Community Engagement Strategy

2015-2016

Richmond
Valley
Council

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Casino Office:
Cnr Walker Street and Graham Place
(Locked Bag 10)
Casino NSW 2470
Phone: (02) 6660 0300
Fax: (02) 6660 1300

Evans Head Office:
Cnr Woodburn Street and School Lane
Evans Head NSW 2473
Phone: (02) 6660 0365
Fax: (02) 6682 4252

Email: council@richmondvalley.nsw.gov.au

Web: www.richmondvalley.nsw.gov.au

Richmond Valley Council Community Engagement Strategy and Framework

Community Engagement Strategy

The importance and purpose of community engagement

Richmond Valley Council believes in open and accountable governance.

We are passionate about the future of the region; harmonising the needs of the community, stakeholders and policy directions from State and Commonwealth governments is key to achieving balanced decision making.

In 2013 Council adopted its Community Strategic Plan Engagement Strategy. This strategy describes how Richmond Valley Council will engage with the community and acknowledges the desire of Council to share information and experiences to develop a shared vision for the future of our community. This Community Engagement Strategy aims to strengthen that commitment by providing a best practice approach in all community engagement activities. Our engagement process recognises diversity within the community and incorporates a variety of tools and techniques to reach our wide range of community members and stakeholders.

Community engagement does not replace the final decision-making power of Council, but is considered invaluable in the way it enhances Council's capacity to make well-informed, acceptable and sustainable decisions.

Goals and Aspirations

Council needs and wants to show that we are engaging with the community. This Strategy reflects and supports our commitment to:

- Inform the community about Council activities and services.
- Promote community interest in Council activities and services.
- Define pathways for the community to provide comment and feedback.
- Facilitate improved relationships between Councillors and the broad community of Richmond Valley Council.

Objectives

This Strategy and supporting documents will:

- Provide a framework to guide Council's engagement with the community in a meaningful and appropriate way;
- Provide a consistent and flexible process for staff to guide the selection of the most appropriate method and level of engagement for projects or decisions;
- Support the environment of trust and confidence established with community and stakeholders to engender a long term sustainable and productive relationship and commitment to a shared vision for Richmond Valley; and
- Strengthen Council initiatives which involve community and stakeholder partnerships, most particularly to involve the community in the co-creation of Richmond Valley Council's Towards 2025 Community Strategic Plan and Community Vision.

Specific Community Engagement Objectives 2015-2016

- Involve community and stakeholders in the development of Richmond Valley Council's Towards 2025 Community Strategic Plan and Community Vision.
- Upskill Richmond Valley Council staff in community engagement techniques, tools and ideas to improve community participation.
- Identify Councillor participation opportunities at community events and campaigns.
- Improve communication with the broad community using new technologies.

Statement of Principles

Richmond Valley Council will apply the following principles for community engagement and communications.

- **Partnership and respect**

  We seek to partner with our community and key stakeholders and will engage respectfully at all times.

- **Accessibility**

  We will provide access to information that is both easily obtained and understood.

- **Right to be informed**

  Our stakeholders have a right to be informed about Richmond Valley Council decisions that affect them.

- **Proportionate**

  We will involve the community to participate in decisions in a way which is proportionate to the significance or impact of an activity on them.

- **Transparency**

  Richmond Valley Council will make decisions in an open and transparent way and provide stakeholders with reasons for decisions, including how views have been taken into account.

Community Engagement Framework

The Community Engagement Framework is guided by Richmond Valley Council's Community Engagement Strategy. The Framework provides the following:

- Outlines the procedures and mechanisms required to engage effectively with the Richmond Valley community;
- Outlines the tools currently available, and those to be considered for engagement programs; and
- Details the activities required in projects to ensure the community engagement component of everything we do, is planned and executed in accordance with the requirements of Council.

When we engage

Council staff should consider community engagement at any time depending on Council's program of work.

Each time there is a project to be developed or a decision to be made there is an opportunity for a community engagement process. Early notice of emerging issues puts Council in a better position to respond in a proactive way.

In a successful engagement planning process, Council staff should consider the impact and complexity of the issue and the optimal time and tools needed for people to engage and respond. Whilst the Local Government Act 1993 sets out minimum requirements for some specific consultations, each engagement process is considered on its individual basis and merit.

Council's approach to community engagement draws from the best practice principles of community engagement as promoted by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). IAP2 provides a guide for undertaking engagement activities based on the required outcome (attached). This approach underpins Council's engagement focus and provides a clear reference for all staff considering community engagement.

Who is responsible for engagement?

Although Community and Communications staff play a key role in engagement, community engagement is a key component in all Council projects at all levels of activity.

Councillor Involvement

Council staff will raise opportunities for Councillors to be involved throughout the year. These opportunities will be offered according to local geography and issues. Councillor involvement opportunities include but may not be limited to:

- Councillor appointments (face to face and online).
- Pop up shops.
- Mobile library.
- Specific project-based opportunities as they arise.

Richmond Valley Community Engagement Strategy team

This group will oversee the delivery of the Strategy. Participants will include the following with the involvement of the General Manager and other relevant staff as may be required:

Vaughan Macdonald – Chief Operating Officer
Sharon Davidson – Manager Communications
Deborah McLean – Manager Governance, Workplace Relations & Community
Paul Radnidge – Manager Assessment, Environment & Regulation
Kate Olivieri – Coordinator, Community Projects & Social Planning

How we engage

In accordance with our principles as outlined in the Community Engagement Strategy, all our engagements reflect our commitments of:

- Partnership and respect
- Accessibility
- Right to be informed
- Proportionality
- Transparency

Community engagements will be undertaken at various times, however, they must all align with the Community Engagement Strategy, and be guided by an engagement plan. Appropriate support and guidance will be provided to deliver effective and appropriate community engagement activities and initiatives which align with Council's Strategy.

Protocols

Project Requirement	Protocol
Official spokespeople for Richmond Valley Council	• Mayor and/or General Manager.
Written communications Protocols	• All material for public distribution will be approved and signed off prior to distribution • All media releases and responses must be approved in line with established media protocol.
Communications protocol for receiving and responding to enquiries such as: emails, community enquiries, complaint letters	• All written responses will be approved • All calls and inquiries, along with responses, are recorded in a contact database. The database will record names, contact details, query, and response. • Enquiries received by phone to be responded to within two working days.
Media Protocol	• All media engagement is managed by Manager Communications. The media spokesperson is the Mayor and/or General Manager.

Issues analysis, mitigation & management:

Each project will have its own unique set of issues, which could affect the delivery of a project or result in negative or incorrect information being distributed. Thus, it is imperative to identify any potential issues before a project commences.

Early identification of issues, along with the establishment of agreed responses and communications tools, will enable the staff involved to manage issues before they have the potential to become major risks. To define issues, it is important to hold a round table discussion or workshop with key project personnel from management through to support staff, to identify issues at all levels of a project.

Example:

Key Issues	Action / Response/Mitigation Measure	Communications Tool
Traffic	A traffic report has been prepared to support the development application.	Letter Information sheet Q&A to resource staff
Impact on local services	Working with the service provider to gain clear information about the causes, impacts and future benefits	Letterbox drop Newsletter article On site staff
Construction impacts	Early notification Identification of key stakeholders Easy access to information	Door knock 24/7 information phone line Newspaper article

Tools and activities

The community engagement tools and activities outlined below will ensure that stakeholders have access to information and can provide feedback on Council projects.

A range of traditional and modern communication, methods will be used to inform residents and gain feedback on Council activities, services and products. This includes but is not limited to those listed below. Some of these are already in use and others will be introduced as appropriate (see Appendix A: Community Engagement Tools for detailed descriptions).

- Pop up shops
- Mobile Library
- Councillor appointments
- Community information number
- Letterbox drops
- Print media & newsletters - newspapers, community newsletters
- Install wall mounted TV screens/monitors in high-visibility local buildings
- Install community noticeboards
- WalkShops
- Partnerships with schools - such as student workshops and notices in school newsletters
- Online channels - Council website, Facebook, Whispir, Twitter, an App, or other community engagement specific software.

Key Stakeholders

Identification of stakeholders is a key component in creating and implementing successful communications and engagements. Council must meet the needs of a variety of stakeholders; those who have an interest in Council's decision-making and those who are affected by Council's decisions.

Richmond Valley Council engages with a broad range of people who make up the Richmond Valley Community. An effective plan seeks to understand their 'stake' in a project, how they will affect or interact in a project, and the most appropriate people and methods for managing these stakeholders, as well as the best method/s of communicating with each stakeholder. The stakeholder groups outlined below may vary by project based on local geography, interest and issues.

Stakeholder	Consultation Method/s
Richmond Valley residents	Newsletters, letters, Whispir, and any other method below as appropriate
Residents impacted by project or issue	Eg: - Online – via app and Whispir - Letterbox drops - Pop up shops - WalkShops
Aboriginal Community The traditional owners of the land in Richmond Valley LGA.	Eg: - Aboriginal Interagency - Aboriginal Advisory Committee
Ageing Community People 55+	- Place-based groups - Aged and Disability Interagency - Aged and Disability Advisory Committee
People with Disabilities	- Place based groups - Aged and Disability Interagency - Aged and Disability Advisory Committee
Migrant Community	Representative groups
Youth and Children/ Schools	Council staff contacts
Business	Chambers of Commerce
Government (Federal, State and agencies)	- Aboriginal Interagency - Aged and Disability Interagency - Other groups as appropriate
Heritage/ environmental	Council staff contacts
Peak community organisations	Hall committees, informal contacts
Interest/action groups specific to project	As appropriate contacts to Council
Media	Communications staff contacts

Stakeholder database

A stakeholder database records details of stakeholders and community members interested or involved in each project as outlined above. A range of databases are maintained by different operating areas in Council to manage various tasks. Information in the database includes name of organisation/individual, phone number, email contact and/or mailing address as required. Relevant database information should be accessed appropriate to each project. Maintenance of contact information should be included as part of any engagement plan.

Type of database	Responsibility
Ratepayers' Database	Rates Team
Community Engagement Contacts	Community Engagement Team
ECM Electronic Records Management Customer Database	Customer Service Team
Whispir Communications Database	Communications Team

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APPENDIX A
Community Engagement Tools

Engagement tools and activities may include, but are not limited to, the following. Some of these are already in use and others will be introduced as appropriate.

Council is interested in engaging with residents in ways which make information provision and gathering of feedback/input more accessible for time-poor residents. Some of these are already in use and others will be introduced as appropriate.

Tools in use

1. Print media
   a. Advertising in newspapers
   b. Paper (and email) ratepayers' newsletter, community newsletter and other newsletters as appropriate

2. Established tools including newsletters, letterbox drops, website content, stakeholder letters

3. Mobile library
   a. Councillors and staff travelling with the mobile library
   b. More targeted information displays mobile library

4. Councillor appointments
   These would be for residents to meet and discuss specific issues with Councillors, for example
   a. 15 minute face to face meetings scheduled during day or evenings
   b. 15 minute online meetings scheduled during day or evenings via Facebook

5. Facebook
   Already in use as a means of letting residents know about events and other relevant information and Council will continue to expand its reach. It is also a potential source of informal feedback and track how many users are seeing the posts.

6. Advisory Committees & Interagency meetings
   Support Council in carrying out its functions and provide comment on specific issues
   a. Aged and Disability Interagency Meeting
   b. Aged and Disability Advisory Committees
   c. Transport Advisory Committee
   d. Aboriginal Interagency Meeting, Aboriginal Advisory Committee
   e. Youth Interagency Meeting (run by Casino Neighbourhood Centre)

Council is actively investigating the following tools for introduction to the toolkit.

1. **Whispir**

   This is a coordinated platform which allows Council to text, email and call residents. Council will:
   - Ask as many residents as possible to sign up with a mobile phone, landline number or email address on Whispir for up to four text messages per month, and phone calls as appropriate – emergency response information, notification of big events
   - Use Whispir to get feedback on items open for community consultation via text messages from residents to Council
   - An app which has a comments section and survey function

2. **Options for a community based online point of contact (website or app based) will be further investigated and may include**
   - Bang the Table - Online community engagement tool where residents are able to leave comments on specific council projects
   - Social Pinpoint – Smaller scale online community engagement tool where residents can view a map and leave comments on the map of towns/geographical areas. Residents can write things they like, things they don't like, an idea, a traffic problem, or any custom item desired. Council can also post 1-3 projects at these levels.
   - An app which would have functionality across different areas of council such as rates, maintenance, surveys

3. **Install wall-mounted TV screens / monitors in high-visibility local buildings**

   These would be installed in high traffic areas in well-patronised buildings. Potential locations are the Casino and Mid-Richmond neighbourhood centres.

4. **Install community noticeboards**

   Council could install community noticeboards in Casino and Evans Head where staff are based to be able to put information up regularly. A suggestion for Casino has been the side of the new automatic toilet in Walker Street.

5. **School Newsletters**

   Parents and teachers are time-poor and students are difficult to reach. Approach schools to put notices in school newsletters. Agreement has already been given with one local high school to put notices in newsletters (Evans River K-12).

6. **Twitter**

   Potential to use Twitter in conjunction with Facebook through Whispir to disseminate information and also be part of broader conversations about issues for local government.

Project specific activities could also include

Place-based community consultation groups

Geographically based consultation groups for community consultation on specific council projects relevant to the particular area. These would not be a 'town hall' or 'free for all' but rather would invite input on a range of specific issues most relevant to the geographical area.

1. **Pop up shops**

   Opportunity for Councillors and staff to get spontaneous feedback from the community. These could be easily facilitated using Council resources of a marquee, fold up tables and borrowing chairs from the Community Centre or Civic Chambers. Event and Community staff able to assist in set up

2. **WalkShops**

   This is an innovative approach for the community to get involved on specific Council projects. Community stakeholders either walk around take notes with clip board or iPad and relevant council staff or project experts accompany them to say what they either want for an area/project or stimulate group discussions on what is envisaged for the area/project during the planning process.

IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum

Increasing Level of Public Impact →

iap2

	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 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 look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example techniques	■ Fact sheets ■ Web sites ■ Open houses	■ Public comment ■ Focus groups ■ Surveys ■ Public meetings	■ Workshops ■ Deliberative polling	■ Citizen advisory Committees ■ Consensus-building ■ Participatory decision-making	■ Citizen juries ■ Ballots ■ Delegated decision

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