



**GEORGES
RIVER
COUNCIL**

**COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT
STRATEGY**

GEORGES RIVER COUNCIL | Community Engagement Strategy

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INTRODUCTION

Georges River Council is committed to maintaining strong and positive relationships with the local community. Council is also committed to communicating with the community in an open and transparent way, whilst ensuring community members have effective methods to communicate with the organisation. It is these commitments that have formed the foundations of this Community Engagement Strategy.

The input of Georges River Council's staff and members of the local community has gone into the development of this Strategy. This Strategy was also based on research into best practice for community engagement which included reviewing strategies used by other local government organisations.

PURPOSE

The Community Engagement Strategy sets out the methods and tools to be used to encourage the Georges River community to get involved in Council's decision making processes. The aim of a strong community engagement process is to listen to the community and gather a broad range of views that will assist Council in delivering and planning services to better meet community needs and aspirations. It will also assist Council in providing residents with greater opportunities to contribute to and influence outcomes which directly affect their lives.

The Strategy:

- Outlines how Council will listen, involve and utilise feedback from the community
- Follows good practice for engagement in alignment with Council's Community Engagement Policy
- Is based on feedback from engagement undertaken with the community
- Follows social justice principals to ensure a broad range of the community are engaged to reflect the City's demographics
- Ensures Council delivers a variety of engagement activities across the local government area to maximise accessibility
- Meets Council's requirements under the Local Government Act 1993, the Integrated Planning and Reporting Guidelines and Manual.

SCOPE

The Community Engagement Strategy is directly aligned with Council's Community Engagement Policy which stipulates Council's commitment to engage and Council's principles for best practice engagement.

The Strategy applies to all Georges River Council engagement practices as an overarching process for what will be engaged on and how engagement will operate. Each major project will also have its own Community Engagement Plan which will outline the specific

engagement opportunities for the project. The Strategy does not cover requirements of notifications in relation to development applications and other statutory notifications.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Term	Meaning
<i>Community</i>	People that live, work or invest in the Georges River local government area. More specifically Community includes residents, ratepayers, business owners, sporting groups, not-for-profit organisations, schools, religious institutions and State and Federal agencies.
<i>Engagement</i>	A two way dialogue between Council and the community where input, ideas and feedback are sought to assist with the decision making process on various projects and activities.
<i>Focus groups</i>	A group of people assembled to participate in a discussion to share ideas and feedback about a project or policy.
<i>Online</i>	Connected to the internet through a digital device – computer, tablet, smartphone
<i>Print</i>	Materials that are produced for the purposes of distributing to members of the public. These include, but are not limited to newsletters, flyers, posters, letters, brochures and surveys.
<i>Social Media</i>	Websites and applications which enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Council’s social media platforms are an informal method of communication and include Facebook and Twitter.
<i>Strategy</i>	A plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim. The word ‘strategy’ also satisfies the requirements of the NSW Office of Local Government and the <i>NSW Local Government Act 1993</i> , which relate to Community Engagement Strategies.

1. When will Georges River Council engage the community

Community consultation will take place:

- Where community input can enhance decision making
- To help identify community needs
- In response to community expressions of interest
- When Council resolves to consult the community
- When required by law

Council will ensure that community engagement takes place on:

- The development of new Council policies, strategies and service plans
- The establishment of social and strategic plans

Community engagement may also take place on:

- The allocating of funding to various projects whether that be for new or current services or to improve or create new infrastructure
- The planning and creation of new services and infrastructure
- The provision of existing services
- The creation of major events
- Major planning and development projects
- Key topics and issues affecting the Georges River community ie environmental, health, safety, transport etc.

2. How and when we will communicate

6 step process

- Step One: Informing and communicating with the community
- Step Two: Listening to community views and gathering feedback
- Step Three: Evaluating and incorporating community feedback
- Step Four: Providing feedback to the community
- Step Five: Decision making
- Step Six: Providing feedback to the community

Step One: Informing and consulting with the community

The key objective of this step is to ensure accurate and timely information is provided to members of the public. During this step, Council will produce information based on the following points:

- What is the project, policy or activity about?
- Who will the project, policy or activity affect?
- What are the problems, proposed alternatives or opportunities and/or solutions?
- What are the key stages of the project, policy or activity?
- What is the timing of the project, policy or activity?

- How can people stay up to date on the project, policy or activity?

Step Two: Listening to community views and gathering feedback

The key objective of this step is to provide a means for members of the community to share their views, ask questions and provide feedback on the information they have been provided. Feedback from the community will directly help inform Council's decision making.

In undertaking this step, Council will use methods that allow people to engage digitally/online, in person or through traditional methods including over the phone or in writing. The type of project Council is engaging the community about will influence the level and methods used for capturing the community's ideas, views and sentiment.

When providing opportunities for members of the community to engage with Council, information will be provided based on the following questions:

- What is the project, policy or activity about?
- Who will the project, policy or activity affect?
- What are the problems, proposed alternatives or opportunities and/or solutions?
- What are the key stages of the project, policy or activity?
- How does the engagement activity work?
- Why has this method of engagement been selected?
- What is the timing of the project, policy or activity?
- How long does the community have to share their thoughts?
- Are there any other ways to share their thoughts?
- How can people stay up to date on the project, policy or activity?

Step Three: Evaluating and incorporating community feedback

The key objective of this step is for all feedback, ideas and input provided by the community to be collated and incorporated into the project that Council is working on. This is also an opportunity for Council to quantify what members of the community have told council in response to the information that they received.

When evaluating and looking to incorporate feedback and ideas from members of the community Council will need to consider the following:

- Who responded?
- Why did they respond?
- What did they say?
- How many people said it?
- Are there any differences based on demographics?
- How do the community's ideas differ from Council's?

Step Four: Providing feedback to the community

The key objective of this step is for the community to feel that their contributions were listened to, valued and have been utilised. When providing feedback to the community Council will include:

- A summary of the nature of the engagement activity undertaken
- A summary of key issues and suggestions raised by the community
- Information about significant changes made to a project based on feedback from the community
- Information about the next steps in the process
- Details of who to contact if community members would like additional information
- An opportunity to provide anonymous feedback on the engagement process through a survey or questionnaire

Depending on the nature of engagement activity undertaken statistical information about the community's views may also be provided during this stage of feedback.

Step Five: Decision making

The key objective of this step is for the information gained through the consultation process to be carefully considered when making recommendations to Council decision makers. When providing information to Councillors, the Executive Team or Senior Staff, Council staff will include:

- A summary and evaluation of the effectiveness of the engagement activities undertaken
- A breakdown of community views relating to the project/policy/activity with information provided about demographical differences where available
- A list of any alternatives suggested by the community through the consultation process
- A list of any recommended changes as a result of the consultation
- Their professional opinion on alternatives suggested by the community

Step Six: Providing feedback to the community

The key objective of this step is for the community to understand how their contributions were utilised and what decisions were made by the Council. When providing feedback to the community Council will include:

- A summary of the nature of the engagement activity undertaken
- A summary of key issues and suggestions raised by the community
- Information about any changes made to a project/policy/activity based on feedback from the community
- Information about decisions made by the Council and the timeframes of implementation

- Details of who to contact if community members would like to discuss the matter further
- An opportunity to provide anonymous feedback on the engagement process through a survey or questionnaire

Levels of engagement with example tools and example scenarios

	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 seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	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 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.
Example tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factsheets • Council Website • Open houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups • Surveys • Public comment • Public meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Deliberate 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 decisions
Example scenario		Venue Hire Grant Funding Program	Major Development of Council owned land	Community Strategic Plan development	Selecting a final design for a Council project

Methods of communication

Council is committed to maintaining open and transparent lines of communication with the community. There are many different methods to engage and share information with stakeholders and Council will utilise multiple techniques on a single project to ensure a broad section of the community has been consulted. These may include:

- Media releases and statements
- Quarterly community newsletters
- Flyers and brochures
- Posters
- Letters
- Print, telephone and online surveys
- Meetings, seminars and forums
- Advertising in the local media
- Council's website – www.georgesriver.nsw.gov.au
- Social media platforms – Facebook and Twitter

Engagement Tools

Engagement Tool	Purpose	Details
Advertisements	To promote Council activities and projects within traditional print media.	Council has a regular advertisement spot in the St George Leader. Advertisements are also placed as required in community language newspapers, Sydney Metropolitan newspapers and school newsletters.
Media releases/statements	To promote Council activities and projects to all media outlets.	Produced as needed ahead of print publication deadlines.
Public notices/exhibitions	To provide an opportunity for the Community to reflect and provide feedback on key council matters including but not limited to the Operational Plan, Budget and new or amended policies.	Published on Council's website and hardcopies on display at key Council venues as promoted in the notice of exhibition.
Social media	To promote Councils activities across a wide audience. Social media often gives Council an opportunity to gather immediate information around an issue.	Council operates Facebook and Twitter accounts but is constantly reviewing its social media platforms.
Newsletters	To provide an opportunity to further engage the community along with providing additional information about Council.	Newsletters include <i>Georges River News</i> and Georges River Libraries publication <i>Current</i> . Newsletters are published quarterly.

Flyers, Brochures and Posters	To capture the attention of members of the community and provide information on how to share their thoughts on a project/activity or policy.	Produced for Council's Service Centres, libraries, community centres, museum and childcare services. May also be distributed to relevant community organisations.
Community emails and letters	Engage specific community groups that may be directly affected by a Council project/activity or policy.	Sent to key residents or contacts as required.
Focus groups	To gauge the sentiment of a specific sample of the community and gather qualitative data to provide further insight into feedback received through quantitative tools such as surveys.	Held during consultation periods. A number of session times will often be provided.
Information sessions and workshops	Provide an opportunity for council to address misconception or misinformation and provide community members with additional access to information, an opportunity to ask detailed questions and provide feedback.	Held throughout Council's local government area at venues considered most appropriate for stakeholders to meet and discuss the nature of the project/activity/policy. Information sessions and workshops are often structured activities.
Drop in sessions	An informal opportunity for members of the public to view information, ask questions and provide feedback during designated hours.	Held during the consultation period drop in sessions are generally held both within and outside business hours.
Information booths at Council or community events	Act as an information point of communication between Council and the local community.	Stalls or pop up booths where Council staff can have one-on-one conversations with community members and handout relevant project/activity/policy information
Meetings with Council officials	Allow community members to meet with their elected representatives, the General Manager or a Senior Staff member to discuss their concerns at a mutually agreeable time.	Meetings must be pre-arranged and can be booked by calling Council or contacting your local representative.
Council Meetings	Scheduled meetings where the business of Council is discussed and decisions made.	Community members can request an opportunity to speak on an issue and provide feedback. This must be arranged in advance of the Council meeting date.

3. Budget

The Office of the General Manager has a dedicated budget for community engagement activities related to the development of key Corporate Planning documents such as the Community Strategic Plan. All other community engagement activities are to be funded by the relevant Council department seeking input from the community.

4. How we are going to achieve this

The following key initiatives will be focused on over the coming two (2) years to help Council achieve its aim of delivering a strong community engagement process:

- Implement new online engagement site
- Develop staff engagement guidelines and templates
- Creation of a calendar of engagement activities
- Improve presence of community engagement activities on Council's website
- Create internal process to assist staff in promoting their projects to the community
- Improve community awareness of Council's social media platforms
- Build a 'share your thoughts' community engagement panel who will regularly provide feedback to Council through online and in person consultations

RESPONSIBILITIES

Position	Responsibility
<i>Position Title or Team</i>	Senior Corporate Planner

VERSION CONTROL AND CHANGE HISTORY

Version	Amendment Details	Policy Owner	Period Active
1.0	<i>Draft Community Engagement Strategy</i>	<i>Senior Corporate Planner</i>	<i>4/04/2017 -19/05/ 2017</i>

Strategy Approved:

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