

CO1 Attachment

1. Communications and Engagement Strategy

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CO1 – Communications and Engagement Strategy



COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

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Why develop a Communications & Engagement Strategy?

At Wollondilly Shire Council our approach to communications and engagement with our community is centred on respect, trust, openness and accountability.

We know we face a number of physical and technical challenges due to the nature of our Shire. We are a dispersed, semi-rural community made up of 17 villages and towns. Many of our community travel out of the Shire on a daily basis to work, study and access goods and services. This impacts on the capacity of our community to attend traditional style community engagement activities and means that we have to be flexible and innovative in our approach to how we communicate and engage.

In our recent survey, the community told us that they wanted to be more engaged and have greater input into Council processes. This Communications and Engagement Strategy outlines our commitment to keep the community informed, and to provide them with opportunities for feedback and participation in the 'business' of Wollondilly.

What are our objectives?

1. To engage and communicate with our community in a transparent, open and 'user-friendly' way that supports good decision making
2. To better understand and respond to community expectations in terms of communication and engagement
3. To deliver more efficient communications and engagement methods that are timely, responsive and tailored to our community's needs

Why do we engage with the community?

As well as complying with the Local Government Act (Section 8A), which states that Councils have a responsibility to "*actively engage with their local communities*", there are a number of reasons why good practice in communication and engagement is important in building and maintaining relationships:

- To understand the community's aspirations and their views on key issues
- To enable the community to get involved and have a say
- To enable the community to access information and stay informed
- To enable the community to do business with us
- To guide services so that they meet the needs of the community
- To guide Council's strategic directions and decision making

What do we mean by communications & engagement?

For the purposes of this strategy, when we talk about *communications* we refer to the act of keeping the community consistently informed about Council services, events and initiatives through a wide range of communications channels. These can range from media releases and social media posts to online videos and community newsletters. These methods largely convey a message to the audience

and are sometimes referred to as one-way communication, although this is changing with the increasing use of social media.

Engagement (or community consultation as it is sometimes referred) is where Council is actively seeking feedback to inform decision making, usually on a particular project or issue. There is of course overlap between the practices, and in this document we identify seven key functions referred to as “focus areas”:

1. External Communications
2. Community Engagement
3. Public Relations
4. Digital Communications
5. Research/Insights
6. Visual Communications
7. Web Communications

Ultimately all of our work across these focus areas is designed to ensure the community knows what’s happening in their local area and has ample opportunities to be involved in community life.

Key Principles

Below are the key principles that guide our work in communicating and engaging with our community:

- Council will strive for a “best practice” approach to communications and engagement.
- Council will prioritise a strategic communications and engagement response to identified key community issues.
- Council will work with communities to identify the most appropriate and effective communication and engagement methods.
- Communication and engagement methods will be documented and evaluated to ensure continuous improvement.
- The communication and engagement skills and capabilities of Council will be supported and enhanced through appropriate resourcing and through professional development and learning.
- The purpose of any communication or engagement will be clearly identified before implementation.
- Council will design and implement creative and innovative communication and engagement practices to increase opportunities for all stakeholders.
- Council will design and implement communication and engagement processes and practices in an equitable and inclusive way to address the diverse needs of all stakeholders.

Note: these principles are based on the **International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum** and the **Social Justice Principles** contained in our Community Strategic Plan, *Create Wollondilly 2033*.

For more information on these sources please visit <https://www.iap2.org.au/> and <http://www.wollondilly2033.com.au/>

What did our most recent community survey tell us?

Council conducted a telephone survey of 400 residents in late 2016 and early 2017 to gain a statistically significant representation of the community's views in relation to Council services. In particular, Council wanted to gain an insight into how the community felt about their ability to participate in decision-making and the level of information provided by Council.

The survey revealed that the community value having opportunities to participate in Council decision-making and having access to quality Council information; however their level of satisfaction with Council's delivery of these two aspects is low.

Specifically, 36% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that information about Council and its decisions are clear and accessible. 35% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that there are adequate opportunities to participate in decision making; and 40% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that Council adequately considers community concerns and views in making decisions.

In response to these findings, Council needs to enable increased participation in Council decision-making and greater promotion on how the community's views contribute to new ideas and projects. We also need to actively increase communication to the community on Council activities and priorities.

In order to actively engage with the community in Wollondilly, Council uses a range of different communication and engagement methods. As part of the survey, Council asked participants how they would like to receive information about Council. The results below depict participants' responses in order of preference:

- Council newsletter 76%
- Council website 70%
- Newspaper 66%
- Community noticeboards 64%
- Council staff out and about in the community 64%
- Flyers distributed in the community 62%
- Direct mail outs 60%
- Email 57%
- Social media 56%
- Word of mouth 54%
- Radio 41%
- Councillors 38%

Our context

In communicating and engaging with our community we need to be aware of community characteristics, trends and aspirations. This "context" influences *how* we communicate and engage with our community and can also be a significant determinant of the issues that our community cares about.

The following is a brief summary of the Wollondilly context in the form of a “STEEP Analysis”. This looks at some of the key **S**ocial, **T**echnological, **E**conomic, **E**nvironmental and **P**olitical factors currently defining our Shire and its community.

Social

- Community pride
- Sense of belonging to towns and villages as separate rural communities
- Sense of permanency, safety and security
- Shared values
- Cultural diversity (limited but beginning to increase)
- Growing population
- Ageing population
- Social connection becoming increasingly digital (the rise of social media- see next section)

Technological

- Continual and rapid change
- Increasing expectation of information accessibility
- Inconsistent NBN and mobile coverage/speed across Shire
- Increasing expectation of on-line business
- Customers and employees increasingly digitally savvy
- Emerging digital access equity issues as some members of the community are more digitally connected than others
- Widespread mobile accessibility to information – the rise of the smart phone
- Image and reputation of an organisation being defined through its website presence
- New ethical and privacy issues stemming from the use of smart technologies and customer data

Economic

- Strong and resilient business community
- Significant (but threatened) peri-urban agricultural sector
- Opportunities for a growing tourism sector
- Strong real estate / property development market
- Economic potential of future growth
- Unemployment levels relatively low
- High levels of working residents leaving the Shire to access work
- Transport disadvantage (limited public transport and large travel distances)
- Infrastructure limitations
- Lack of educational facilities

Environmental

- Value placed on the Shire’s rural character and setting
- Value placed on the Shire’s natural environment
- Abundant natural resources
- Sense of not being “urban” and being separate from Sydney
- Rich indigenous and European heritage

- Concern about change, development and urbanisation
- Environmentally-minded community
- Specific environmental issues and challenges as a result of being on the “peri-urban” fringe of Sydney

Political

- A stable and functional Council working collaboratively
- Wollondilly Council declared “fit for the future” but needing to sustain effective and efficient performance
- High community expectations regarding information being accessible, transparent and accountable
- A small minority of groups and individuals perpetually discontent with Council
- Social media being used as the voice of discontentment
- Ongoing levels of disengagement from Council by the majority
- Council’s scope of responsibilities, its achievements and its challenges not well understood by many in the community
- Local government operating in today’s “reputation economy”, where organisations and businesses are “judged” on what they say, what they do and what others say about them

The increasing role of social media

The Sensis Social Media Report 2017 highlights some of the current trends involving Australians’ use of social media. The findings are relevant to the Wollondilly community and can help us make more informed decisions about how to use these channels to engage with our customers.

- 79% of Australians used social media in 2017, 10 points up from the previous year.
- The most popular social networking sites used in Australia are Facebook – 94%, YouTube – 51%, Instagram – 46%, SnapChat – 40%, Twitter – 32%.
- The average amount of time spent per visit on social media is 23 minutes, the same as for the previous year.
- Most social media is now accessed by Smartphone, with 81% of people using their phones to access social media. Laptop use is down to 59%. Almost everyone under 40 has a smartphone.
- 81% of social media followers use Facebook messenger
- Twitter is rising in popularity, from 19% in 2016 to 32%. In 2017, more than 67% of Twitter users were tweeting more than 5 times a day.
- While more people are engaging with news content on social media (12%) traditional media remains a more trusted news source (82%)
- Prime times for social networking:
 - 71% in the evening
 - 57% first thing in the morning
 - 47% at lunchtime
 - 47% during work breaks
- Across all gender, age and location segments, Facebook is used by at least 90% of social media users.
- Visual platforms such as Instagram and SnapChat have surged – more photograph and video based.

Focus Areas

The following sections outline a proposed strategic approach to each of the key communication and engagement functions of Council.

The high level strategy is supported by a series of 'Action Plans' for each Focus Area which will support the implementation of the Strategy. These action plans will be evolving documents and can be changed to adapt as new opportunities arise.

1. External Communications

Aim	What We Do
To communicate the many services, events and initiatives that Council provides. To deliver effective, wide reaching communications using multiple digital and print mediums in a cost effective way.	Inform the community about projects, initiatives and events
	Plan, advise and deliver informative and transparent communications
	Meet legal obligations of informing the public of exhibitions and notices
	Anticipate and respond to emerging community issues
	Liaise with media and coordinate official Council responses
	Report back to the community on Council's performance
	Use appropriate channels to meet the needs of the different sections of the community
	Provide reporting on the effectiveness of communications

Where we are now (Current Situation)	Where we want to be (Goal)	How we will get there (Strategy)
Limited budget for Communications	Communications budgets considered in the early planning stages of projects	Develop business case to resource the most effective and innovative communication tools and approaches
Communications is underutilised within the organisation	Communications has a clearly defined role in the development new projects	Work collaboratively with relevant teams to build capacity and demonstrate the benefits/risk mitigation opportunities of early involvement of communications and engagement in project development and implementation
Traditional communication methods widely used, with gradual uptake in use of online platforms	Resources are realigned from traditional communications to digital communications where possible, to reflect growing demand for online information	Prioritise use of new and creative mediums where appropriate. Enhance and update digital platforms such as the website and social media pages to better reflect community expectations
Strong focus on one way communications, opportunities for dialogue are limited	Community is actively encouraged to participate in discussion and feels heard	Create opportunities to embrace two way dialogue internally and externally
Reactive, less strategic approach to communications exists	Communications across the organisation is conducted in a strategic and proactive way	Develop greater 'intelligence' on emerging issues through development of relationships with internal and external stakeholders. Develop strategic communications responses to pro-actively address ongoing and emerging community concerns

2. Community Engagement

Aim	What We Do
To work with the community to ensure they are kept informed about relevant Council projects, that appropriate opportunities for community feedback are available and the community is empowered to have a voice in the decision making process.	Identify and promote opportunities for the community to provide input into Council's project planning and decision making processes
	Provide support and advice to deliver community engagement projects within the community
	Deliver a wide range of engagement opportunities such as information kiosks, community meetings and focus groups
	Implement innovative opportunities for the community to inform the decision making process
	Facilitate a range of Community Advisory Committees

Where we are now (Current Situation)	Where we want to be (Goal)	How we will get there (Strategy)
Council's online community engagement portal (Engage.Wollondilly) isn't fully integrated with Council's main website or user friendly	Council has an online community engagement portal which complements Council's community engagement activities and is user friendly, intuitive and invites return visitation	Integrate Engage.Wollondilly with Council's website and enhance functionality
Community engagement is not always considered or specifically budgeted for in the early stages of the project planning process	Council has an embedded culture of best practice community engagement	Develop greater 'intelligence' on upcoming projects through relationship building with internal project teams Integrate community engagement budgets into Council projects
Community engagement is primarily carried out by the Engagement Team and some Council staff are hesitant to deliver engagement activities	Relevant staff across the organisation have the skills to confidently carry out community engagement activities (where appropriate)	Develop support tools to assist Council staff to carry out community engagement activities independently
Evaluation and review of community engagement activities is inconsistent	Evaluation and review of engagement is an integral step in the community engagement process and changes to engagement practices are implemented accordingly	Develop streamlined evaluation and review processes for community engagement activities Monitor evaluations for trends/continuous improvement opportunities

Where we are now (Current Situation)	Where we want to be (Goal)	How we will get there (Strategy)
Engagement activity options are delivered based on staff knowledge and experience of what works and doesn't work within the community	Statistically significant data is used to support decisions around selection of community engagement activities and methods	Undertake market research to further explore community perceptions, interest in Council activities, engagement and communication preferences
Wide range of engagement methods used to ensure message is well disseminated.	Statistically significant data is used to support decisions on appropriate methods	Undertake market research to further explore community perceptions, interest in Council activities, engagement and communication preferences
Customer data is not well captured nor well used to assist community engagement	Council's customer data is better captured and used to 'intelligently' engage with customers	Investigate opportunities to use our customer databases to streamline engagement with customers

3. Media/Public Relations

Aim	What We Do
To deliver clear, consistent and factual information to the media, including newspapers, radio and television, that will result in positive and accurate coverage of Council's decisions and activities	Promote Council's positive outcomes for the community
	Produce regular, well-written and easily understood media releases
	Provide quality photographs to accompany media releases where appropriate
	Respond to media requests in a timely and suitable way
	Monitor media coverage and maintain accurate records of coverage
	Build positive relationships with media contacts
	Develop individual Communication Plans for issues and events
	Provide media/public relations advice to internal stakeholders

Where we are now (Current Situation)	Where we want to be (Goal)	How we will get there (Strategy)
Newspaper and radio highly used to communicate Council's message. Use of social media is increasing	A range of innovative, current platforms are used, to reach all sections of the community	Further build on existing digital platforms and experiment with new methods and creative ideas, while maintaining the best of traditional methods to extend our reach
Corporate Style Guide – update incomplete	A useful Style Guide exists to help deliver a consistent message across all of Council's services	Work on the completion of the Style Guide, facilitated by the Plain English team
Inconsistent approach to promotion of events/projects/initiatives	All Council initiatives receive appropriate promotion in a timely and useful way	Develop relationships with key internal stakeholders to ensure internal communication lines are strong. Identify and encourage "info champions" from different areas
Some Council issues/decisions impact negatively on community perceptions	Council has a strong relationship with the community based on previous interactions and follow-up	Develop strategies to strengthen community relationships by continuing to provide factual, reliable and timely information on issues and increasing community interaction and opportunities for feedback

4. Digital communications

Aim	What We Do
To offer digital communication choices for those who wish to engage with Council and to connect with our community on-line in an accessible and transparent way	Manage social media platforms
	Administer Council's website as a key information source
	Operate 'Engage.Wollondilly' website for specific projects
	Live stream Council meetings and other events

Where we are now (Current Situation)	Where we want to be (Goal)	How we will get there (Strategy)
Social media used mainly as a promotional tool for events/projects	Social media acts as both information and educational tool. Social media is used to reach customers in an effective and creative way.	Develop a more targeted approach, specific to the particular social media platform and target audience
Evolving expectations around social media as a customer query/complaint platform and reasonable response times	Aware and alert to customer comments, with guidelines in place to support staff to manage community expectations around social media	Identify and support 'social media champions' across Council to enable more effective response to customer queries Investigate ways to integrate social media queries with Council's customer service response system
Council currently web-casts meetings and occasional events to community	Council meetings and forums are interactive and allow direct customer input	Investigate opportunities for two way customer interaction while web-casting
Social media advertising or 'boosting' of posts is executed on request/ ad hoc	Social media advertising is used in a targeted way and actively encouraged as an option in communication strategies	Identify all advertising needs in early stages of projects
Limited use of community administered social media groups to distribute information	Community administered social media groups are used where appropriate to distribute information and increase 'reach'	Explore opportunities to join community administered social media groups for promotion and information provision purposes.

5. Research/Insights

Aim	What We Do
To collect research, feedback and other data that supports evidence based priority setting and decision making	Undertake research such as focus groups and surveys to collect the views and opinions of the community
	Collate feedback and data results to support the strategic direction of key projects
	Review and evaluate customer interactions to enable continuous improvement to service delivery
	Review best practice/emerging research to ensure an up-to-date approach

Where we are now (Current Situation)	Where we want to be (Goal)	How we will get there (Strategy)
Research is conducted in an ad hoc and sometimes reactive fashion	Research is conducted in a proactive and strategic way and is an essential component of all major projects	Develop systems to ensure community research proposals are developed with input from communications and engagement team
Research and evaluation findings are not consistently used across the organisation to inform evidence based decision making	Research and evaluation findings are consistently used to inform evidence based decision making	Develop systems to ensure that all proposed research meets with community strategic plan outcomes Establish a data clearing house to capture findings and enable a search function for recurrent trends or location specific projects Outcomes/benefits of major research projects to be reported on to ensure value for money/learnings
Inconsistent allocation of budget for research	Budgets for research and evaluation are an integral part of all major projects	Develop systems to ensure the integration of budget allocation for research and evaluation at the early stages of project scoping

6. Visual communications

Aim	What We Do
Ensure all publications and communications (Print and Online) strengthen Council's brand and promote a positive and consistent presence in the community	Develop creative, informative and engaging communication
	Provide graphic design services and advice to Council's various departments, while monitoring and making recommendations on our corporate brand
	Promote Council's services, events and initiatives through clear, engaging and easily accessible design with the development and production of a range of high quality publications and web graphics
	Continue to evaluate and report on the effectiveness of visual communication produced

Where we are now (Current Situation)	Where we want to be (Goal)	How we will get there (Strategy)
Underdeveloped Brand Style Guide resulting in an inconsistent approach to brand identity	A consistent approach to Council's branding on all communication recognised and strengthened for all target audiences A useful resource tool is in place for external suppliers	Develop new Brand Style Guide and build in checking mechanism to ensure compliance
Inconsistent forms and templates	Consistent approach to design/style in all internal and external documents	Review and update all current templates to align with Council's Brand Style Guide
Image database difficult to navigate	A logical and easy to navigate image database that helps to streamline work practices	Review and develop new structure and promote naming conventions and filing procedures
High demand on existing graphic design resource, minimal skills in design software across the organisation Use of casual designers is expensive and time consuming to manage	Additional resources in place to enhance capacity graphic design service A more strategic approach to corporate branding is evident	Develop business case for additional graphic design resource for organisation Explore opportunities to further up skill key staff in use of graphic design software
Graphic design is at times not adequately considered in the early planning stages of projects	Graphic design requirements are considered during scoping stage of projects, resulting in a more effective approach	Increase awareness throughout organisation and provide guidelines to prompt project leaders

7. Web communications

Aim	What We Do
To use Council's website to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deliver 24/7 accurate and timely information 2. Provide an accessible point of contact for the community 3. Enable the community to easily 'do business' with Council 	Administer, develop and maintain Council's website – this includes in-house administration as well as managing contractors
	Apply protocols and systems to ensure information on website is accurate and up to date
	Provide information for customers to conduct their business accurately and effectively
	Continue to develop web services that are tailored to our customers' needs

Where we are now (Current Situation)	Where we want to be (Goal)	How we will get there? (strategy)
Council's websites are administered inconsistently	Council has a consistent approach to the administration of its websites	Websites migrated to a common host provider; consistent CMS (content management system) used; staff training provided in relevant CMS
The contractual arrangements for hosting and supporting Council's websites are inconsistent	Council has a consistent approach to the contractual arrangements for hosting and supporting our websites	Move toward use of one single contracted host provider
Council's websites are not integrated (i.e. they don't communicate with each other and have poor data integration)	All Council websites are integrated (i.e. they communicate with each other and their data is shared and "single-source")	Develop tools and standards for integration and apply to all sub-sites
There are inconsistent approaches to content development and upload	Content development process is consistent and customer focused	Develop standards, guidelines and easy to use tools for staff responsible for web content
Council's main website currently has a strong focus on council processes and is structured around the organisational structure	Website is designed from a customer viewpoint, reflects the needs of the customer and invites return visitation	Conduct research to establish user needs and identify areas for improvement
Current website content does not support application to multiple devices	Website is compatible with desktop and mobile devices	Liaise with software and service providers to ensure customer expectations are met
Current website has limited customer interface options e.g. online payments	Customers are able to do business with Council in a streamlined and accessible way	Liaise with software and service providers to ensure customer expectations are met
Customer usage data is not well captured nor well used to improve service delivery	Customer usage data is captured and used to enhance overall customer experience	Use a combination of technologies to improve data accuracy and enable a proactive and targeted approach to customer engagement