

Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to guide best-practice community engagement processes across Whitsunday Regional Council, by outlining the objectives and principles for inclusive, transparent, effective and meaningful community engagement.

Scope

This policy is applicable to all Whitsunday Regional Council employees (full time, part time, temporary and contract) and consultants or contractors engaged by Council, who are working on any activities where the public may be impacted or which requires community input.

Applicable Legislation

This policy is to support the legislative requirements for “meaningful community engagement” under Section 4 (Local Government principles underpin this Act) of the *Queensland Local Government Act 2009*.

Community Engagement (public consultation) is also a legislative requirement under the following Acts and Regulations:

Local Government Regulation 2012

Planning Act 2016

Land Protection Act 2002

Water Act 2000

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992

Policy Statement

Whitsunday Regional Council is committed to an inclusive, effective and transparent community engagement process:

1. To improve outcomes for the community,
2. To demonstrate responsible local governance, and
3. To increase public participation in Council decision-making.

Definitions

CEO refers to the Chief Executive Officer of the Whitsunday Regional Council appointed in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009*.

Council refers to the Whitsunday Regional Council

Employee refers to any employee, contractor, volunteer etc. of the Council

For this document, Council defines **Community Engagement** as “any process that involves the public in problem-solving or decision-making, and that uses public input to make better decisions.” This definition is supported by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). IAP2 is an international member association which seeks to improve the practice of community engagement, and Council has been a member since 2017.

Under this policy, **Community Engagement** also refers to the many activities and practices where communities and individuals connect and interact with Council on a range of programs and services. The policy provides a framework for best-practice community engagement process, as identified by the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, which recognises five levels of engagement:

- Inform – To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.
- Consult – To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.
- Involve – To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.
- Collaborate – To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of a preferred solution.
- Empower - To place final decision making in the hands of the public.

Under this policy, the **Community** refers to the entire Whitsunday region population, including residents, ratepayers, businesses and all community groups from Airlie Beach, Bowen, Collinsville, Proserpine, the Whitsunday Islands and all surrounding areas within regional boundaries.

Principles

Whitsunday Regional Council recognises that meaningful community engagement involves making connections with the community and encouraging opportunities for the everyday public to be part of the decision-making process. Any engagement undertaken by Council needs to be conducted in a genuine and consistent way, to build community trust and involvement in Council activities. Effective community engagement is a two-way process between the community and Council, and Council aims to be a leader in this space by establishing a strong and positive engagement framework.

The Community Engagement Policy is based upon the following principles, supported by Council's corporate strategies and the IAP2 Code of Ethics:

- Council will provide inclusive and genuine opportunities for the community to be involved in the decision-making process;
- Council will provide open, accountable and transparent local governance;
- Council will ensure that all members of the community are provided with culturally appropriate opportunities to engage with Council on issues which may impact them;
- Council will foster a transparent and accountable culture of community engagement across the organisation;
- Council will communicate and engage intentionally and consistently;
- Council will encourage open and effective information sharing processes and opportunities.

All Community Engagement plans must be approved by Councils CEO or delegate before being enacted.

Objectives

Whitsunday Regional Council aims to strengthen the relationship between Council and the community, by implementing best-practice community engagement processes. However, it should be emphasised that the ultimate responsibility for decision-making rests with Council.

This policy outlines the following objectives for Whitsunday Regional Council, as supported by Council's corporate strategies and the IAP2 Code of Ethics:

- To improve Council's community engagement processes and practices, by developing a framework which is based on this policy and the Community Engagement Guidelines;
- To implement this policy and the underpinning framework across the organisation, clearly linking to the goals and objectives of current corporate plans and strategies;
- To ensure there is adherence to a community engagement framework which focusses on meaningful community engagement;
- To be transparent and build trust with the community, by clearly communicating the engagement process and identifying levels of engagement through the preparation of Community Engagement Plans;
- To undertake a broad range of community engagement activities during consultation, aiming to offer all affected members of the community an opportunity to provide input;
- To clearly communicate how public participants' involvement influenced the final decision during the consultation process;
- To provide opportunities for feedback from public participants, after a consultation process has concluded.

Community Engagement processes will be implemented during the early stages of project planning, to increase genuine participation and community involvement. A Community Engagement Plan will be prepared during the early planning stages, which will determine an appropriate level of engagement for the project. All Community Engagement Plans will be reviewed and approved by the CEO.

Council will determine the appropriate level of community engagement based on a wide range of factors, including:

- Who is impacted by the project / decision;
- The extent of the impact on the community;
- Consideration of community concerns and priorities;
- Consideration of project timeframes and resources;
- Whether there is a genuine need to consult; and
- Whether the engagement process will lead to a better outcome for the community.

Relating Documents

Whitsunday Regional Council Community Engagement Guidelines 2018

Whitsunday Regional Council 2020 Corporate Plan 2014-2019

Whitsunday Regional Council 2016-2017 Operational Plan

Whitsunday Regional Council Community Plan 2011-2021

IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

IAP2 Code of Ethics

Effective Date

28 March 2018

Review Date

Council will formally review this policy after two years of operation.

Review Date: 28 March 2020.