



Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2025

LITCHFIELD
COUNCIL



DRAFT



INTRODUCTION

WHAT

The **Litchfield Council Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2025** guides Council on how it will engage with the community and acknowledges Council's commitment to effective engagement and open and transparent governance.

The Strategy will provide a framework to:

- 1 Provide accessible information to ensure the community has the opportunity to contribute to and/or understand the decision-making process.
- 2 Reflects the importance of community feedback and demonstrates how their input has been considered.
- 3 To provide a best practice approach in all community engagement activities.

WHY

Effective, proactive and responsive community engagement develops relationships, increases community confidence in Council, informs decision making and produces informed action. We want Council's community engagement to result in an engaged and connected community contributing to our vision **'the best place to live in the Top End'**.

HOW

Council will plan community engagement activities in a timely and effective manner, accessing the target audience and developing the most appropriate tools and methods of communication to encourage a high level of participation. Council is guided by the engagement principles of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2).

Develop relationships

Increases community confidence

Informed decision making



COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT



Engage

Understand

Listen

Consult

OBJECTIVES

Council understands that to achieve success we need to have a proactive, positive attitude towards community engagement and provide an open exchange of information between Council and the community.

This Strategy has the following objectives:

- 1** **Commitment to robust and transparent engagement practice** - Develop and foster an environment of trust and confidence that creates and enables a two-way dialogue between the community, stakeholders and Council.
- 2** **Best practice approach in all community engagement activities** - Improved understanding, capacity and skill in community engagement practice.
- 3** **Strengthen mutual understanding of why and how Council will engage** - Encourage ongoing conversation by being a trusted service provider who is listening to the needs of the community and has a willingness to consider and incorporate feedback
- 4** **Provide a voice for all** - Enabling and encouraging community involvement and participation in consultation activities and provide meaningful opportunities for engagement.

OBJECTIVE 1

Commitment to robust and transparent engagement practices

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

Transparency is key to building and maintaining channels of trust between council, stakeholders, and the broader community. Transparency and trust are tightly intertwined concepts. When decision-making processes and reasoning are clearly outlined, explained, observed, and understood, people are better able to trust that a decision was best for the community at the time.

What we will do

- Ensure that information is easily accessible and easy to understand, to encourage community input to the engagement process and the sharing of ideas, as well as gaining a deeper understanding of community and stakeholder needs
- Provide consistent information and updates on Council website and social media for all engagement activities
- Close the feedback loop. Empower the community to engage with Council led consultations by demonstrating how their input has been considered in engagement outcomes and include the next steps for all projects.

Key Actions

Action	Success Measure	Outcome
Ongoing commitment to keep community members informed and updated through the website and social media	Increased opportunity to contribute to and/or understand the decision-making process. Continued social media engagement for all consultations and community communications. Council website is easy to navigate and information is easy to find and access	Ongoing conversation and community moderation on council social media Council website provides a 'one stop shop' that is home to all engagement activities and support material and provides
Unpack complex concepts and processes	Complex information is presented in an easy to understand format that encourages input to deliver community led outcomes	A more engaged community and a greater sharing of ideas that provides a deeper understanding of community and stakeholder needs
Ongoing review and evaluation of the Council's website and social media activity	Develop and implement mechanism for tracking and monitoring site traffic.	Increased traffic to the Council website and constructive dialogue on social media.
Close the feedback loop	Ability to demonstrate to the community how their participation and input has help inform and guide consultation outcomes	Provide an evidence base of the robustness of Councils engagement processes
Utilise the opportunity of the Annual Report to reflect on engagement outcomes	Provide meaningful reporting on consultation and engagement outcomes to the community	Transparency around engagement processes and outcomes.

OBJECTIVE 2

Best practice approach in all community engagement activities

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

What we will do

- Provide resources, training, and guidance to help staff effectively navigate public engagement process and implement the most appropriate method and level of engagement for all projects and consultations.
- Ensure commitment by Councillors and Council staff (including external contractors and consultants) to engage with the community in a meaningful, appropriate and genuine way about decisions that may impact the community
- Provide ongoing review and evaluation of current methods and consider ways to improve existing activities.

Key Actions

Action	Success Measure	Outcome
Provide ongoing staff training. Including key staff completing International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Advanced Certificate in Engagement. E.g. online training and webinars.	Staff attendance and participation in training and engagement opportunities Number of training sessions offered/ Level of training requested. Level of engagement from the community at Council led consultations	Staff will have the knowledge, skills and confidence to undertake effective community engagement activities. An engaged community that actively participates in consultation activities.
Undertake a review of community engagement activities to ensure the tools, tactics and technologies used still meets the needs of the organisation and the community.	Feedback from consultation surveys, community members, Councillors and staff, including comments about the delivery, content and effectiveness of the engagement activities. LGA compliance recommendations implemented.	Understanding of which areas of community engagement need improvement and how/where to implement change Increased understanding of community, staff and management expectations of community engagement.

OBJECTIVE 3

Strengthen mutual understanding of why and how Council will engage

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

By effectively communicating the methods of council's community engagement practices, the community will have a clear understanding of how they can participate, and the outcomes being sought. Council assumes the role of a trusted service provider who is listening to the needs of the community and has a willingness to receive and respond to feedback.

What we will do

- Provide ongoing communication to the community through different platforms to convey the importance of community engagement and why Council encourages participation in community engagement activities.
- Clearly communicate engagement processes and outcomes, identify limitations and Council's capacity to deliver within the legislative frameworks that it operates within.
- Develop a level of trust with our community and stakeholders to foster robust and constructive participation in consultation activities.
- Actively engage decision makers including Councillors and key stakeholders to assist with the promotion and advocacy of community engagement and establish the community's confidence in the process.
- Provide an accessible combination of face to face and online community engagement opportunities to help support and raise awareness of Council initiatives and community engagement activities and ensure accessibility by all community members

Key Actions

Action	Success Measure	Outcome
Utilise Council's social media channels Develop a series of videos, posts and or/ interactive tools that explain how the community can provide feedback and why it is important.	Post engagement including; Number of views per video. Likes and shares. Website or link clicks.	Increased understanding and knowledge of the value of community involvement in Council initiatives.
Foster and encourage two-way communication and engagement on Council social media channels	High levels of engagement (likes, comments, shares, reach) on Council's social media	Constructive community participation that captures diverse community views and feedback Council Facebook becomes a useful community resource and information source
Build relationships with key stakeholders in Litchfield (Community Groups, MLAs, Peak Bodies, Local Business, Industry Associations)	Key stakeholder support and advocacy to promote awareness and engagement in consultations.	Increased understanding of community engagement and how to support / be involved Increased reach and participation from all areas of the community
Foster a positive relationship with the media including; Generate regular and consistent media releases Incorporate media strategies into project communication plans	Increase in good news stories/ positive coverage. Breadth and reach of coverage. Follow up stories.	Establish positive reputation and influence amongst community members. Increase community buy in and engagement.

OBJECTIVE 4

Provide a voice for all

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

Community engagement practices must accommodate for all lifestyles of the community, and ensure every voice is provided an opportunity to be heard. Acknowledging accessibility barriers and considering requirements for participation are vital for enabling and encouraging community involvement.

What we will do

- Utilise online communication techniques, complementing traditional engagement methods to actively encourage participation amongst Council’s diverse communities.
- Reduce barriers to participation, co-create engagement opportunities with the community and establish processes and systems which will encourage feedback and community involvement.
- Ensure all community engagement activities and consultations are open for a minimum of three weeks. Allowing sufficient time for all members of the community to participate in engagement activities, taking into consideration the impact of public holidays and school holidays.
- Acknowledge accessibility barriers and consider requirements when selecting engagement activities, communication channels, tools and physical venues.
- Ensure there is a variety of different engagement tools available to community members including online, face to face, anonymous submissions etc. to provide input and feedback to Council.
- Work collaboratively with local community groups, community committees and key stakeholders to improve and develop new community engagement methods and activities to increase participation in Council’s community engagement initiatives.

Key Actions

Action	Success Measure	Outcome
Provide adequate time for consultation activities	Aim for three weeks for all consultations, unless legislation requirements restrict this time frame.	Community has sufficient time to be made aware of consultation activities and provided time to respond
Provide accessible engagement opportunities.	Diverse mechanisms for engagement are included in all consultations (eg face to face activities on different days/times/ locations and online includes social media, online surveys and long form answers)	Increased opportunities for community engagement and feedback
Develop strategies to engage with niche/hard to reach areas of the community	Work with community organisation and NGOs organisations to support access all community members Utilise Community reference Groups to help guide the development of key strategic plans	Increased community engagement amongst typically hard to reach audiences and vulnerable / previously unengaged members of the community
Where possible, pre-schedule community engagement activities throughout the year	Planned schedule of upcoming community engagement activities that don’t overlap with one another and avoid key events and public holidays	Reduction of ‘engagement fatigue’ in the community



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