

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY



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Gwydir Shire Council Community Engagement Strategy

Introduction Gwydir Shire Council's Community Engagement Strategy is intended to harness the benefits of on-line engagement whilst retaining the best of print and face-to-face consultation. It contains five key strategies - inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower - and is underpinned by a set of over-riding principles.

As part of the NSW Government's commitment to a strong and sustainable local government system, the Local Government Amendment (Planning and Reporting) Act 2009 was assented to on 1 October 2009.

This legislative reform followed public consultation conducted by the DLG on the integrated planning and reporting package, which included the draft Bill, Regulation, Guidelines and Manual.

The specific aims of the Integrated Planning and Reporting framework are to:

- improve integration of various statutory planning and reporting processes undertaken by councils as required by the **Local Government Act 1993** and the Department's guidelines **Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979**
- strengthen councils' strategic focus
- streamline reporting processes
- ensure that the **Local Government Act 1993** and the Integrated Planning and Reporting Guidelines support a strategic and integrated approach to planning and reporting by local councils.
(Division of Local govt. Dept of Premier and Cabinet)

The Strategy is primarily based on experience and also on research. Source material from several Councils is acknowledged; Bayside, Cairns, Maitland, Hawkesbury, Maribyrnong, Onkaparinga, Rockdale, Mosman(NSW) and Woollahra; along with the Local Government Association of South Australia, Premier's Department of Western Australia, Planning NSW, Department of Premier and Cabinet NSW, the International Association of Public Participation(IAP2) and the Australian Government Information Office.

Gwydir Shire Council believes that the rise of digital information and communication technologies makes possible a new environment for community engagement in our more remote and isolated communities and more use should be made of them to engage the community with the proviso that no sector of the community be disadvantaged.

Purpose “Community engagement is not a magic wand that can be waved to make all parties happy. If community engagements are not conducted in good faith and do not fully engage the community, they can be perceived as cynical and manipulative exercises. They may also be seen as tokenism responding to dominant voices and ignoring the broader community, as a means of co-opting groups or defusing opposition, as falsely raising public expectations, or as substitutes for good government and sound policy making.

This is why community engagements must be conducted in a clear, transparent manner that provides the public and all participants with a realistic understanding of the policy and decision making process and the range of possible outcomes” (*Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System*)

The purpose of this Community Engagement Strategy is to:

- establish standard processes for community engagement
- ensure those processes are implemented by Council staff and where relevant by external consultants employed by Council
- ensure that relevant decision making takes account of outcomes acquired from such processes along with relevant legislative requirements and other Council policies
- ensure where appropriate that the community is kept informed of decisions emanating from Community Engagement.

Scope This Community Engagement Strategy relates to many activities undertaken by Council with the exception of notifications in relation to development applications and other related statutory notifications.

Where legislative requirements or other council policies exist which address specific information/consultation processes, they take precedence, but the implementation of that legislation and those policies should be cognisant of the Community Engagement Strategy.

Benefits There are a number of benefits from having an effective Community Engagement Strategy, including:

- increased community awareness about Council's services, planning and program delivery
- increased awareness across Council of community views and the issues that should be considered as part of the decision-making process
- increased awareness of the needs, priorities and diversity of the local community, which in turn ensures that Council's service provision and planning functions are aligned appropriately
- increased level of community ownership and acceptance of decisions impacting the local area
- council and the community working together to address local issues
- potential for significant time, resource and cost savings for Council.
- commits Council to be open and accountable
- helps Council plan services better to meet community needs and aspirations
- helps Council prioritise services and make better use of resources
- allows broader range of views to be expressed and more information to be assembled prior to making decisions
- enables Council and the community to work together to achieve balanced decisions
- offers opportunities for residents to contribute to and influence outcomes which directly affect their lives

Terms and Acronyms used

Capacity Building	The ongoing development of awareness, knowledge, skills and capability by certain groups and individuals, normally the community, to achieve their purpose.
Community Consultation	The process of informed communication between Council and the local community on an issue prior to the Council making a decision or determining a direction on those issues. Consultation is a process, not an outcome and recognises that Council has the mandate to be the decision-maker.
Communities of Interest	A community of people who share a particular experience, common interest or characteristic. This could include but is not limited to: young people, gender and faith groups; indigenous people, resident groups, environmental groups, social groups and sporting groups.
Communities of Place	A community of people within a defined geographical area, such as Upper Horton or Coolatai.
Local Community	The term ' local community' refers to all residents, interest groups, community organisations, business persons and those who have a vested interest in the future direction of the Gwydir LGA.
Community Engagement	The processes through which the community and other interested parties are informed about and/or invited to contribute, through consultation or involvement, to proposals or policy changes relating to Council services, events, strategic plans, issues, projects and the like.
E-Engagement	Community Engagement carried out by electronic means. Community People who live, work, visit or invest in the Gwydir Shire Council Local Government Area. The community includes residents, ratepayers, State and Federal Government Agencies, non government agencies, the private sector, community organisations and groups, churches, schools and local government partners such as the GLR
Open Data	Public data not subject to privacy, security or privilege limitations that is made available for re-use in any accessible non-proprietary form.

Strategy	The use of the word “strategy” satisfies the foreshadowed requirements of the Department of Local Government through the proposed amendments to the Local Government Act 1993 which relate to Community Strategic Plans being accompanied by a Community Engagement Strategy.
Social media	Social media are primarily Internet and mobile-based tools for sharing and discussing information among human beings. The term most often refers to activities that integrate technology, telecommunications and social interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio. This interaction and the manner in which information is presented, depends on the varied perspectives and “building” of shared meaning among communities, as people share their stories and experiences. Businesses also refer to social media as user-generated content (UGC) or consumer-generated media (CGM). (Wikipedia)
Social networks	On-line communities of people who share interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. (Wikipedia)
Partnership	The process whereby parties work collectively towards an agreed objective or aim. This might include the community, government and non-government organisations.
IAP2	International Association for Public Participation
Action research	A reflective process of progressive problem solving led by individuals working with others in teams or as part of a “community of practice” to improve the way they address issues and solve problems.
DA	Development Application
DCP	Development Control Plan
LGA	Local Government Area

Legislation

Council has a legislative requirement under the Local Government Act 1993 to ensure that community input is a part of the decision making process. Chapter 3 of the Act refers to Councils' charter. Ten of the eleven points in the charter require community engagement:

- to provide directly or on behalf of other levels of government, after due consultation, adequate, equitable and appropriate services and facilities for the community and to ensure that those services and facilities are managed efficiently and effectively
- to exercise community leadership
- to exercise its functions with due regard for the cultural and linguistic diversity of its community
- to properly manage, develop, protect, restore, enhance and conserve
 - the environment of the area for which it is responsible
 - to have regard to the long term and cumulative effects of its decisions
- to bear in mind that it is the custodian and trustee of public assets and to effectively account for and manage the assets for which it is responsible
- to facilitate the involvement of councillors, members of the public, users of facilities and services and council staff in the development, improvement and co-ordination of local government
- to raise funds for local purposes by the fair imposition of rates, charges and fees, by income earned from investments and, when appropriate, by borrowings and grants
- to keep the local community and the State government (and through it, the wider community) informed about its activities
- to ensure that, in the exercise of its regulatory functions, it acts consistently and without bias, particularly where an activity of the council is affected.

Foreshadowed legislation by the State government will require Councils to have formally adopted a Community Engagement Strategy as a minimum. The Community Engagement Strategy prepared and implemented by council must identify relevant stakeholder groups within the community and outline methods that will be used to engage each group.

“The Integrated Planning and Reporting legislation dramatically changes current strategic planning and reporting requirements for NSW councils. Under the legislation, every council will be required to prepare a series of new plans to guide and inform their operations and priorities, and to build strong links with local communities and other stakeholders.

Specifically, the legislation requires all councils in NSW to:

- Formulate and implement a Community Engagement Strategy
- Prepare a minimum ten-year Community Strategic Plan
- Prepare complementary long term financial, workforce and asset management plans
- Develop four-year Delivery Programs and annual Operational Plans with associated
- performance measures to ensure the Community Strategic Plan is implemented effectively
- Improve data collection and research to support the planning process
- Provide regular performance reports to their communities and the NSW Government.” (UTS Centre for Local Govt)

**Suzanne Webber
Social Services Manager
Planner
2010**

Community Engagement Strategies - Overview

The following IAP2 principles will underpin Gwydir Shire Council's approach to community engagement.

- Integrity – when there is openness and honesty about the scope and purpose of engagement.
- Inclusion – when there is an opportunity for a diverse range of values and perspectives to be freely and fairly expressed and heard.
- Deliberation – when there is sufficient and credible information for dialogue, choice and decisions, and when there is space to weigh options, develop common understanding and to appreciate respective roles and responsibilities.
- Influence – when people have input in designing how they participate, when policies and services reflect their involvement and when their impact is apparent.

Community Engagement by Gwydir Shire Council will be made up of one or more of five strategies:

- Inform
- Consult
- Involve
- Collaborate
- Empower

Each has a specific goal, an accompanying promise to the community and a set of methodologies.

An overview follows.



Strategy 1: Inform

Goal To provide the community with appropriate information on Council itself, on governance and decision making mechanisms, on its services, events and projects and any associated issues.

Promise the Community We will keep you informed.

Methodology - how, when, who, evaluation The methodology includes:

- provision of up-to-date information
- use of media
- understanding of how the community prefers to receive information
- in-house publications, and
- on-line information provision - website, email lists, social networks,
- community newsletters, open data

Strategy 2: Consult

Goal To capture community input on strategic plans, directions, issues, priorities and projects.

Promise the Community We will listen to you, consider your ideas and concerns and keep you informed.

Methodology - how, when, who, evaluation The methodology includes:

- community meetings
- surveys/questionnaires
- focus groups
- interviews
- consultative workshops/shop fronts
- community newsletters, and
- on-line comment - active listening, web sites, forums and other participatory sites

Strategy 3: Involve

Goal Gwydir Shire Council Community engagement Strategy Page 12
To work on an ongoing basis with the community to ensure that community ideas, concerns and aspirations are listened to and understood.

Promise the Community We will work with you on an ongoing basis to ensure that your ideas, concerns and aspirations are considered. We will provide feedback on Council's decisions.

Methodology - how, when, who, evaluation The methodology includes:

- consultative groups
- working groups
- volunteer groups
- on-line involvement - open data, web sites, social networks etc.

Strategy 4: Collaborate

Goal To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

Promise the Community We will work together for the best outcomes for our Shire.

Methodology - how, when, who, evaluation The methodology includes:

- community meetings
- working groups
- consultative workshops
- volunteer groups
- on-line involvement - open data, web sites, social networks etc.

Strategy 5: Empower

Goal Gwydir Shire Council Community engagement Strategy Page 13
To place final decision making in the hands of the public through its elected representatives.

Promise the Community We will ensure that the collective position of the community is an integral part of the decision making process.

Methodology - how, when, who, evaluation The methodology includes:

- collation of information to be displayed publicly for comment
- involvement of community
- individual communities of place plans coordinated into strategies

A summary of how Council will undertake these strategies follows.



Strategy 1: Inform

Goal Gwydir Shire Council Community engagement Strategy Page 14
To provide the community with appropriate information on Council itself, on governance and decision making mechanisms, on its services, events, projects and many associated issues.

This is the primary form of community engagement. In order to be able to actively engage in the community and in Council's decision making processes, the community requires information in a variety of ways to reach all sections of the community. For a number of people, depending on the nature of the issue, this may be the only form of community engagement they want.

Promise the Community We will keep you informed.

Methodology - how, when, who, evaluation Provide up-to-date information Make up-to-date information available on Council's processes, meeting agendas and minutes, on services Council provides; including on how the community can access the service, and on how residents may feedback any issues, concerns and suggestions for service improvements.

Ensure that all information provided to the community is in a form that is accessible to all groups in the Community eg: people with disabilities, people with computer literacy difficulties, young people, the aged; and, people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Information is provided in a myriad of ways including exhibitions, posters, leaflets, reports, shopfronts, displays etc. and, all of course, on-line.

Media Continue with a range of media releases distributed to local media and if needed, metropolitan media. All media releases will be posted on Council's website

Understand how the community prefers to receive information Conduct community surveys to analyse, among other things, the community's preferred methods of receiving information. Council will need to conduct a thorough survey of its residents to determine the preferred method of engagement this in itself will require several different methods of engagement, including face to face interviews, on line interactions and focus groups in each community of place.

In-house publications	<p>In-house publications</p> <p>Continue with the production of the Community Newsletter, Council's own publication which will be letterboxed to the community each quarter.</p> <p>Continue to produce additional copies of council agendas and minutes to be available to the public for reference at both Council offices and the Libraries. Consider the production of a range of in-house publications to be made available to residents, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Residents' Kits • Council's Services Directory including Sport and Leisure • Calendar of Events
On-line information provision	<p>Publish all of Council's printed materials on-line, supplemented by additional information, images, audio and video where appropriate. Maintain Council's website www.gwydirshire.com as an authoritative, complete and timely source of information on Council's activities, services and facilities. Make information available in open formats to allow the user to choose the delivery method they prefer, whether it be, for example, a web browser on a desktop PC, a portable device, email newsletter, Twitter alert or social network widget. Improve and promote email newsletter service and allow residents to select topics of interest to them so that they are regularly notified. Participate in and build social networks to allow Council to target its communications better and improve its information provision and promotion. Ensure digital communication is part of the corporate culture and is considered a core business function.</p>
When	Ongoing and as specific events and projects are scheduled.
Who	Entire community.
Evaluation	Amount of positive feedback received on the processes, results from community surveys and visits to Council's websites.

Strategy 2: Consult

- Goal** To obtain community input on strategic plans, directions, issues, priorities and projects. Council will ensure that Community consultation takes place around:
- the 10 year Community Strategic Plan
 - the development of new Council policies, strategies and service plans
 - the review and evaluation of existing Council policies, strategies and service plans
 - the planning and development of new services and infrastructure
 - the ongoing provision, management and review of Council services, and infrastructure
 - the setting of priorities for Council in relation to social and strategic planning, services and infrastructure, and
 - on issues which impact on and or are of concern to the community or to any group within the community, including:
 - broad community issues, eg. community safety;
 - specific issues that impact on a particular group, eg. older people, business community;
 - matters that affect people in a particular street, village or town, eg. cattle grids;
 - matters that affect a particular site, eg. change in land use.

Promise the Community We will listen to you, seriously consider your ideas and keep you informed about what input was received, an analysis of this input and the final decision/s reached following a report to Council.

Methodology - how, when, who, evaluation Consultation methods will be chosen that will not only take account of the primary stakeholders but also be accessible to the broad community. The purpose of each consultation process will be conveyed clearly. This will include:

- what the consultation is to achieve
- background information as appropriate, and
- the role of Council and the community

Community consultation techniques will vary depending on who is being consulted and the nature and complexity of the issue that Council is consulting about. Available resources will also determine the type of consultation techniques that can be utilised ie: the timeframe available for consultation, the funds available, the staffing resource capacity etc.

A range of consultation techniques will be utilised to ensure greater participation levels. These will include Community Meetings, surveys, focus groups, consultative workshops, shopfronts/ markets/Festivals and on-line feedback.

Community Meetings

Council has conducted Community Meetings in all our towns and villages following the amalgamation in 2004. Participation is growing and different techniques for engagement are being trialled. The community meeting / BBQ seems to be a positive way to engage a larger cross section of the community and is growing in appeal. All information in the form of minutes will be made available to the public through Council meetings and on line so that community is aware of issues and topics covered at these meetings. Listed below are suggestions for topics to be addressed at the next round of community meetings. Perhaps the community meetings could adopt a more inclusive approach through a follow up workshop. Community meetings are an opportunity for Councillors and staff to listen to the residents attending and to take ideas on board for discussion at the follow-up workshop to inform the 10 year Community Strategic Plan and to set Council's priorities.

Surveys/Questionnaires

Resources

- Access to an experienced staff member or consultant to design survey
- Staff to undertake phone or personal surveys and collate and analyse data
- Website
- Printing
- Postage
- Telephone
- Up to date mailing lists

Instructions

- Surveys can use questionnaires to collect information and these can be delivered through face-to-face interviews, self completion written forms, telephone surveys, or electronic surveys.
- Determine which type of survey will be most appropriate for the target group and information to be collected.
- Find out what is already known and what relevant surveys are being done or planned elsewhere. This will avoid duplication and will help establish what you need to find out from your survey.
- Talk to locals with strong views and local knowledge to sharpen the focus of the questions.
- Survey writing is a skill that improves with practice and feedback, so where possible seek someone who is experienced in writing surveys who can advise you on the requirements of survey writing, but rely on your own understanding of the issue or topic.
- Preliminary investigations, e.g. focus groups or interviews with people on a 'convenience' basis (outside shops and businesses), can help to develop some of the issues/range of questions needed.

- Determine how the information is to be obtained. Surveys can be done by asking people questions through a mailed survey or in personal interviews, inviting a response through the Council website or by a combination of methods.
- Select your target audience. How will you sample them? What areas of the community do you need to reach? How will you ensure that your survey gives a representation of the ideas of the group?
- Draft the survey questions.
- Trial this with a pilot study to ensure the answers will give you the information you wanted. (Check readability and clarity of questions.)
- Undertake the survey.
- Collate and analyse the results.
- Write a report and make available to those surveyed, to appropriate authorities and to the media. If the report is lengthy and/or detailed, provide a synopsis of the key points.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are one example of an active participation methodology used to explore the opinions, knowledge, perceptions, and concerns of individuals in regard to a particular topic. A focus group typically involves six to ten people who have some knowledge of or experience with an issue or may be randomly selected. Group discussion is led by a moderator who guides participants through a series of open-ended questions. The information gathered can provide important clues to the participants' attitudes and values as they relate to an issue.

Attendances at Focus Groups are usually by invitation targeting specific groups with relevant experience of the subject matter. Randomly selected Focus Groups may also be convened from time to time to allow a wider perspective on specific issues.

Focus Groups should cover groups such as those in the Gwydir Shire Council Social Plan:

- Older People
- Young People
- Children
- Women
- People with a Disability
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People
- CALD

With the addition of groups such as:

- Business Houses
- Agricultural Producers
- Community Groups
- Volunteers

Convening multiple focus groups with different community members on the same topic can strengthen Councils level of understanding about issues associated with the topic of concern. It is important to have a skilled facilitator who encourages all members of the group to participate, to provide a comfortable venue and to ensure that the participants feel confident about expressing their views.

Further efforts may be required to obtain additional comments or views which may not have been articulated during the focus group. This may include follow up phone calls with participants, opportunities to have an informal discussion with participants following the focus group, and/or opportunities for participants to make written or email comments following the event.

Interviews From time to time, for example in the development of the Social Plan or a specific service, interviews are conducted in the homes of some residents, such as the frail aged, the house bound, carers etc; and occasionally at schools or at the Youth Centre with students with special issues or needs.

Consultative Workshops Consultative Workshops are open to the community with the aim of briefing interested residents on specific projects and to get their feedback prior to the preparation of plans such as the Local Environment Plan.

**Shopfronts/Markets/
Festivals** Shopfronts improve participation by taking the Council to the people usually in busy areas like the main street, at our Orange and Honey Festivals and at upcoming markets. The community can drop in at their convenience and display materials are provided along with staff to answer questions. Shopfronts have a relaxed atmosphere and can enable kitchen table style discussions. The outcomes from the two shopfronts held by John Monguard are a case in point and the information gathered is invaluable.

On-line comment Enhance on-line consultation by providing additional channels for community response; for example, using video, discussion forums or comments tagged by Users in their own web spaces and programmatically picked up by Council. Build consultation-specific websites when appropriate and make consultations listed on Council's website more convenient to users by incorporating survey or comment forms directly in the web page.

Participate in and build social networks to allow Council to receive community input from those communities.

Provide direct and timely responses to comments on-line and publish the results of consultations wherever possible.

Maintain a program of 'active listening' or 'continuous consultation' by monitoring mentions of Gwydir on the internet and feeding these conversations to the relevant Council officers. Commit to the use of clear, jargon-free language.

When Council will ensure that the community is consulted on issues which impact on and or are of concern to the community or to any group within the community in a timely manner to allow adequate community comment to occur and be analysed in order to inform the decision making processes.

There will be community meetings held twice a year in each community.

Who All groups/persons who are impacted will be consulted. Stakeholders will vary according to the issue, but could include residents, ratepayers, businesses, volunteers, those who visit or work in the Shire, other service providers/agencies, community groups, other levels of government, peak bodies, etc. It could also include particular groups within the community, eg. older people, families, children, youth, different ethnic groups, business people, people with a disability, etc.

In relation to the Community Strategic Plan stakeholders include:

- Interested residents
- Volunteers
- Councillors
- Staff
- All community organisations
- Schools
- All demographic target groups
- Business community
- Government organisations
- Barwon Local Area Command

Invitations will be sent to all of the above and the whole community will be invited through the media, the internet, flyers, posters and the like.

Evaluation The evaluation process should include promotional techniques, who was consulted, numbers involved, method/s used, adequacy of timescale, information provided, feedback from participants including through surveys and on-line, and web visits and number of contributions.

Strategy 3: Involve

Goal To work on an ongoing basis with the community to ensure that community ideas, concerns and aspirations are listened to and understood and that community knowledge is harnessed for the benefit of all.

Community involvement enables the community to provide ongoing and in-depth input into community planning and into the development of solutions and resources that are best able to meet the community's needs. It also enables the community and service users to have substantial input into the development of services.

Participatory structures and on-line engagement have the potential to empower Communities and to enable residents including young people to gain skills in Community participation. In turn they provide for ongoing dialogue with Council and the potential for higher quality and specialist input into Council's planning and decision making processes.

Promise to the Community We will work with you on an ongoing basis to ensure that your ideas, concerns and aspirations are considered. We will provide feedback on Council's decisions.

Methodology - how, when, who, evaluation

Consultative groups and 355 Committees of Council

Consultative Groups are established by Council. Membership is by invitation of the Council and expressions of interest generally advertised in the media and on the web. It is essential to the balanced operation of any consultative/working/user group and the like that membership is reflective of all views and is regularly refreshed and not "hijacked" by strongly held thoughts of non elected people or interest groups and not become "owned" by a small group of residents. Outside of the "involving process" it is inappropriate for members to lobby or endeavour to politically influence the Council. It should be noted that all meetings of Council and any of its consultative groups are open to the public and should be advertised accordingly.

These Committees include:

- Bingara District Historical Society
- Warialda Historical Society
- Croppa Creek Public Hall
- Crooble Public Hall
- Coolatai Public Hall
- Gravesend Public Hall
- Yallaroi Public Hall

- North Star Public Hall
- Warialda Sports Council
- Bingara Special Events
- Warialda Rivercare
- Aged Services Advisory
- HACC and Disability Services Advisory
- Warialda Tourism Advisory
- Naroo Hostel Advisory
- Tharawonga Preschool Fundraising
- Bingara Preschool Fundraising
- Bingara Showground Advisory

With the possible addition of the following two committees.

Access Group (to replace the Disability Access Committee)

The Group to comprise:

- Two Councillors chosen by their peers
- Two Council staff, namely the Social Services Manager and Building Services Manager (plus an alternative staff member from each section if either of the two members is unavailable)
- Community membership including people with a disability sought via an expression of interest following the annual advertising of the Group in the local media and on-line
- Other potential members may be invited at the recommendation of Gwydir Shire Council and the Group members

Community Safety Group (proposed)

The Group to comprise:

- Two Councillors chosen by their peers
- Two Council staff, namely the Environmental Services Manager and Social Services Manager (plus an alternative staff member from each section if either of the two members is unavailable)
- Police being representatives from Barwon Local Area Command
- Area Health Service representatives would be sought from Hunter New England Health Service
- Community membership sought via an expression of interest following the annual advertising of the Group in the local media and on-line
- Other potential members may be invited at the recommendation of Gwydir Shire Council and the Group members
- The Group may invite a guest speaker with expertise in a specific area of interest and relevance to the Group to address a meeting.

Working Groups Council may establish Working Groups from time to time to focus on particular issues at hand. Each Working Group would be determined by the Council together with specific terms of reference and reporting mechanisms. These Groups are “sunset” groups which cease to function once Council is satisfied that their work is complete. This will give people a specific task to work towards and not have it drag out unnecessarily.

Volunteer Groups The encouragement and support of volunteer groups such as:

- Westpac Rescue Helicopter
- Hospital Auxiliaries
- Cancer Support Group
- Radiance Club
- Carinda House
- Historical Societies
- Tourism Committee
- Bingara and District Vision 20/20
- Warialda Chamber of Commerce

These groups may be facilitated by Council or may be self-forming. They are encouraged and supported by staff who work closely with them. They focus on the service for which they volunteer. Attendance is open to all relevant volunteers and interested residents.

On-line involvement Make more use of on-line spaces – such as blogs and forums - where two-way communication between Council and the community is encouraged and nurtured.

Formalise moderation guidelines and terms of use (community guidelines) to ensure on-line discussions are appropriate, intelligent and lawful. Acknowledge and mentor those community members who are active participants on-line or who wish to be.

Hold workshops for Councillors to encourage their use of blogs and other social media to communicate and converse with the community.

Hold social media workshops at the Library to promote Council's on-line engagement and give practical support for community participation.

Continue collaborative projects on-line that allow the community to document and share its local knowledge while also participating in other collaborative spaces, such as Wikipedia.

Ensure that priority is given to open data formats to allow cost-effective and efficient use of that information by other Council systems as well as external applications and users

Keep relevant senior staff, managers and key professional officers informed of online discussions and report to Council as appropriate.

When Ongoing and as specific events and projects are scheduled.

Who Entire community.

Evaluation Amount of positive feedback received on the processes, results from community surveys, visits to Council's websites, minutes of meetings.



Strategy 4: Collaborate

Goal To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

Engagement at a collaborative level provides the community with a high level of involvement in Council's decision-making. This type of community engagement encourages community members to be involved in identifying solutions to local issues.

Today we face an entirely new environment for innovation and getting things done. The days of the lone genius quietly toiling away in pursuit of that Eureka moment to revolutionise our Council are all but over. We are now in the days of asking and listening to our residents and ratepayers, and working with them for the betterment of our whole community, innovation demands collaboration. In the past we could focus on a single task in an assembly-line fashion, handing our completed activity to the next person who would in turn do the same, until the job was finished. Now the jobs change fast, requiring learning new skills rather than merely repeating the old. We have to seek out people who have other pieces of the puzzle and work with them to tackle increasingly complex issues at a much faster pace.

Promise to the Community We will work together for the best outcomes for our Shire.

Methodology - how, when, who, evaluation

Community Meetings

There are a range of innovative methods which can be used in workshopping forums. A well facilitated community meeting can generate a wide range of feedback about a topic and ensure that many people have their say, not just the loudest and most articulate attendees.

Council has conducted Community Meetings in all our towns and villages over the past few years. Participation is growing and different techniques for engagement are being trialled. The community meeting / BBQ seems to be a positive way to engage a larger cross section of the community and is growing in appeal.

Opportunities may also exist to provide information, or to create consultations at existing community meetings, at the invitation of other groups. Attending existing meetings makes good use of community infrastructure, and if negotiated in advance, is likely to minimise community frustration, demonstrate respect for community processes and to lead to more coordinated engagement.

All information in the form of minutes will be made available to the public through Council meetings and on line so that the community is aware of issues and topics covered at these meetings

Community meetings are an opportunity for Councillors and staff to listen to the community and to take ideas on board for discussion at the follow-up workshop to inform the 10 year Community Strategic Plan and to set Council's priorities.

Working groups

Council may establish Working Groups to focus on particular issues. These groups would be facilitated by council employees to ensure a true collaborative approach is taken.

These Groups are "sunset" groups which cease to function once Council is satisfied that their work is complete. This will give people a specific task to work towards and not have it drag out unnecessarily.

Consultative workshops

Facilitated discussion groups or workshops involving participants selected either randomly or to approximate the demographics of a community, can be a good way to draw out a range of views and opinions. Discussion groups and workshops usually explore a limited number of community or council established issues over a brief period of time. Discussion groups tend to involve relatively open-ended dialogue whereas workshops are generally more structured activities which often combine dialogue with other strategies such as information provision. An action research approach is sometimes the basis for the coordination of these techniques.

Volunteer groups

The encouragement and support of volunteer groups such as:

- Westpac Rescue Helicopter
- Hospital Auxiliaries
- Cancer Support Group
- Radiance Club
- Carinda House
- Historical Societies
- Tourism Committee
- Bingara and District Vision 20/20
- Warialda Chamber of Commerce

These groups may be facilitated by Council or may be self-forming. They are encouraged and supported by staff who work closely with them. They focus on the service for which they volunteer. Attendance is open to all relevant volunteers and interested residents.

On-line involvement - open data, web sites, social networks etc.

To enhance on-line consultation by providing additional channels for community response; for example, using video, discussion forums or comments tagged by Users in their own web spaces and programmatically picked up by Council. Build consultation-specific websites when appropriate and make consultations listed on Council's website more convenient to users by incorporating survey or comment forms directly in the web page.

So that the residents and ratepayers can participate in and build social networks to allow Council to receive community input from those communities.

To provide direct and timely responses to comments on-line and publish the results of consultations wherever possible.

When Ongoing and as specific events and projects are scheduled.

Who Entire community.

Evaluation Amount of positive feedback received on the processes, results from community surveys, visits to Council's websites, minutes of meetings.



Strategy 5: Empower

Goal To place final decision making in the hands of the public through its elected representatives.

Promise to the Community We will implement what you decide.

Methodology - how, when, who, evaluation **Collation of information to be displayed publicly for comment**
All information gathered during the community engagement process will be collated and made available for comment in different forms for access by the whole community.
Closing the 'consultation loop' and informing participants as to how their opinions and information have contributed to the preparation and decision of Council is vital. Providing participants with feedback is important in respecting the partnership and maintaining ongoing engagement with the local community.

The views and comments of participants specific to the consultation process itself is a valuable learning tool. Candid evaluation at the conclusion of each consultation program will ensure that Council continues to improve how consultation is carried out in the future. It should include questions regarding the values of the process, whether the stated objectives and purpose were clear and achieved and whether the methods used were suitable.

To achieve this Council will:

- Aim to include details about the evaluation component in the planning of the project. This will ensure that issues are given due consideration in a methodical manner and where appropriate changes be made to the strategy and/or project to reflect the needs and priorities expressed by the local community
- Clearly outline and communicate the evaluation/feedback mechanisms and decision-making process with participants at the earliest possible stage of the project
- Provide regular project updates and/or feedback on how decisions were made in a timely manner. Within a reasonable timeframe at the conclusion, Council will ensure that the results and reports are made available in a range of formats and in a variety of venues as determined at the commencement of the project
- Provide, where appropriate, opportunities for feedback through a variety of means. This could include written submission via post or email; feedback forms; verbally through meetings and workshops or web-based methods, such as social networks, twitter, discussion boards or e-forums etc.

Involvement of community

Community involvement ensures effective planning and decision making. It provides important information on Council development and identifies major issues and broader community concerns. The Council will work to open up dialogue with the community and provide opportunities for the community to be involved in decisions that affect them.

The Council will seek community involvement through activities such as public meetings and workshops, Community Liaison Groups, media announcements, letterbox drops, advisory committees, newsletters and questionnaires.

Individual communities of place plans coordinated into strategies

Each town and Village within Gwydir Shire will be required to review the existing plans and produce a revised plan for itself that will then be used to form an overall Shire strategy. This will enable Council to establish each communities needs and provide access to appropriate services to meet these identified needs. As with Councils Social Plan individual groups within each community will be identified and engaged in different forms to come up with the best possible outcomes for each individual community. As a whole the Shire will then be able to seek funding and services in line with these needs.

When This needs to be attended to at all times to ensure the Council has the support of its community.

Who Entire community.

Evaluation The generic goal of most evaluations is to provide “useful feedback”. Most often, feedback is perceived as “useful” if it aids in decision-making. In order to make this evaluation “useful” Council will endeavour to monitor:

Content, quality, and relevance of the engagement

- What was learned?
- How will it be used?

Attitudes and achievements of the Community

- What does the community think of the process
- Do they think the process will make a difference in their local area?. If yes, what kind of difference?

Quality of engagement (including facilitator)

- Do people in the community support and agree with the process?
- Do they think the method was appropriate to their needs?
- Does the process communicate information they want to know?

Principles Checklist

The Community Engagement Strategy is underpinned by the following principles which should be heeded throughout engagement processes:

Clarity of Purpose	Clear definition of why the engagement is occurring and its context, in order to plan and resource an effective process.
Commitment	Demonstrated commitment to establish and maintain credibility and accountability.
Hospitality	Friendly, welcoming environment with appropriate refreshments provided.
Respect	Mutual respect for the needs, aspirations and opinions of all within the community.
Accessibility	Ensure that all individuals or groups can access the process. Be sensitive to the needs of particular individuals or groups to maximise their ability to contribute. Provide information in a form that is easy to understand and appropriate for all sectors of the community. Accessibility on-line acknowledges users with a disability as well as those with Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), mobile devices or older browsers. It also takes into account the ability of other machines to read and process Council content and data programmatically for the benefit of users. Practically, this principle requires Council to follow the Web Accessibility Initiative's (WAI) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 available at http://www.w3.org/TR/UAAG20/ , use open web standards.
Communication	Establishment of a two way process of providing accurate and timely information, and demonstration that feedback is being valued.
Evidence	Establishment of good engagement practices that are based on sound research and quality information.
Flexibility & Responsiveness	Establishment of engagement plans that are flexible during the process, eg. time and venue may change due to community feedback.
Timeliness	Ensure that participants know how long an engagement process is expected to last and when feedback is expected at each stage of the process.

Inclusiveness	Ensure that a cross section of the community is invited to the community engagement activity.
Moderation of on-line discussions	<p>A moderation process to ensure the discussion is appropriate, intelligent and lawful. Editing will only occur to remove a contribution that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is off-topic • Is defamatory, abusive, harassing or hateful • Includes any abusive, obscene, indecent or offensive language • Endorses commercial products or activities or solicits business • Violates copyrights or other forms of licences and consents • Invades anyone’s privacy, reveals the identity of another user or impersonates anyone • Encourages conduct that may or would constitute a criminal offence or give rise to civil liability, or that otherwise violates any local, state, national or international law or regulation anywhere in the world It will state publicly when and why a contribution has been edited or removed.
Collaboration	Establishment of partnerships with relevant community groups, State and Federal government, local government partners, other stakeholders, and/or with internal sections within Council.
Ethics	Members of various consultative groups, along with Councillors and staff to adhere to relevant Code of Conduct including requirements to address pecuniary and nonpecuniary interests and to allow the views of all members to be heard.
Don’t over consult	<p>The community is consulted about a range of issues and by a range of people in a range of ways. It is important to recognise this and not to over consult which can result in residents feeling that their time is being wasted and comments such as “we have already told you what we want, why are you asking us again?” This can be avoided by utilising existing research and findings of other consultations that Council or other agencies have conducted, whilst being mindful that contemporary thinking is important to Council’s planning.</p>
Continuous Learning	Establishment of a reporting system to ensure that Council learns from the community engagement activity and is able to monitor and evaluate success to enable improvements.

Gwydir Shire Council Key Stakeholders

Stakeholder Groups	Type of stake			Expectations of Gwydir Shire Council										
	An Interest	A Right	Notional ownership	Accountability	Legal Compliance	Ethical conduct	Consistency in decision making	Open & honest communication	Sustainability commitment	Best Practice Risk Management	Economic responsibility	Socioefficiency	Ecoeffectiveness	Best practice governance
Primary														
Community in general			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ratepayers			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Other residents	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Employees		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Senior Management		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Department Local Government		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
NSW Departments		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Federal Departments	Yes			Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Council's Bank		Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes				Yes
Council's Auditors		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Council's Insurer	Yes			Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes					Yes
Elected Councillors			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Natural Environment	Yes			Yes				Yes	Yes			Yes		
Suppliers		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes							Yes
Secondary														
Contractors	Yes				Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes			
Special Interest Groups:	Yes													
Local Environmental	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes		
Sporting community	Yes				Yes	Yes		Yes						
External Environmental	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes		
Cultural community:														
Indigenous		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	
European	Yes					Yes	Yes			Yes				
Neighbouring LG's	Yes						Yes					Yes		
Tourists/Shire Visitors	Yes						Yes		Yes					
Local media	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes						
Employee groups:	Yes													
Unions	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes		
Professional Groups	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes			
Employer Association	Yes			Yes			Yes							Yes
Business community:														
Local	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes				Yes
External	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes					Yes

Methods of Engagement at a Glance

Level of participation	Tool	Description	Time commitment	Cost	Level of skill required
Inform	Letter	Personally addressed letter, or a non-addressed leaflet or flyer distributed through a letterbox drop to all affected households. It may outline issues and provide information and options for comment or feedback; invite community members to a meeting or event.	Low	Low	Low
Inform	Newsletter	Written material distributed as a Council publication, or as part of an existing community newsletter.	Medium	Low/ Medium	Medium
Inform	Information Posters	Posters containing a synopsis of the issue or information, and how the community can have input into the consultation.	Low	Low/ Medium	Low/ Medium
Inform Consult	Surveys	A statistically correct survey collecting data on particular attitudes, beliefs or information	Medium	Medium	Medium/ High
Inform Consult	Media	The media can be used for community engagement in a number of ways and mediums, and can include media releases in the local and regional newspapers, radio, ads in the local newspaper, radio interviews and a special regular Council page in the local paper.	Low/ medium	Low/ medium	Low/ Medium
Inform Consult	Electronic Media	Material distributed through electronic mediums such as Council website, MySpace and YouTube. Material can include surveys and media releases.	Low/ medium	Low	Low/ medium
Inform consult	Open House/shop front	Used to provide an access point to the public where people can drop in at a time of their choosing, obtain a variety of information about an issue, a proposal, or a draft plan, provide feedback in a variety of ways, and speak to staff or project proposers in an informal way.	Medium/ High	Medium	Medium/ High
Consult Involve/ collaborate	Meeting Planner	Assists Council personnel to appropriately plan for community or stakeholder meetings or events.	Low/ medium	Low	Medium
Inform Consult Involve/ collaborate	Community Feedback Register	A randomly selected group of citizens created to give feedback to Council on its services and priorities.	Medium	Low/ medium	Low/ medium
Involve/ collaborate	Clarifying roles and responsibilities	Used to help a team or committee develop clear roles and responsibilities for members.	Low	Low	Medium
All	Stakeholder analysis	Used to assist in planning for community engagement by developing an understanding of stakeholders, especially in more complex projects. This tool can be used by an individual at the outset of a project, or in conjunction with a community or project reference group.	Medium/ High	Medium	High
All	Community leaders/ champions	To use community leaders/champions actively in engagement activities or programs.	Medium	Low	Medium

Engagement Template (For the Facilitator)

The following process will support the development of successful engagement. It covers:

1. Determining the need for engagement
2. Determining the objectives for engagement
3. Identifying partners in the engagement process
4. Researching partners' perceptions, concerns and needs; and consider relationships
5. The design of key messages
6. The choice of engagement tactics, and
7. Evaluation of the exchange

1. Determining the Need for Engagement

- a. Describe the issue that people will be consulted about.
- b. What is the context of the issue? Consider the public and private interest in the issue.
- c. What engagement is needed?

2. Determining the Objectives for Engagement

Complete the following table. It is recommended that you should not have any more than six overall objectives.

Objective	Outcome

3. Identifying Partners in the Engagement Process

Complete the following table in identifying engagement partners. Given resources and time consideration, who will you consult with?

Partner category	Specific partner list

4. Researching Partners' Perceptions, Concerns and Needs and Considering Relationships

What do you know about the current perceptions, concerns and needs of the partners with whom you wish to consult?

What sort of relationship do you wish to have with each partner during the engagement process?

Complete the following table by stating the most important information for each partner.

Partner Category	Specific Partner List	Perceptions	Partner Concerns	Partner Needs	Desired Relationship

5. The Design of Key Messages

Answer the following three questions to help in the design of messages.

- a. What do you want to get across to partners involved in the engagement process?
- b. What do the partners involved in the engagement process want to know?
- c. What could the partners get wrong or misunderstand unless the correct information is emphasised?

Given the above information, what messages do you want to convey during the engagement period?

Enter a maximum of eight messages below. Each message should only be one sentence long.

6. The Choice of Engagement Methods

For each engagement objective you have listed, please indicate the methods you will be using to achieve that objective. Also indicate the partners for whom these methods will be relevant.

Objective	Methods	Specific partners

7. Evaluation For each of your evaluation objectives, consider how you will know when you have achieved success.

List performance indicators or baseline data needed to evaluate these indicators and any evaluation tactics needed to measure performance.

Objective	Performance indicator	Base-line data required	Tactic/s for getting data to measure performance

For each of the engagement tactics you have chosen, what sort of monitoring will be needed?

List any pre-testing and monitoring methods.

Tactic description	Pre-testing methods	Monitoring mechanisms

Evaluation Checklist

This checklist can be used to assist in the evaluation of community engagement exercises.

Questions	Objectives	Yes	No
	Were the objectives of the Community Engagement exercise clear to all involved?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Was there any legal requirement to consult with the community? Who was Consulted?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Did you get responses from those you most wished to ask? Were you successful in consulting 'hard to reach' and under represented community groups/sectors/members?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Did you provide feedback to those consulted?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Did the people you engaged with feel that the consultation was worthwhile?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	How are you aware of this?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Methods			
	Did different groups respond to the different methods used?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Were the methods used the right ones for your objectives?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	If you used more than one method, which method worked better than others, and why?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Did you get the required:		
	Quantitative and/or qualitative information?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Response rate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Representative sample?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Timeframe			
	Was the time frame clear?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Was the time frame kept to?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	If not, why not? _____ _____ _____		
	Was enough time allowed for responses?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Questions	Information Provided	Yes	No
	Did you succeed in making information available to those you were targeting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Did the methods you used attract the right audience?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Was the information easy to access?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Was the information available in an appropriate format for the various audiences?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Was the information provided relevant to the engagement/issue?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Resources			
	Did you budget adequately?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Were there any unexpected expenses?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Did you have appropriately skilled staff for the exercise?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outcome of the Community Engagement			
	Do the outcomes correspond with what was being sought?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Has the process been of benefit to stakeholders?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	What has changed as a result of the community engagement?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Did you use the views generated by the process?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Follow Through			
	Who will provide the follow-up?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	How will you monitor that agreements made are kept?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Adapted from the Local Government Community Services Association of South Australia, 'Making it Real: a resource for community consultation'.