

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY	
Reference Number	750800
Responsible Business Unit	Corporate Services
Responsible Officer	General Manager Corporate Services
Legislation	Local Government Act 1999
Relevant Delegations	Chief Executive Officer
Related Policies Management Guidelines Frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Code of Conduct for Council Members • Code of Conduct for \$41 Independent Members • Code of Conduct for Council Volunteers • Code of Conduct for Employees • Council Member Allowances and Benefits Policy • RCMB Caretaker Policy • RCMB Social Media Policy • RCMB Media Policy • RCMB Records Management Policy • RCMB IT Policy • RCMB IT Internet, Email and Computer Use Policy
Link to Strategic Plan	Objective 4.3 - Improve customer services
Date Adopted	14 September 2015, item 217.7
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Previous revisions	
PURPOSE AND SCOPE	
This community engagement strategy outlines a framework for a consistent and coordinated approach to community engagement for the Rural City of Murray Bridge. It applies to all Council workers who undertake community engagement activities and is overseen by the General Manager Corporate Services.	
DEFINITIONS	
<p>Community Engagement - a planned process of two-way communication between Council and the community that involves the community in problem solving and uses community input to make decisions.</p> <p>Stakeholder - a person, group, organisation, or system who affects or can be affected by Council's actions, including Council Members and workers.</p> <p>Decision Maker - the person or group with the responsibility and authority to make decisions within an organisation, especially those that determine future direction and strategy.</p> <p>Participatory Democracy - a system in which all members of a group or community participate collectively in major decisions.</p> <p>Inform - To provide the community with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.</p> <p>Consult - To obtain feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.</p>	

Involve - To work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that community concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

Collaborate - To partner with the community in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

Empower – to place a final decision making in the hands of the Community.

Sustainable – a decision that is economically viable, technically feasible, environmentally compatible and publicly acceptable.

PROCESS

Why is stakeholder engagement important?

- What are the benefits of effective engagement?
- What happens when you do not engage effectively?
- Project Management Framework

Stakeholder engagement framework

- RCMB stakeholder engagement principles

Roles and responsibilities

Stakeholder engagement process

- Project risks and opportunities
- Identifying objectives, stakeholders, issues and level of impact
 - What are the objectives of consultation?
 - Who are the stakeholders?
 - What are the issues?
 - What is the level of impact?
- Developing key messages
- Selecting appropriate communication tools
- Preparing a Communication Plan or Brief
- Evaluation and reporting

1 - WHY IS STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT?

Engaging with key stakeholders and the Community at large is an important element of the Rural City of Murray Bridge operations, for both the Elected and non-elected bodies, as it assists to improve and guide decision making by collecting and collating multiple perspectives and points of view from members of the Community and people or groups potentially affected by those decisions.

Sometimes the owner of a project will make decisions based mainly on technical information, without being aware of the social, cultural and economic aspects or impacts of a project. Involving a range of stakeholders who can bring this knowledge to the process is more likely to result in outcomes that are successful and supported by the Community in the long term.

The end result is not necessarily about gaining widespread support for a project or a decision. It is about fairness and transparency, involving key stakeholders in Council processes, as appropriate, so they understand the drivers of projects and what they mean for them and their Community, or the Rural City of Murray Bridge as a whole.

Council recognises that engagement is an integral part of modern business operations and seeking the views of stakeholders provides valuable commentary, opinion, support and insight to make more informed decisions.

1.1 - WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT?

- Minimum standards of consultation with stakeholders are required by State legislation. Legislative requirements aside, planned and proactive stakeholder engagement can add significant value to any project, no matter how small or large.
- Effective stakeholder consultation can help Council to:
 - improve Council's reputation and increase public understanding and support for our vision, goals, projects and decision-making processes
 - identify and explore the needs of its people, plan for services and infrastructure and as a result make better informed, more accepted and sustainable decisions to better meet community needs and aspirations
 - enhance efficiency and effectiveness as community participation highlights concerns, priorities, focus areas, risks and in deliberation, ensures Council implements actions in a way that mitigates potential challenges and associated risks
 - minimise project delays and negative impacts to project resources and budgets
 - strengthen Council's reputation, connection and relationship with the Community and potentially transforms our role from bureaucrat and regulator to partner and advocate
 - encourage a sense of belonging, place, community spirit and pride, which increases the desirability of the area as a place to be, which in turn enhances our brand
 - facilitate the building of local networks and encourages people to participate in civic life with a greater understanding of the role and operations of local government
 - ideally, make tough, unpopular or divided decisions more sustainable by creating a sense of process, integrity and transparency, acknowledging that everyone is not always going to be happy or satisfied with the decisions made 100% of the time
 - allow for a broader range of views to be expressed and considered prior to making decisions
 - provide opportunities for community members to contribute to and influence outcomes that directly affect their lives

1.2 - WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DO NOT ENGAGE EFFECTIVELY?

- Lack of communication is a form of communication in itself – it can send a message of indifference or arrogance, even if that is not the intention. Poor engagement can have many detrimental effects, both for Council as an organisation, and for the specific project.
- These can include:
 - damage to Council's reputation – both in the community and with other stakeholders
 - delays to project timeline and increased costs when stakeholder issues arise unexpectedly
 - reacting to issues rather than anticipating them increases risk to the project and is an inefficient use of resources

1 – 3 PROJECT MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK


Council uses a corporate project management framework that includes the identification and analysis of stakeholders in a project. Projects that require significant community engagement are required to develop either a Major or Minor Communication Plan using the processes outlined in

this document, alongside the Project Plan.

2 – STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Council's stakeholder engagement structure and principles are based on the public participation spectrum developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

IAP2 suggests public participation as any process that involved the public in problem solving or decision making and uses public input to make decisions. *(It should be noted that the 'Empower' level on the spectrum below has limited application in Local Government, as the elected Council s are the decision making body.)*

Increasing Level of Public Impact 					
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	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.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Fact sheets▪ Web sites▪ Open houses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Public comment▪ Focus groups▪ Surveys▪ Public meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Workshops▪ Deliberative polling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Citizen advisory committees▪ Consensus-building▪ Participatory decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Citizen juries▪ Ballots▪ Delegated decision

2.1 – RURAL CITY OF MURRAY BRIDGE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

- Stakeholder engagement will be inclusive, transparent and ensure fair participation
- Stakeholders will be engaged around decisions that are yet to be made
- Stakeholders will be asked to comment on a problem rather than a solution
- Stakeholder engagement activities will only occur when there is a real opportunity for people to influence and change decisions and services
- Stakeholder engagement activities will have a clear purpose, be appropriate for the issues, and the roles of each stakeholder should be clearly identified
- Stakeholder engagement activities will be realistic and not raise expectations unnecessarily
- Stakeholder engagement will acknowledge the history of an issue or situation
- Stakeholder engagement activities will recognise varying skills, abilities, and constraints, and respond appropriately
- Stakeholder engagement activities will allow for appropriate and timely feedback, as outlined in the Communications plan
- Stakeholder engagement is about informed decisions – not necessarily agreement

3 – ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

There are a number of groups who will provide input into Council's stakeholder engagement operations. Their individual responsibilities are listed below.

Mayor

- Will act as the principal spokesperson of the Council; unless Council has appointed another member to act as its principal spokesperson
- Will represent the interests of residents and ratepayers, to provide community leadership and guidance, and to facilitate communication between the community and the Council

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

- Will ensure that timely and accurate information about Council policies and programs is regularly provided to Council's community and to ensure that appropriate and prompt responses are given to specific requests for information made to the Council

Executive Leadership Team (ELT)

- Will provide advice and feedback on the stakeholder engagement guideline and stakeholder engagement activities to the CEO
- Will attend/assist with stakeholder engagement activities where warranted
- Will provide information to the Council Members on stakeholder engagement activities when required

Leadership Team

- Will provide advice and feedback on the stakeholder engagement guideline and stakeholder engagement activities to the ELT
- Will attend/assist with stakeholder engagement activities where warranted
- Will notify the ELT of all stakeholder engagement activities. If Council Members are identified as stakeholders, then they will be invited to stakeholder engagement activities using the corporate diary; otherwise, they will be informed of stakeholder engagement activities for their information

Council Officers/Project Manager

- Will consult with the Manager Organisation Development at the inception of projects that require stakeholder engagement, to plan the engagement process and check the stakeholder engagement calendar to ensure there are no clashes
- Will notify Team Leader Customer Services of all stakeholder engagement activities
- Will provide an evaluation of all stakeholder engagement activities to the office of the CEO

Organisation Development Business Unit

Council has a specialist resource to support the organisation's activities in stakeholder engagement and communications. This resource can assist Council staff in the areas of:

- communications strategies
- material to facilitate public awareness of Council projects
- community correspondence
- public displays
- issues management
- facilitation of meetings and discussions
- survey design and management
- newspaper advertisements, wrap-arounds and inserts
- workshop design and management

To discuss any aspects of your projects regarding communication or community involvement, contact the Organisation Development Business Unit.

External Stakeholder Relations

- The Organisation Development Business Unit will provide advice, and where possible, assistance for all stakeholder engagement activities
- The Organisation Development Business Unit will maintain a register and calendar of all stakeholder engagement activities that may be accessed by all staff
- The Organisation Development Business Unit will report all stakeholder engagement activities to the Executive Leadership Team on a regular basis
- The Organisation Development Business Unit will be responsible for maintaining relevant stakeholder engagement principles

Council Members

Council Members engage with the community, but do not have any direct responsibilities under this guideline. However, as part of their role they will be kept informed as to when and where stakeholder engagement activities are occurring, and be invited where appropriate. They will also receive updates from the Executive.

Council Members are reminded that only the CEO and the Mayor (or a Member specifically appointed by Council) can make official comments on behalf of Council.

Council Members should ensure any other comments are clearly labelled personal in a manner appropriate to the individual media used. A statement such as '**As a Council Member for the Rural City of Murray Bridge the views expressed here are mine alone and should not be taken to represent the decisions and opinions of either the Council as a whole or its staff**' will remove any ambiguity.

Council Members as the corporate body remain the final decision makers on policy and strategic direction, long-term planning and resource allocation. Individual Council Members have no authority to make a decision.

4 – STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Engagement can take a number of forms depending on the needs of the project.

The Organisation Development Business Unit will assist in co-ordinating projects across the Council.

Regardless of the approach taken, the process generally follows the steps below:

1. Project risks and opportunities
2. Identifying objectives, stakeholders, issues and level of impact
3. Preparing a Communication Plan (Major or Minor)
4. Implementation
5. Evaluation and reporting

4.1 – PROJECT RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The purpose of conducting a high-level risk assessment is to understand whether the project is likely to be of high risk (Major) or moderate risk (Minor) to Council from a stakeholder perspective, and to develop the engagement approach accordingly.

It is just as important to understand the potential opportunities offered by a project, as it is to understand the risks. The planning stage of a project is the ideal time to think about how the project will benefit stakeholders, what 'good news' stories might arise, how the project could be used as part of education/promotion initiatives and what partnerships Council may be able to form with the local community, businesses and others to drive the success of the project.

IDENTIFYING OBJECTIVES, STAKEHOLDERS, ISSUES AND LEVEL OF IMPACT

When developing a communication plan, everybody involved in the project needs to be clear about what Council is trying to achieve by engaging with stakeholders.

What are the objectives of consultation?

Objectives for consultation should be:

- specific
- achievable
- measurable

As well as overall program objectives, different stages of the project may have different objectives. For example the main objective of one project may be to find out which of three options is preferred by the community, while another project's objective may be to inform affected stakeholders about the reasons for the project and the potential impacts it may have on them.

Who are the stakeholders?

Stakeholders, whether individuals or groups, tend to fall into one of two groups:

- those who may be affected by the project and / or service
- those who may be able to influence the project and / or service either positively or negatively

Depending on the size, scale and location of the project stakeholders will generally fall into one or more of the following categories:

- Council: Mayor, Council Members, Council Executive, Council workers
- State Government representatives and agencies
- Federal Government representatives and agencies
- Special interest groups: businesses, environment, community, lobby groups

- Service providers: hospitals, utilities, schools
- Emergency services
- Community: residents, visitors
- Media: print, television, radio

What are the issues?

Each project will have its own specific issues. No matter what the issue is, issues need to be identified as early as possible so they can be addressed from a communications and consultation perspective.

What is the level of impact

By identifying the objectives, stakeholders and issues, you can determine the level of impact of the proposed project, service or issue. Impact relates to the 'effect of an action or change on the community'.

The impact levels are as follows:

Level of impact	Description
Level 1 (Major – Total RCMB)	High level of impact on the whole or a large part of RCMB
Level 2 (Major – Small scale)	High level of impact of a local nature, for example a local area, specific community or user group
Level 3 (Minor – Total RCMB)	Lower level of impact on the whole or a large part of RCMB
Level 4 (Minor – Small scale)	Lower level of impact of a local nature, for example a local area, specific community or user group

These levels are based on the assumption that any project, issue, service or action will have some real or perceived impact on the community.

To determine the level of impact, staff will firstly need to determine the community group/s and stakeholders that are affected by the project, issue, service or action. It may be appropriate to involve other Council workers in making these decisions and the approach to involving other workers should be determined early in the process.

At any time during a project, issue or action, it may be necessary to reassess the level of impact and vary the engagement approach accordingly, due to a change in the situation or recognition of implications.

Use the following criteria to determine the likely 'level of impact' of your project, issue, service or action.

Level of impact	Criteria (one or more of the following)	Examples	Level of participation generally required
Level 1 (Major – Total Area)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High level of real or perceived impact or risk across RCMB. - Any significant impact on attributes that are considered to be of high value to the whole of RCMB, such as the natural environment or heritage. - Any impact on the health, safety or well being of the RCMB community. - Potential high degree of controversy or conflict. - Likely high level of interest across RCMB. - Potential high impact on State or regional strategies or directions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Council's Strategic Plan - Local Environmental Plan (Council-wide) - Plans of Management (district or regional) - A change to land categorisation, such as community to operational land - Removal of a facility or service catering across RCMB, for example library services - Provision of a district or regional facility, for example sports facility - Key changes to a RCMB - wide service, for example waste management - Changes to or impact on natural bushland or waterway (where the natural values could be affected) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inform - Consult - Involve - Collaborate

Level of impact	Criteria (one or more of the following)	Examples	Level of participation generally required
Level 2 (Major – Small scale)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High level of real or perceived impact or risk on a local area, small community or user group/s of a specific facility or service - The loss of or significant change to any facility or service to a local community - Potential high degree of controversy or conflict at the local level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local Environmental Plan (localised change) - Removal or relocation of a local facility - Change to or loss of valued activity or program, for example local youth activity - Re-development of a sports ground - Local street road closure - Increase or removal of car parking in local shopping centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inform - Consult - Involve - Collaborate
Level 3 (Minor – Total RCMB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lower, although still some real or perceived impact or risk across RCMB - Potential for some controversy or conflict - Potential for some although not significant impact on State or regional strategies or directions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improvements to a Council-wide service, Emergency services, library services - Changes to Customer Service processes, for example payment of rates - Most changes to fees and charges (unless contentious) - Provision of a community-wide event - Review of community needs, for example annual survey, recreation needs assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inform - Consult - Involve
Level 4 (Minor – Small scale)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lower level of real or perceived impact or risk on a local area, small community or user group/s of a specific facility or service - Only a small change or improvement to a facility or service at the local level - Low or no risk of controversy or conflict at the local level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Upgrade of a local playground - Local street or streetscape upgrade - Changes to a local activity program, for example timing or venue/location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inform - Consult

4.3 Developing key messages

Key messages are clear and concise statements about what should be communicated to stakeholders. Using key messages in communications with stakeholders will ensure stakeholders receive accurate, upfront and consistent information.

Key messages should focus on communicating fundamental or essential information only.

4.4 Selecting appropriate communication tools

There is an abundance of tools that can be used for communicating with stakeholders. The trick is to make sure you choose the right tool for the right job. Before selecting your communication tools, think about the aim of the communication (such as one-way or two-way communication)?

If the aim is to simply share information or raise awareness, then tools such as brochures, newsletters, website, fact sheets and letters may be appropriate. If the aim is to gain stakeholder feedback on issues or options, then tools such as meetings, interviews, open days, surveys and reference groups may be appropriate. Further information about some of the most commonly used tools for informing and consulting stakeholders is provided in the Communications Policy.

4.5 Preparing a Communication Plan

The Communication Plan Major and Minor Templates (RCMB Communication Management Guideline) consolidate all the preparatory work that has been done and outlines the specific actions and timing that will be used to communicate with different stakeholders at each stage of the project.

It is essentially a 'to do' list that will be used by all of the project team to guide interaction with stakeholders.

Resources are available within the Organisation Development Business Unit to support the organisation's activities in stakeholder engagement and communications that are deemed high-risk or contentious. Please contact the Organisation Development Business Unit.

4.6 Evaluation and reporting

Evaluation is an important part of any stakeholder engagement program. It helps assess the success of engagement with stakeholders and to identify opportunities for improvement.

Evaluation is not something that should be left to the end of a project or engagement process. Ideally, evaluation should be an ongoing process, which allows the program to be modified and improved as it moves forward.

There are many ways to evaluate the stakeholder consultation program, including both formal and informal methods. Formal methods, such as surveys, feedback forms, interviews and independent reviews are often more useful at the end of a project or at a major project milestone, whereas informal methods can be used throughout a project to help keep the consultation program on course