

Northern Beaches Council Policy

Community Engagement

Purpose of Policy

To outline the approach to community engagement conducted by Northern Beaches Council as part of Council's decision making processes.

Policy Statement

This policy recognises that community engagement and participation processes are a vital part of local democracy. It aims to strengthen the trust between Council and the community and build confidence in Council's ability to plan and make decisions that will respond to the present and future needs of the community.

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. It involves seeking broad informed agreement and the best possible solution for Council and the community, however it does not necessarily mean achieving consensus.

This policy emphasises that the community should be kept informed throughout the consultation process and receive feedback that demonstrates how their input has influenced the decision.

Objectives

- To confirm Council's commitment to conducting quality consultation and its willingness to actively engage the community in its decision making processes.
- To clarify the role that Council will take to engage our community in decision making.
- To develop a framework that ensures a consistent approach is undertaken by Council staff in relation to projects requiring community consultation
- To create an organisational culture and build staff capacity that ensures community engagement processes are seen in a context of adding value, being best practice and good governance.
- To ensure that our community is well informed about issues, strategies or plans that may directly or indirectly affect them and have the opportunity for genuine involvement in decision-making and policy development.
- To seek the views of a wide cross-section of the community, selecting engagement methods that are flexible, inclusive and appropriate to those being engaged.
- To meet Council's legislative requirements regarding community consultation in all areas of its service delivery.

Scope

- This policy applies to all facets of Council's operations including corporate, strategic land use, financial planning and Council's day to day business activities.
- It defines the principles underpinning Council's engagement activities, the role of councillors and staff in engaging with the community and the methods which Council will use to engage with the community.
- Community engagement guidelines for private development are outlined in the relevant Development Control Plans and Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979. The DA process is not within the scope of this policy.
- Community engagement is multifaceted and requires a standard of consultation that appropriately responds to the nature, complexity and impact if the issue/s involved. The range of methods and techniques used may vary depending on the resources that are available.
- Both 'consultation' and 'community engagement' are terms used by practitioners and in literature. However in this model of community engagement, consultation is one of the levels of engagement (as per the IAP2 spectrum below).
- Council's approach to community engagement is based on the spectrum of engagement activities as advocated by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). The five levels of engagement are shown on the table below:

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Public Participation Goal:	Public Participation Goal:	Public Participation Goal:	Public Participation Goal:	Public Participation Goal:
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, 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.

It should be noted that the 'empower' level on the spectrum has limited application in Local Government as the elected Council is the decision-making body. However there may be occasions where non-financial empowerment may occur.

Key Considerations

- The Community Engagement Framework consists of this Community Engagement Policy and the supporting documents: Community Engagement Matrix and the Community Engagement Toolkit.
- Council's Committee and Community Group Framework forms a key part of the overall engagement framework and is an important engagement approach.
- Council will endeavour to ensure that its engagement processes are appropriate, accessible, well-planned and adequately resourced.
- The level of community engagement undertaken relates directly to the level of community involvement required, and should always be appropriate to the nature, complexity and impact of the issue, plan or strategy

- All community engagement activity is to be undertaken in accordance with the principles of engagement (detailed in Community Engagement Matrix).
- Statutory requirements are a minimum and this policy encourages Council to engage the community in addition to statutory requirements providing that any legal timeframes are met.
- Staff will advise elected local representatives of community engagement activities in advance.
- The recommended period for community feedback is 28 days. However this may vary depending on statutory requirements.
- The timing of community engagement activities should take into account key dates, notably the Christmas and New Year period, school holidays and special events. (Refer to the Matrix for more detail)
- For high impact projects or issues that affect the whole of Northern Beaches (eg Local Environment Plan, Community Strategic Plan, Housing Strategy etc) engagement activities are recommended at sites across the LGA.
- In circumstances where the level of involvement requires members of the public to make submissions to Council, content received may be regarded as public and available for general access.
- Prior to any decision Council will ensure that it is well informed of the advantages and disadvantages of alternative decisions on matters before them, including accurate reporting of community comments and recommendations that reflect all sides of the debate.
- Council will provide feedback to all participants involved in a project by closing the loop.

Development on Council Land - Special Consultation Requirements

Council acknowledges that when undertaking high impact development on Council owned and managed land, a community engagement process consistent with the engagement framework will be undertaken in addition to the statutory requirements. This includes early input at the concept design stage. (Refer to Attachment 1 of the Matrix for more information).

Authorisation

This Policy was adopted by Council on [insert date].

It is effective from [insert date].

It is due for review on [insert date].

Who is responsible for implementing this Policy?

Executive Managers, Project Managers and all Council appointed consultants

Document owner

General Manager

Related Council Documents

Community Engagement Matrix

Community Engagement Toolkit (under review)

Legislation and references

Local Government Act 1993 to ensure that community input is a part of the decision making process

International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)

Definitions

Key Term / Acronym	Definition
Community Engagement	“Any process that involves the community in problem solving or decision making and uses community input to make better decisions” International Association of Public Participation (IAP2)
Consultation	A process of community engagement that seeks to inform the community or draw out the views and preferences of the community. These views are used to inform decision makers and should provide a guide to decision making
Community	Community is a broad term used to define a groups of people including people who live, work, study, own property, conduct private or government business, visit or use the services, facilities and public spaces and places of the Northern Beaches area. The community can be referred to as stakeholders or be comprised of stakeholders.
Communication	Generally refers to the exchange of information from Council to the community, and can also include the exchange of information or views from the community to Council
IAP2	International Association of Public Participation (www.iap2.org.au)
Submission	A formal response to a public document made during the public exhibition period.
Comment	A response received during early engagement or consultation that is not part of a formal Public Exhibition endorsed by Council
Committee Framework	The Committee Framework includes Strategic Reference Groups and other committees run by Council.
Level of Impact	The degree to which a community is affected by a decision.
Participation	The degree to which a community is involved in decision making