

Community Engagement Policy

JULY 2015



Definition of community engagement

Community engagement is the process of involving the public in the business of government.

Although there are many terms used to describe this process, 'community engagement' is the most widely-accepted term by Australian governments. Other commonly used terms that refer to community engagement or aspects of community engagement include 'public participation', 'citizen engagement', 'public engagement', 'public consultation' and 'empowering communities'.

Community engagement is:

- a two-way process of interaction between a local government and its constituents; and
- about something, such as a decision the local government needs to make, or a problem or issue affecting the community that the local government wishes to address

Because community engagement covers a wide range of activities it is useful to view community engagement as a continuum based on the level of involvement of the community.

Increasing impact on the decision 

	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 the final decision 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	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed	We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
		decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals	and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.		

Source: International Association of Public Participation (IAP2)

Statement of Council's commitment to community engagement

Community engagement is about involving the community in decisions which affect them. It is critical in the successful development and implementation of acceptable policies and decisions and for improving services by being responsive to the needs of the community.

Nillumbik Shire Council is committed to providing good governance and the delivery of high quality local services by fostering democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement with its citizens.

Council will achieve its commitment to inclusive and effective community engagement by adherence to this Community Engagement Policy to guide efforts to enhance the planning and delivery of the Council's services and programs.

This Policy does not prevent Council from engaging with the community in addition to any statutory requirements providing that any legal timeframes are met.

Community engagement does not necessarily mean achieving consensus. However it does involve seeking broad, informed input into the decision-making process and the best possible solution for Council and the community.

Community engagement principles

The following principles will guide Nillumbik Shire Council's approach to community engagement.

Nillumbik Shire Council will:

- Communicate the objectives and parameters of the engagement process to participants at the beginning, including legislative requirements, Council's sphere of influence, policy frameworks and context, and budget constraints and opportunities
- Recognise community participation as a right of all citizens and promote opportunities and mechanisms for a wide cross section of the community to actively participate in decision making, including people with disabilities, carers and families
- Approach engagement free from bias toward any stakeholder and treat all participants in the engagement process with respect and dignity
- Be accountable, accessible and ethical in all dealings with the community in a way that is consistent with our codes of conduct and relevant laws
- Actively listen to all points of view and respect the rights of all citizens to be heard
- Ensure that the consultation will be undertaken early enough in the decision-making process to ensure that its outcomes are considered before the decision is made.
- Ensure that the community is given enough time to take part in engagement processes and provide feedback, avoiding holiday periods such as Christmas and New Year
- Demonstrate that all community contributions and relevant data have been considered, prior to making any decisions that affect the local community
- Commit to providing participants with feedback at key stages throughout the project and upon completion and how community input influenced the decision.
- Ensure any proposed project or decision will be adequately resourced to conduct a thorough and effective community engagement process.

What issues will Council engage on?

Council is committed to being inclusive and transparent in its decision-making.

Council will engage the community on matters which affect our citizens and whenever it believes that community engagement will result in a better outcome for the community and better informed decisions.

The following are examples of the occasions when community engagement would be undertaken:

- Community planning and land use planning
- Policy development and implementation
- Corporate planning (Council Plan)
- Service levels/standards
- Community specific issues
- The design and location of new infrastructure or facilities (including roads) and renewal of existing infrastructure
- Specific projects or programs (such as sport and recreation, community safety/crime prevention, flood mitigation, tourism)
- Legislative, policy or service issues that are the responsibility of higher levels of government, but where the Council wishes to convey community views (such as issues impacting the Green Wedge, housing, education, the environment and health)
- Where the *Local Government Act 1989* or other legislation prescribes that community consultation is required.

How to develop a *Community Engagement Plan*

