



MIDCOAST
council



**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY -
review approach
July - November 2022**



Introduction

This document outlines the engagement that is planned to inform the review of Council's Community Engagement Strategy.

This review is an important opportunity to review our Community Engagement Strategy in light of the changes in the way our community wants to communicate and engage with us.

Over the past two years communication preferences and opportunities have shifted as a result of technology and the impact of COVID on our communities.

This review is an ideal time to check in with our community on their communication preferences so we can take into account any significant shifts in our forward planning and include in our revised Community Engagement Strategy.

It is also important we understand our community's lived experience and use that to inform how we communicate and engage in light of the major review of our Community Strategic Plan that will take place during 2023-24, during the life of the reviewed strategy.

To inform the review we are undertaking consultation with our community over several phases, with a focus on the ways in which our community likes to receive information, the types of information they wish to receive from Council and how they wish to share their thoughts with us.

This will result in a reviewed Community Engagement Strategy that will be put to the elected Council for endorsement.

It will also form actions for delivery that will be commitments made to our community through our Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework – namely the delivery program and operational plan.

Background

A Community Engagement Strategy is a required element of the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework as outlined in the *Local Government Act*.

The Community Engagement Strategy is our commitment to the community on how we will communicate and engage with them and outlines our goals and objectives to improve these interactions over the life of the strategy.

It tells our community what they can expect from us, outlines the principles guiding our engagement, our key objectives, how we interact with stakeholder groups, how we identify engagement opportunities and the tools we use.

To inform this strategy we need to understand some key elements of our community's needs and behaviours, particularly in terms of how they like to receive information and how they like to interact with us.

It also includes mandatory timeframes for public exhibition periods to meet our Community Participation Plan requirements under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.

Currently we have four documents that outline our commitment to the community across these areas. They are:

- Community Engagement Strategy 2019-2022
- Communication Strategy 2019-2022
- Community Engagement Policy
- Community Participation Plan (appendix to Community Engagement Strategy)

Following the review of the strategy, that will be informed by the engagement outlined in this document, the four documents above will be replaced by a consolidated Community Engagement Strategy and a community engagement charter which will outline the commitment we make to our community to keep them informed and offer opportunities for them to participate in engagement activities.

Engaging with our community

For us to improve the way we engage and communicate with our community we need to understand how our community wants to engage with and hear from us.

This will allow us to identify opportunities in our Community Engagement Strategy for improving how we undertake these aspects of our interactions with the community and design actions to support this improvement.

Principles that shape our engagement approach

When engaging with our community our guiding principles are designed to deliver on our mission to build trust with our community and to show we value community participation.

Timely	Early in the project timeline prior to key decisions being made
Accessible	Open and available with strategies in place to reach across the community
Broad	Strategies for ensuring representation from across the entire community
Accurate	Feedback collected, interpreted correctly and reported clearly
Meaningful	It is clear how input has contributed to decision making
Transparent	Community understands the process and sees how their input is used
Genuine	The input sought has a purpose and is used to inform decisions
Responsive	Community dialogue continues throughout the process, to outcome

Purpose of engagement

Council is committed to understanding the needs and aspirations of the MidCoast community and values the input that members of the community provide.

The purpose of the engagement on this project is to inform the review of our Community Engagement Strategy, to ensure our approach is informed by the experience of the community and to support our planning and delivery of activities. It will also enable:

Councillors – to have confidence that the reviewed Community Engagement Strategy delivers on the needs of the community

Staff – to be guided by the needs and behaviours of the community to improve the way we communicate and engage with our community

Community – to have confidence in the process, and trust we have listened and considered their needs and aspirations

This strategy has been developed to ensure engagement is consistent with the commitments made in our Community Engagement Strategy. Council is committed to proactive open discussions with the community on the future needs of the community.

Scale of engagement

Engaging with the community to support the review of our Community Engagement Strategy is a level four, high, engagement project in line with the engagement matrix included in our Community Engagement Strategy.

This scale is reached as it is to inform the development of a long-term strategy that has the potential to impact across the population of the MidCoast and is a strategy that is a legislated requirement.

Level of engagement

As outlined in MidCoast Council's Community Engagement Strategy our engagement approach utilises the five-point framework developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

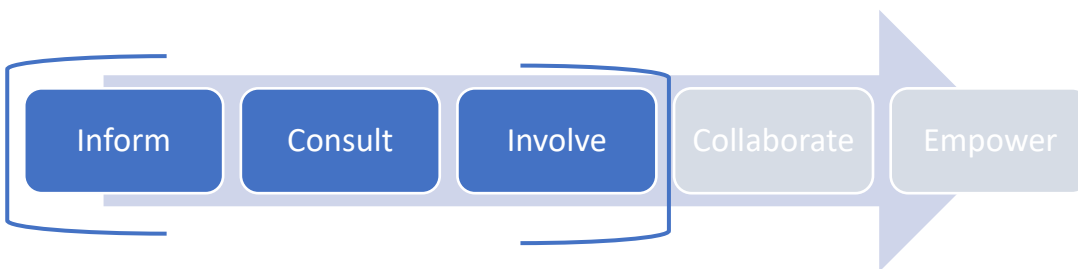
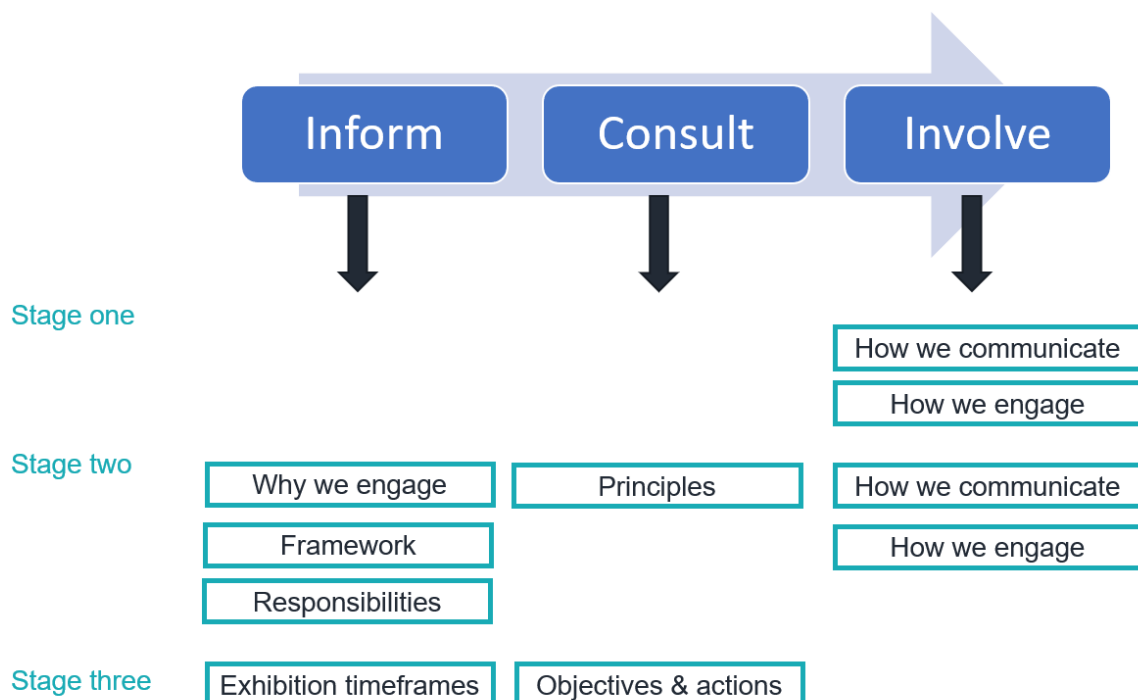


Figure 1: The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, where 'inform' is the lowest level of engagement, and 'empower' is the highest. More information on the spectrum can be found at www.iap2.org.au.

The proposed levels of engagement for this project are inform, consult and involve.

- **Inform** - to provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, benefits and/or solutions
- **Consult** - to obtain public feedback on the project and/or alternatives
- **Involve** - to work directly with the public throughout the decision-making process to ensure that community concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

The level of engagement will vary throughout the stages of the project as per the below.



Objectives

The overarching objective for the engagement is to inform the review of our Community Engagement Strategy by:

- Ensuring our approach is informed by the experience of the community
- Supporting our planning and delivery of actions and activities
- Understanding the communication and engagement behaviours of our community

Scope of engagement

The elements of the reviewed Community Engagement Strategy we are most interested in obtaining community feedback on, and form the focus of the engagement activities we will undertake include:

- The principles of engagement
- How we communicate with our community
- How we engage with our community

There are a number of elements we need to ensure we are informing the community on. These include:

- Mandatory exhibition timeframes
- The responsibilities of engagement
- Why we engage

A number of elements are out of the scope of the engagement, these include:

- budget for communication and engagement activities
- resourcing for communication and engagement activities

These budget and resourcing implications of any actions that are included in the final Community Engagement Strategy will be explored through the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework mechanisms of Council's annual budget, resourcing strategy and operational plan.

Engagement approach

Through our engagement with the community, we will seek to build an understanding of what the community's needs and aspirations are. The approach for this engagement will be to:

- inform the whole community how they can be involved via direct email, Council's weekly e-newsletter, media release, information on Council's web page and social media channels
- utilise both face to face and online forms of engagement to make participation accessible
- Undertake a statistically relevant randomised survey to get a broad picture of community needs and provide quantitative data
- Undertake small number of focus interviews to obtain qualitative data that drills down on survey results
- actively be mindful of the hard to reach in our community (eg youth, Aboriginal, young families).

Timeframe and activities

The engagement activities being undertaken to inform the review of the Community Engagement Strategy will take place in three stages.

The table below shows the timeline for the different stages of the engagement:

Stage 1: April - June 2022	Stage 2: July-September 2022	Stage 3: October-November 2022
Purpose: Undertake randomised phone survey and Community Conversation survey	Purpose: Gather feedback on how our community wants to be informed and engaged to inform strategy development	Purpose: check in with the community on the draft strategy, including objectives and goals, mandatory timeframes
Stage one allows us to get a picture from a statistically relevant group of the community on how they wish to be engaged and tests this with those engaged members of the community who attend Community Conversations	Stage two allows us to explore how the community wants to hear from us and be involved in our decision making to allow us to plan how work with our community into the future	Stage three will see a draft Community Engagement Strategy placed on public exhibition for feedback on objectives, goals and actions
Involving	Informing consulting involving	Informing consulting
<p>Statistically relevant phone survey to canvas communication and engagement preferences to obtain quantitative data</p> <p>Focus interviews to gain qualitative data on items of interest arising in phone survey</p> <p>Online survey for participants in Community Conversations program.</p> <p>Review of feedback available from other engagement sources, including Community Satisfaction Survey</p>	<p>Online engagement tools to provide the broader community with an opportunity to share their thoughts.</p> <p>Focus on social channels to gain additional information about communication preferences in particular geographic areas.</p> <p>Face-to-face opportunities will be provided.</p> <p>Interactions with community groups in specific localities to understand the best channels to use.</p> <p>Feedback to be integrated into strategy review and inform the development of actions.</p> <p>Findings from engagement will be analysed and provided in an outcomes report.</p>	<p>Feedback on the draft strategy will be sought from across the LGA.</p> <p>Feedback provided will be reviewed and changes made if required before final document is reported to Council for adoption.</p>

Stakeholders

We recognise there is a broad range of stakeholders that would be ideal to hear from during the engagement period including the following:

- MidCoast ratepayers
- MidCoast residents – geographic and demographic spread
- Community groups
- Families
- People with a disability
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people
- Business owners
- Elected representatives
- Council staff

Different stakeholder groups will be targeted in different stages of this engagement project to ensure we are hearing from a cross section of the community across the life of the project.

Flexibility

This engagement strategy outlines how Council intends to listen to our community. As new information is gained, concerns are raised, or situations change, the engagement strategy can be revised as required. We will remain agile enough to take advantage of the opportunities and changing circumstances that may arise.

Key messages

The key messages that will be consistently applied through this engagement are:

- Your input will shape the way we communicate and engage with you.
- You can make a difference – you have a voice and it matters.
- We want to know what you want to hear from us on.
- We want to know how you currently get your news and information and how you want to hear from us.
- We want to understand the challenges the community faces when accessing information from us.
- We want to know how the community wants to share their thoughts and views with us.

Tools and channels to support engagement

The following communications tools and channels will be used to support engagement:

Method:	Timing:	Details:
Phone survey	Stage one	Statistically relevant randomised phone survey to capture the sentiments of members of the community to provide quantitative data
Focus interviews	Stage one	Small number of focus interviews to investigate items of interest raised in the phone survey.
Community Conversation survey	Stage one	Online survey for attendees of the Community Conversation program to understand engagement and communication preferences with those who are actively engaged.
Website	Stage two Stage three	Raise awareness of engagement and provide information on the project and how to participate.
Online engagement tools	Stage two Stage three	Use of online engagement tools to provide the community with opportunities to tell us their thoughts, concerns and frustrations.
Media releases	Stage two Stage three	Issued to print, radio, and television contacts in a timely manner to help inform the community of the project and feedback opportunities.
Emails to community database	Stage two Stage three	Use our community databases to target stakeholders from specific interest groups and geographical locations, to raise awareness, invite participation and canvas views.
Posters and flyers	Stage two Stage three	To raise awareness of engagement and inform the community where to find information and how to participate. Possible locations include Council customer service centres and libraries.
Digital signage	Stage two	To capture those who attend Council's customer service centre and drive past Yalawanyi Ganya and encourage participation.
Email signature	Stage two	To promote participation to all correspondents from Council email addresses for a period of time.
Radio promotion	Stage two Stage three	Provide information to the community via media, for example through our regular weekly radio spot and other opportunities.
Advertising	Stage two	Advertisements to encourage participation and awareness
enewsletter	Stage two Stage three	Inclusion in weekly MidCoast News Wrap e-newsletter.

Social media	Stage two Stage three	Use social media channels to inform members of the community how they can participate, and to canvas social media communication preferences and gain insights into various locations and groups uses and preferences.
Pop-ups	Stage two	Pop-ups and CBD visits in various locations across the LGA to promote participation in the survey and collect information
Internal channels	As required	Customer service briefings, news and updates, all staff

Reporting

We will report back to our community on the outcomes of the engagement, making sure we demonstrate that we have listened, and reporting on how the input has been used.

The information collected during the engagement process will be used to inform the review of the Community Engagement Strategy and to develop a report which will be provided to Council's senior executive team and elected councillors.

The engagement report will also be publicly available via our website.

We will also report back to those members of the community who have participated in the process and close the loop by letting participants know how their input has been used to inform the review of our Community Engagement Strategy.