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The LGAQ Mission:
To strengthen the ability and performance of Local Government to better service the community.

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Community Engagement Policy

Introduction

Purpose of resource
THE PURPOSE OF the community engagement policy development guide is to enhance the capacity of local government to develop a high level policy outlining the purpose, intent and processes of community engagement. This guide is not intended to be a strategy for community engagement but to inform council’s community engagement policy development and implementation processes.

How to use this resource
The guide is laid out in 4 sections.

SECTION ONE provides background detail about why councils are required to develop a community engagement policy.

SECTION TWO outlines a number of things that council should plan for and consider before commencing the development of the policy.

SECTION THREE details a process for developing a community engagement policy and a template to input the information to complete the policy. The policy template is designed to be used in parallel with working through this guide.

SECTION FOUR describes some considerations for implementing the policy.
SECTION ONE – Background

Why develop a community engagement policy?

Community Engagement – The Legislative Base

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT Act 2009 has an increased emphasis on community engagement. The principle based legislation applies to all local government business. It indicates that a Councils’ decisions about operation and service delivery should be grounded in meaningful community engagement.

Amongst the five (5) key principles of the Act, there is an emphasis on “democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement” and “transparent and effective processes and decision making in the public interest”.

Community engagement is not specifically defined by the legislation. The LGAQ defines community engagement as the process of building connections between government, citizens and communities on a wide range of policy, program and service issues. It can be formal or informal (LGAQ, 2003).

To access the explanatory notes for the Local Government Act 2009 visit LGOnline Legislation Services at www.lgaq.asn.au where useful commentary will be available after the Act commences in July 2010.

For the Local Government Act 2009 visit the Queensland Legislation website www.legislation.qld.gov.au


Community Engagement is good business

Community engagement is good practice. It presents a way for decision makers to connect and stay connected with communities in order to further develop relationships and inform decision-making processes. Communities have an expectation of being engaged now. Engagement is about good communication, and ranges from a phone call, flyer or letter to a participatory workshop or forum.

Connect with those hardest to reach

A planned community engagement strategy provides individuals and groups with opportunities to have a say about what is happening in their community and to contribute in meaningful ways. An effective engagement policy means the planning of engagement activities includes how to connect with the hard to reach such as young people, people with a disability, Culturally and Linguistically diverse people, Indigenous people or remote people.

Share responsibility for future

Building credible relationships with community encourages everyone to share the responsibility for developing positive futures and avoids council being presented with a list of issues to “fix”. Community engagement provides a way to get greater understanding of the real issue and potential cost for initiatives as well as develop some plans for how the greater community can contribute.

Explore complex issues in safe ways

Sound community engagement practice can remove the onus from local government to ‘always have the answers’ or to know what is best for the community. Often, those most affected by an issue will have the most creative and viable solutions. Connecting with communities provides valuable opportunities to harness the assets and strengths of individuals, groups, businesses, other levels of government and local government to find a solution together.
What makes an effective community engagement policy?

AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY engagement policy will outline ways to build upon and formalise new and existing relationships and partnerships for council.

A policy will allow council to harness the best of what currently works in communities to make what currently exists more functional.

An effective community engagement policy should:

- Be reflective of the community context in which it is to be implemented
- Be developed in consultation with community and council stakeholders for effective buy in
- Outline local governments commitment to remaining in touch with communities
- Be accompanied by a Community Plan with a clear strategy built on a recognised community engagement framework
- Be resourced adequately
- Be monitored and evaluated regularly
- Be viewed as a tool to maximise the engagement of council staff across council business as well as a way for council to connect with the community.
SECTION TWO – Policy Development Considerations

POLICIES FORM PART of the framework within which councils operate. They set the guidelines for decision making responsibility and action. They describe high level processes for how and why things should be done as well as by whom.

Whole of Council Application
A community engagement policy needs to apply across all areas of council operations. Community engagement is the responsibility of all staff and elected representatives.

Simplicity
To be useful, the policy needs to be developed in a format that encourages its use on a day to day basis. It should be clear and concise in order to convey the intent of community engagement. Ideally, a policy should be no more than 3 pages long; otherwise it could be discarded as too hard to follow.

Policy Inclusions
Policies vary according to the level at which they are to be implemented. Policies which describe how things should be done at a service delivery level are detailed, while policies that indicate broad strategic directions are less specific about actions.

Selecting what level of detail to include in a community engagement policy will depend upon the resources and capacity of Council for policy development and implementation. The following section details eight possible inclusions for a sound community engagement policy.
SECTION THREE - Developing The Policy

Definition of Community Engagement

THERE IS NO right or wrong definition of community engagement. It is a broad term describing a variety of ways to communicate, consult, involve and encourage participation between community and council.

Community engagement is about offering opportunities for people to influence what happens in the community through being active in informing decisions of council.

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) does not refer to an actual definition of community engagement; instead it draws from a number of sources of global definitions which affirm that community engagement is critical to effective, transparent and accountable governance in the public, community and private sectors and is recognised as a two way process:

- by which the aspirations, concerns, needs and values of citizens and communities are incorporated at all levels and in all sectors in policy development, planning, decision-making, service delivery and assessment; and

- by which governments and other business and civil society organisations involve citizens, clients, communities and other stakeholders in these processes.


Outline the purpose or objective of the Community Engagement Policy

THIS IS A brief, clear and direct explanation of what the policy is intended to achieve and to whom it is intended to apply. A purposeful policy needs to be an accurate reflection of the community and be applicable to the community. Policies that are not developed with the local context in mind will be difficult to communicate, implement and report against.

It could state why council is issuing the policy and the desired effect or outcome to be achieved. The purpose should also include a reference to any legislative mandate or government requirements that the policy intends to address.
SECTION THREE - Developing The Policy (continued)

The Policy Statement

This is the endorsed statement by council, which reflects council’s commitment to community engagement and outlines how the community can expect the council to implement the policy.

The policy statement could include:

- A statement about what council will provide or undertake to demonstrate commitment to engaging with the community
- A broad description of how council will engage with the community and the role/responsibilities of staff
- A brief statement that community engagement is the responsibility of all staff from road crews through to corporate staff.
- A brief explanation about council’s potential role in acting upon the advice of the community.

At times council will have a direct role in responding to the communities input or advice, other times this will be out of scope of direct council business. However, there is still the likelihood that council could take on a facilitation or advocacy role in ensuring the opinions and advice of the community are addressed to those that can take action.

Community Engagement Principles

Principles are inherently linked to policy. They provide the framework for councils activities, in this instance from which to engage the community. These principles should be evident in all community engagement activities and processes and can inform how well engagement has taken place. The majority of councils will have a set of values or principles which guide their work. These could be highlighted once again in the community engagement policy.

The Queensland Government and the Local Government Association of Queensland have endorsed the following community engagement principles from IAP2.

- Integrity – when there is openness and honesty about the scope and purpose of engagement;
- Inclusion – when there is an opportunity for a diverse range of values and perspectives to be freely and fairly expressed and heard;
- Deliberation – when there is sufficient and credible information for dialogue, choice and decisions, and when there is space to weigh options, develop common understanding and to appreciate respective roles and responsibilities;
- Influence – when people have input in designing how they participate, when policies and services reflect their involvement and when their impact is apparent.
The benefits of Community Engagement

OUTLINE THE MANY ways council and community can benefit from active participation and engagement. Inclusion of this statement in a policy document offers the rationale for promoting implementation of community engagement practices and can answer the question often posed of “what difference will community engagement make” to council and the community?

Policy scope

POLICY SCOPE ANSWERS the questions of what, where and who the policy applies to. In short this could include everyone involved from operational matters through to strategic decision makers in council – including councillors and staff.

Policy scope also indicates at a broad level when council will engage the community and in relation to what types of issues or processes. The intention of having a community engagement policy is not about committing council to consult people on every issue. For example it would be considered good practice to consult a community about significant infrastructure projects and the development of major plans but not about operational matters related purely to council business.

Referring to a recognised community engagement framework such as the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum will provide information on this point. More detail about the Public Participation Spectrum can be accessed here at; http://www.iap2.org.au/sitebuilder/resources/knowledgelassetfiles/36/iap2spectrum.pdf
Related policies and legislation

THIS SECTION INCLUDES reference to the legislative base, detailing other policies or pieces of legislation that this policy directly relates and other key council documents such as Community or Corporate Plans.

As a minimum, reference should be made to the following plus any additional plans relevant to your community:

- Local Government Act 2009
- Queensland Sustainable Planning Bill 2009
- Local Government (Finance, Plans and Reporting) Regulation 2009
- Local Government Finance Standard 2005
- Queensland Integrated Planning Act 1997

Review

IMPLEMENTING A COMMUNITY engagement policy or plan is not a finite process with a time limited beginning and end. It is an ongoing process which is intended to inform work practices of all staff and representatives and shape how council does business with the community.

Monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the impact and effectiveness of the community engagement policy is critical to the success of implementing the policy – if it does not work, it will not be used and application of the policy is mandated by the law.

The purpose of monitoring the policy is to learn from the direct experience of those with implementation responsibility to determine:

1. Effectiveness of the policy in guiding community engagement activities
2. In what instances and for whom has it worked well or not so well
3. Improvements that need to be made to either the policy itself or how the policy is implemented to ensure congruency between purpose and implementation
4. Outcomes that need to be reported against for sound governance.

Performance indicators are visible signs of success and help answer the question of ‘how will we know that we are meeting our community engagement objectives?’ This requires council to clearly articulate
SECTION THREE - Developing The Policy (continued)

Review (continued)

the outcomes or signs of success that it would like to see happening as a result of having a community engagement policy. Presenting this in case study formats can be a simple and practical way to capture this information.

Any policy needs to be reviewed regularly (annually or biannually) to ensure that it continues to meet requirements. Local context can change and polices need to be responsive to councils circumstances, business and levels of resourcing. Consider what type of information you will need to collect to report against achievements and learning's.

Linking the community engagement policy to other areas of council business or plans (community, corporate and operational) will also contribute to a robust reporting framework. The Local Government Act 2009 specifies that councils will need to report on the results of an annual review of the implementation of the community plan (section 104). This review could also inform how relevant or effective the community engagement policy is.

Congratulations!

You have completed the necessary steps for developing a community engagement policy.

Go to the next page to input information to a policy template
EACH COUNCIL IS likely to have a template which guides the policy development process. This template is intended to be a guide for inclusions and layout.

**SECTION THREE - Community Engagement Policy Template**

1. **Definition of Community Engagement**
   Explain how Council defines community engagement.

2. **Purpose/objective of community engagement**
   Outline the purpose of the community engagement policy, why it exists and who it applies to.

3. **Policy statement for community engagement**
   Describe Councils commitment to community engagement and outline how the policy will be used to benefit both Council and the community.

4. **Community Engagement Principles**
   Detail the principles or values that underpin the intention of the policy.

5. **Benefits of Community Engagement**
   Specify the benefits or potential outcomes for community and council that could be achieved through effective implementation of the policy.

6. **Policy Scope**
   Detail what areas of Council business the policy relates to.

7. **Related Policies and Legislation**
   List other polices, legislation or plans this policy relates to.

8. **Review**
   List review triggers and timeframe
SECTION FOUR - Considerations for implementation

HAVING A COMMUNITY engagement policy is just the beginning of a robust community engagement strategy. For the policy to be useful, consideration needs to be given to how the policy is to be implemented and what needs to be considered prior to going public. Communicating how the policy is to be implemented, reviewed and reported against provides an extra layer of transparency to the process.

Some councils may include the following detail on resourcing, performance measures and methods within the policy itself. Some may have it as a linked directive or guideline that the policy refers to.

Internal Support
Developing the policy in consultation with internal council stakeholders will allow those that implement the policy to have greater ownership and commitment to implementation. Many problems can arise if the policy is not understood or supported by those that the policy applies to. Ensure that internal support is high prior to communicating or engaging with the broader community.

Make certain that the appropriate systems and processes are in place to be able to implement the policy. Systems will be required for things like managing budgets, resourcing staff, developing promotional material, collecting data or feedback from engagement activities and reporting back to the community outcomes of the engagement activity.

Resourcing
Prior to launching the community engagement policy, consider what resources will be required to resource the implementation of the community engagement policy.

Consider the following:

- What resources will be required to communicate the policy to all staff or to support staff to transition to a different way of doing things?
- Will staff require additional resources or tips to guide and monitor implementation?
- Will staff benefit from up skilling via training/professional development?
- Will the policy require a designated budget allocation in order to implement community engagement strategies?
Methods of community engagement

Each community is different and the way in which council engages with community will be guided by these unique features.

Community engagement practice is not about one size fits all approach. Finding, applying and even adapting a community engagement framework will guide the methods used to engage the community in decision making.

The International Association for Public Participation Spectrum of Engagement (IAP2) is one model that details a broad range of tools and strategies to engage the community.

The spectrum describes a range of community engagement methods whereby the appropriate method is tailored to sectors of the community being engaged and the issue/s topic around which engagement is sought. The Public Participation Spectrum outlines an engagement approach across a wide spectrum including methods that could be used to inform, consult, involve, collaborate or empower the local community to engage in issues of a substantive and important nature. The spectrum offers a degree of flexibility from which to choose, adapt or create an approach that offers a best fit for your community and the decision you are making.
### SECTION FOUR - Considerations for implementation (continued)

**IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum**
Developed by the International Association for Public Participation

#### INCREASING LEVEL OF PUBLIC IMPACT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORM</th>
<th>CONSULT</th>
<th>INVOLVE</th>
<th>COLLABORATE</th>
<th>EMPOWER</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Participation Goal:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Public Participation Goal:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Public Participation Goal:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.</td>
<td>To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.</td>
<td>To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.</td>
<td>To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.</td>
<td>To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Promise to the Public:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Promise to the Public:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We will keep you informed.</td>
<td>We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</td>
<td>We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</td>
<td>We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.</td>
<td>We will implement what you decide.</td>
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<td><strong>Example Techniques to Consider:</strong></td>
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| - Fact sheets  
- Web Sites  
- Open houses | - Public comment  
- Focus groups  
- Surveys  
- Public meetings | - Workshops  
- Deliberate polling | - Citizen Advisory Committees  
- Consensus building  
- Participatory decision-making | - Citizen Juries  
- Ballots  
- Delegated decisions |

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SECTION FOUR - Considerations for implementation (continued)

Reporting
Reporting the outcomes of policy reviews is a critical part of the continuous improvement loop; unfortunately it is also the one component that seems to be skipped over.

Communicating success, achievements and learning’s to all internal and external stakeholders allows opportunity to reflect on how to improve the policy and build in necessary improvements that need to be understood to those with responsibility for implementation.