



Our approach to
Community Engagement.

Douglas Shire Council

Our approach to Community Engagement

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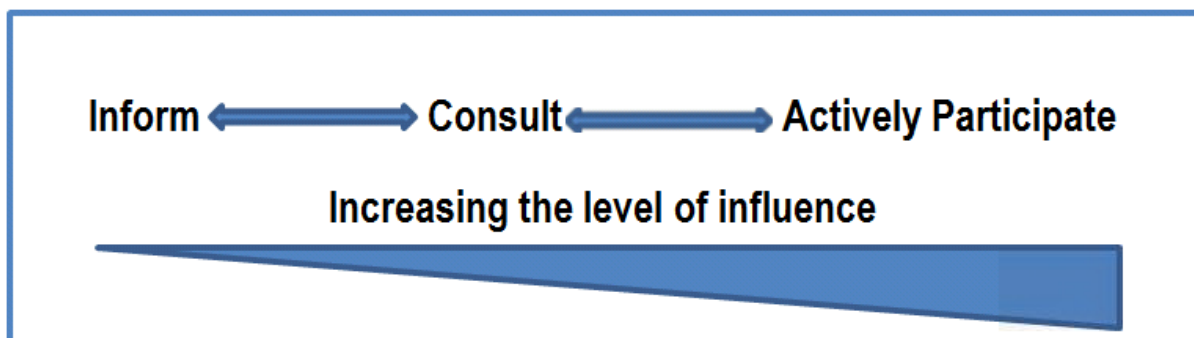
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Our approach.....

The new Douglas Shire Council has a goal to develop and implement policies and processes that are progressive, strategic, best practice and meet the needs of all stakeholders, especially for the communities of our region.

Our engagement framework provides us with a consistent approach when Council is making decisions. It assists us when deciding how to engage people from our communities, other external stakeholders and within our own organisation. We can best consider the complexity of the issue, the potential impact on our communities and stakeholders and have a greater understanding of their respective opinions, preferences and expectations.

Our approach to community engagement can be described as a selection of activities ranging in categories from 'informing' to 'consulting' to having communities 'actively participate' in initiatives which contribute to decision making processes. The people of the Douglas Shire who live, work, play, use services and do business within the region have expertise and local knowledge that should be utilised to inform and influence Council decisions that impact their communities.



As we work together to build strong, vibrant and inclusive communities we are guided by the principles of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). An integral part of governance in Queensland local government relates to meaningful community engagement. Council is required by *The Local Government Act 2009* to perform in accordance with the local government principles that include:

- transparent and effective processes, and decision-making in the public interest; and
- sustainable development and management of assets and infrastructure, and delivery of effective services; and
- democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement; and
- good governance of, and by, local government; and
- ethical and legal behaviour of councillors and local government employees.

What is Community Engagement?

Activities can range from information sharing/ notification, informal discussions, interaction with internal and external stakeholders, general discussions, public forums or meetings and formal consultation processes. Including, Council working with and supporting community members to be proactive in taking action on issues.

Communities are unique and diverse, with issues and priorities that may differ considerably, changes and evolve over time; and may have numerous and opposing opinions. Community engagement activities need to accommodate and consider the diversity and dynamics of the communities of our region and assist different target groups to understand, engage and consider issues constructively; and manage conflicting interests.

Why is Community Engagement important?

Benefits for communities

- Hearing other opinions
- Helping Council understand complex issues
- Learning from each other and working together
- Strengthening community networks
- Building information and skills
- Value ideas/opinions
- Achieving sustainable outcomes

Benefits for Council

- Understanding of community needs and aspirations
- Increasing awareness/understanding of issues
- Identifying challenges/opportunities/solutions not previously considered
- Seeking public feedback for options
- Developing consensus/trust
- Gaining a better understanding of local knowledge/opinion of what will/won't work

Principles of Community Engagement

Council's process of community engagement is underpinned by the following principles:

Purpose

A clear purpose and reason why the engagement is occurring.

Timeliness

A clear period of time an engagement process is expected to last and when feedback will be provided.

Commitment

Establish and maintain credibility and accountability by demonstrating dedication to the community engagement process.

Inclusive

Undertake a range of opportunities and techniques to encourage participation and increase awareness and understanding of all people who may be affected by or interested in the outcome.

Accessibility

Ensure all members of the community are able to access and participate in the community engagement process. Present information 'online' and in appropriate formats that can be understood by all sectors of the community.

Integrity

Be transparent, accountable and not tokenistic.

Respect

Maintain and encourage mutual respect for the needs, aspirations and opinions of all within the communities of our region.

Respect for Country

Council has a commitment to acknowledge the unique position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the 'First Peoples' of Australia. As part of good community engagement planning and design Council will recognise the Traditional Custodians/ Owners of the land and waters in which the community engagement activity is being held.

Welcoming

Provide safe environments and venues conducive to friendly, constructive and productive interactions.

Communication

Establish and maintain a two way process of providing accurate and timely information to the communities of our region.

Evidence

Utilise engagement practices based on best practice, sound research and quality information.

Flexible & Responsive

Be adaptable and flexible to meet the purpose of the engagement, and requirements of the community based on feedback, environmental, social/economic conditions and reasons.

Collaboration

Work in partnerships with relevant community groups, State and Federal government, local government partners, other stakeholders, and/or internally within Council.

Ethics

Consultative/ advisory groups, along with Councillors and staff adhere to relevant Codes of Conduct including requirements to address pecuniary and conflict of interests; and allow the views of all members to be heard.

Respecting Personal Information

Personal information collected from any community engagement activity will be respected as private and will not be shared or used for any other purpose, unless required or authorised by law.

Don't over consult

Respect the community by avoiding over consultation on a range of issues, by a range of people, in a range of ways.

Record & Evaluation

Ensure Council learns from community engagement activities and is able to monitor and evaluate success to enable improvements.