You can find a list of examples of Community Plans below.

It's a good idea to acknowledge those who have contributed to the Plan's development, including yourselves, and others who have supported. It is also crucial that the priorities listed are both what the community wants and are possible for your group. Consider the wording of the priorities / goals so they are achievable.

Present the Draft Plan to the Community

Presenting the Plan for community feedback is important for several reasons:

- It enhances its quality and strengthens community relationships.
- It demonstrates transparency, showing their voices have been documented accurately and their input has been recognised.
- When community members see their feedback reflected in the Plan, they are more likely to feel invested in its success and support its implementation.
- It encourages ongoing engagement and participation from the community and supports volunteer contribution.

After the community approves the Plan, it's time to share it with Council and other key partners. Some groups create a communication plan to keep important organisations and stakeholders informed by sending them a copy.

It would be great to have the Plan publicly available if possible so that it's accessible to everyone in the community. When your Plan is approved by your community, it becomes a resource for other communities and for Councillors current and incoming. Plans can be shared on Council's website.

Resources

- 3.1.1 Plan on a Page Draft.
- Examples of Community Plans (consider including photos of your community in your plan):
www.southgippsland.vic.gov.au

Step Two: Implementing the Plan

Implementing the Community Plan will most likely include several individual projects.

These may include creating a plan for a specific project, for example developing a community garden. Each project requires a project plan.

All project plans have these eight components in common to ensure effective implementation.

1. Set Clear Goals

Define specific, measurable goals based on the Community Plan.

2. Develop an Action Plan

Create a detailed action plan that outlines the steps needed to achieve the goals including timelines, responsible parties and required resources. Prioritising actions that can be wholly delivered by the community will have the greatest chance of success with the plan timeframe.

3. Engage Stakeholders

Make a list of all those affected by the project and involve them and communicate with them regularly.

4. Allocate Resources

Identify and allocate the necessary resources.

5. Monitor Progress

Establish a system for monitoring progress.

6. Communicate Updates

Keep the community and all your partners informed about the progress of the project.

7. Gather Feedback

Encourage ongoing feedback from the community and relevant parties to understand their perspectives and make improvements as necessary.

8. Celebrate Achievements

Recognise and celebrate milestones and successes, which helps build momentum and encourages continued community engagement.

Resources

- 4.1.1 Sample Project Management Tool.
- 4.1.2 Community Projects and Activities Summary.
- 4.1.3 Simple Project Action Template.

Step Three: Review

The review process has two parts:

Reflecting on Achievements

Take time to acknowledge and celebrate what your community has accomplished. Recognise the hard work, time and energy contributed by volunteers, community members and partners. Their commitment is what brings the Community Plan to life.

Go back to the original goals – what did you hope the Plan would achieve? Review both the progress of specific projects and the overall direction of the Plan. Is it still relevant? Has the community changed? Does the Plan still align with Council's strategic priorities?

Suggested Review Timeframes

Every Year

Check priorities. Are they still what is being focused on by the group? Has the group documented its progress on these priorities? Is the Communications Plan being implemented?

Every Three to Five Years

Check with the community. Are the priorities and projects still reflecting what the community wants?

Reviewing the Process

Think about how the planning process unfolded. What did you learn along the way? What worked well and what could be improved for next time? This reflection helps build stronger processes and deeper community engagement in the future.

Taking time to review and celebrate ensures the Community Plan remains a living, meaningful guide and helps keep community momentum strong. Reviewing a Community Plan is important for several other reasons:

- The review process enables your group to assess the effectiveness of the Community Plan in achieving its goals and objectives.
- It can gather feedback from the community and stakeholders, ensuring that the Plan remains relevant and responsive to changing needs.
- Involving the community in the review process can enhance engagement as residents see their feedback being considered and acted upon.

- Regular reviews can help identify whether additional resources or support are needed to achieve the Plan's goals, providing a chance to address gaps.
- Reviewing the Plan allows for recognising and celebrating achievements, which can motivate community members and stakeholders to continue their involvement.

Resources

- 3.4.1 Assessing the Community Planning Process.

Need assistance?

If at any time during the Community Planning process your group needs assistance, the Community Development team at South Gippsland Shire Council is there as a valuable resource. Contact them on 5662 9200 or council@southgippsland.vic.gov.au

Community Planning Checklist

- ☐ Formed a Community Planning Group of at least five members.
- ☐ Identified and established best business structure.
- ☐ Identified what skills you have and what others you need.
- ☐ Completed research into who makes up your community.
- ☐ Developed a Communication Plan.
- ☐ Ran a community engagement process.
- ☐ Gathered the data and analysed what the community has told you.
- ☐ Considered community resilience building and emergency preparedness.
- ☐ Identified key projects.
- ☐ Developed a draft Plan.
- ☐ Presented the Plan to the community for review.
- ☐ Identified key drivers for each project.
- ☐ Developed simple project plans for key projects.
- ☐ Presented the Plan to partners e.g. Council, affiliated groups etc.
- ☐ Implemented the Plan.
- ☐ Kept the community informed of your progress to implement the Plan.
- ☐ Reviewed the community planning process.
- ☐ Review the Community Plan at least every 12 months.

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

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