

Community Engagement Policy

Date Adopted: 15 April 2025

Version: 3.0

Policy Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Outline Council's commitment to the principles of engagement to inform Council decision making
- Establish a framework for the design, planning and management of community engagement across the organisation
- Embed a philosophy of community engagement as a core part of how Council does business.

Policy Scope

This policy applies to councillors, the General Manager, staff, volunteers and contractors as it pertains to all community engagement activities undertaken to inform Council decision making.

Policy Statement

Maitland City Council is committed to ensuring meaningful, informed and genuine community engagement contributes to Council decision making and problem solving. Council will align its engagement with international best practice, most notably the International Association of Public Participation's (IAP2) Core Values. Engagement activities will reflect the social justice principles of access, equity, participation and rights as well as Council's adopted guiding principles.

1. Council's commitment to engagement

Council is committed to proactively engaging our community to inform decision making, where appropriate. We will ensure staff have the training and skills they need to plan, design and manage engagement and provide opportunities to build organisational capacity to embed engagement as a core part of how Council does business.

2. Principles of community engagement

Our community engagement principles are aligned to our Community Participation Plan and shaped by our Guiding Principles. They are our promise to the community about how, when, why and who we will engage.

Council will be guided by the following principles for community engagement:

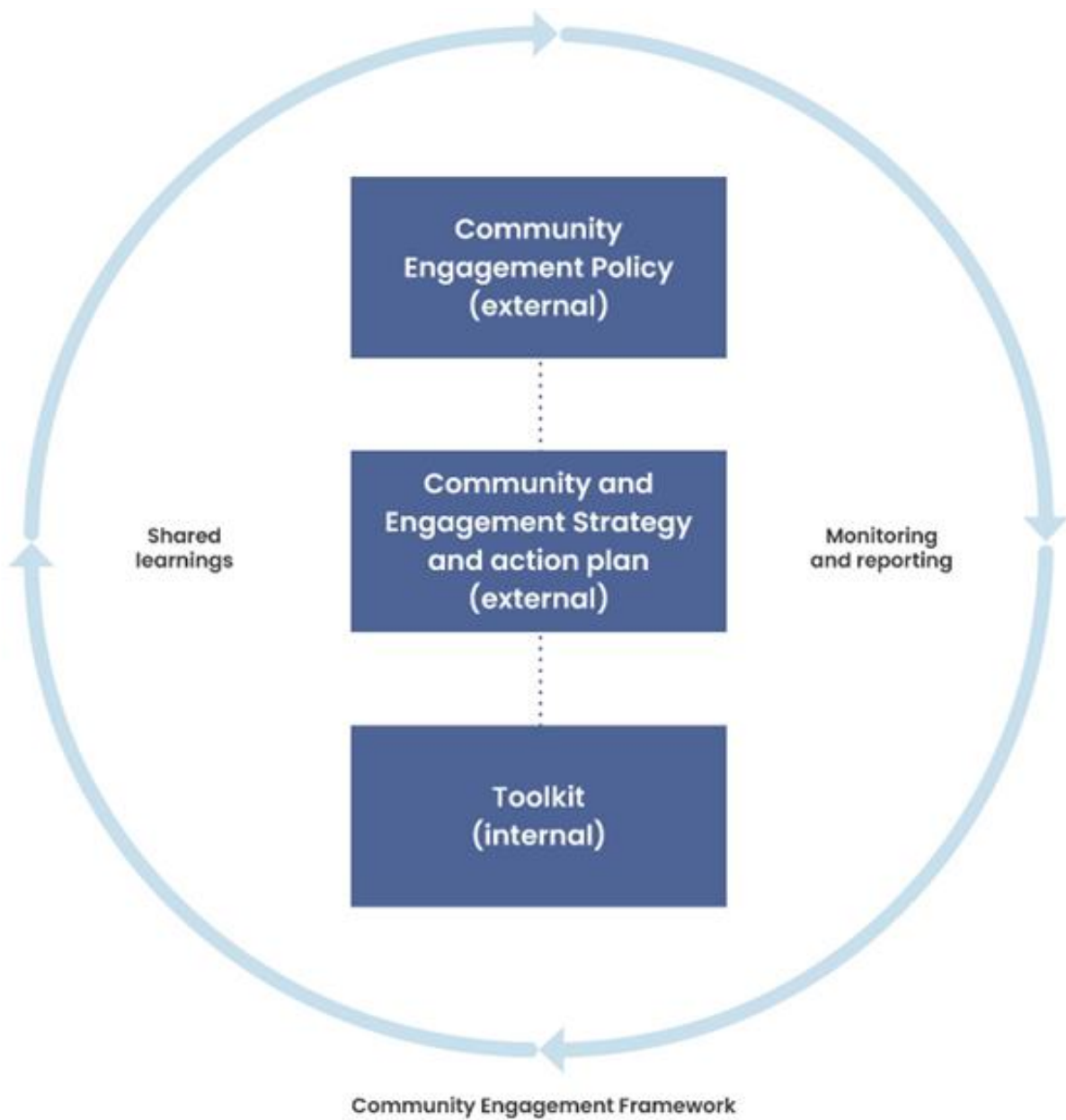
- Our community has a right to be informed of planning matters that affect it
- Planning and programming information should be easily accessible and in plain language

- We engage in early, representative, ongoing, and meaningful engagement with the community using methods appropriate to the significance and impact of proposed planning, programs or initiatives
- We engage in open and transparent decision making, including reasons for planning decisions.

3. Community Engagement Framework







The Community Engagement Framework will comprise of an external Communication and Engagement Strategy, and action plan and an internal toolkit to outline key actions and to support staff.

Figure 1: Maitland City Council’s Community Engagement Framework



The framework is based on IAP2 Australasia’s Community Engagement Model, that succinctly describes the different levels of engagement. The model recognises that community engagement is not a one-way path from Council to community. Council is committed to this approach and will use the model to identify the most appropriate roles for Council and the community.

Figure 2: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

					
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Our role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will keep you informed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will listen, and consider your concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations are reflected in the decisions made 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will look to you for advice and innovation and incorporate this in decisions as much as possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will implement what you decide
Community's role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep in touch (follow Council on social media) Subscribe to newsletters Check Council's website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute ideas and feedback Respond to surveys and polls Make public submissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively participate in workshops and engagement sessions Share ideas, concerns and aspirations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work together to develop solutions Join community panels, committees or advisory groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commit and participate in a range of activities over a period of time
What this might look like	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Factsheets Websites Newsletters Social media posts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys Social media quick polls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshops Pop up stands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advisory committees Ambassador programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citizens jury or panels Participatory budgeting or editing

In most cases, decisions that will impact the community are made by the elected council unless otherwise specified as part of the engagement project or by delegation to the General Manager or other nominated Council officer. There are a range of other factors that need to be considered and balanced during the decision making process such as budget, social, economic, and environmental impacts, legislation, governance, policies, and technical advice.

IAP2’s Public Participation Spectrum will be used by Council to help identify the level of influence and participation that is required. The spectrum also sets out Council’s approach for selecting the tools and channels for different stakeholders for all communication and engagement to ensure transparency about what the community can influence and what it cannot, from Inform to Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower.

Policy Definitions

- Community:** Anyone affected by or interested in a decision of Maitland City Council. It includes individuals and groups of people, stakeholders, interest groups and community groups.
- Engagement:** A planned process with the specific purpose of working with organisations, stakeholders and our community to solve problems and/or shape decisions in relation to a problem, opportunity or outcome. It is also known as community consultation, stakeholder engagement and public participation.
- Stakeholder:** A stakeholder is an individual, a group of individuals, organisation/s or political entity with a specific stake in the outcome of a decision.

Policy Administration

Business group:	People and Performance
Responsible officer:	Manager Communications, Engagement and Marketing
Council reference:	Ordinary Council Meeting 10 December 2024 – 14.1
Policy review date:	Four (4) years from date of adoption
File number:	34/74
Relevant legislation	<p><i>Local Government Act 1993 (NSW)</i></p> <p><i>Local Government (General) Regulation 2005 (NSW)</i></p> <p><i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (NSW)</i></p> <p><i>Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009</i></p> <p><i>Privacy Act 1988</i></p> <p><i>Privacy and Personal Information Act 1998 (NSW)</i></p> <p><i>State Records Act 1998 (NSW)</i></p>
Related policies / procedures / protocols:	<p>Code of Conduct</p> <p>Communications and Engagement Strategy 2024-28 including Community Participation Plan)</p> <p>Social Media Policy</p> <p>Public Exhibition Protocol</p>

Policy History

VERSION	DATE APPROVED	DESCRIPTION OF CHANGES
1.0	28 April 2020	New policy adopted
2.0	22 November 2022	Updated policy in line with Council's Communication and Engagement Strategy 2022-26
3.0	15 April 2025	Updated in line with Council's Communication and Engagement Strategy 2024-28 (including Community Participation Plan) and to reflect recent organisation restructure.