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Introduction

Blacktown City Council has a reputation for working with communities and stakeholders in the development of its policies, plans, facilities and services. Our communities are involved in many ways – from formal responses to Council plans on exhibition, participating in Advisory Committees to help us shape policies, helping us design new facilities or providing customer feedback about our services.

The NSW Integrated Planning and Reporting Guidelines (2009) also require all Councils to develop a Community Engagement Strategy so that Councils can better understand and respond to their local community's needs and aspirations.

This Community Engagement Strategy formalises and documents Blacktown City Council's existing engagement practices and meets Council's requirement to produce a formal strategy. It includes:

- Section 1: A **Community Engagement Policy** which describes Council's commitment to community engagement.
- Section 2: A **Community Engagement Tool Kit** which provides a step by step guide for Council staff undertaking a community engagement process.
- Section 3: An **Implementation Framework** which describes how the strategy will be implemented and reported to Council
- Section 4: **Proposed Whole of Organisation Community Engagement Processes** which describes a number of large scale community engagement proposals for Council's consideration.
- Section 5: An **A-Z Resource Guide** of community engagement techniques which are either currently used by Council or may be suitable to be used by Council staff in their community engagement work.



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Section 1:

Community Engagement Policy

What is community engagement?

Community engagement means communication between Council and community members. Virtually all Council staff members undertake community engagement and for many, it is a major part of their Council role.

Community engagement happens whenever a Council employee communicates with one or more members of the community. It includes everyday interactions such as staff speaking with community members in the street or reserve, over the phone, by email, over the counter, in letters and at stalls during community events. Community engagement also includes information on Council's website and in the local newspaper. When we communicate with community members as part of our job, we represent Council. The way we engage with the community reflects on Council. To many in the community, anyone from Council.

Community engagement is *also* about encouraging and supporting local people to participate and be involved in Council decision making processes regarding the development and operation of Council policies, plans, facilities and services.

Types and levels of community engagement vary according to the requirement, purpose or aim of the work being undertaken. This Tool Kit provides information on the different levels of community engagement and guidance on the issues and actions to be considered for each of these different levels.

At Blacktown City Council we engage our community in many ways:

- **Provision of information:** to provide the community with balanced and objective information to help them understand a problem, alternatives, opportunities or solutions.

Example: Council's Civil Maintenance Team undertake a letterbox drop of streets where they are about to undertake maintenance work to advise the community of the work and provide a contact phone number for issues or questions.

- **Consultation:** to obtain community feedback on alternatives / decisions.

Example: Council's Development Service planners write to neighbours of development applications to advise them of the development and seek their views. Community members can also attend Planning and Development Committee meetings to provide feedback to Councillors on the development.

- **Involvement:** to work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that community concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

Example: Council's Sport and Recreation Services planners seek the input of local communities at open days and barbeques on sites where they are developing facilities and parks.

- **Collaboration:** To partner with the community in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution.

Example: Council's City Project and Transport Services staff held twelve meetings with the future tenants of the Sargent's Centre to collaboratively develop design options for the Centre for presentation to Council.

Definitions

Throughout this document the following definitions apply:

Community (or communities) refers to the people who live, work, play, own land or property, study or visit Blacktown, local community groups and government organisations.

Stakeholder is a person or group who has or feels they have an interest or stake in a project.

In this document, **Project** refers to a Council project, program, service, policy or initiative.

Consultation refers to formal mechanisms to obtain community feedback on alternatives or decisions being made by Council.

Why is it important to engage the community?

The Community Engagement Strategy will assist Council to:

- Understand local community needs and desires.
- Better meet those needs.
- Tap into local knowledge and expertise.
- Have a more informed community.
- Encourage and enable the community to participate in decision making.
- Develop partnerships with local communities and organisations.
- Meet the requirements of legislation, policies and procedures.

Council staff assist Councillors in their decision making by providing:

- Professional advice based on staff qualifications, training and experience.
- Information gained from community engagement processes to provide Councillors with additional information to assist them in their decision making.

Council staff also implement the policy positions developed and adopted by Council and Councillors. Community engagement also requires Council staff to work in partnership with the community to implement solutions or deliver services together.

We are also legislatively required to engage with our communities. For instance:

- A key aim of the *NSW Local Government Act (1993)* is „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.“
- The recently gazetted *NSW Local Government Integrated Planning and Reporting Guidelines (2009)* specifies that Councils undertake community engagement as a core part of their work.
- There are also other consultative requirements in the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act (1979)* and *Principles of Multiculturalism Act (2000)*, which specify how Council should engage with its communities.

Our policy position

Blacktown City Council is committed to engaging with local communities to understand their needs and aspirations, and to ensure that our policies, plans, services and projects reflect these needs and aspirations appropriately and effectively.

Community engagement processes will underpin our work.

We will undertake our engagement processes in transparent and accountable ways working with communities, residents and stakeholders to determine the best way to communicate and provide timely feedback on our response to their input.

Our commitment to community engagement

We value input and feedback during the planning and delivery of policies, services, strategies and plans. It helps us to ensure our work is relevant, appropriate and effective. We acknowledge that often stakeholders have differing views and needs which need to be considered. It may not be possible to satisfy all of these views but we will take them all into account.

We will provide opportunities for involvement. Effective communication needs to underpin the invitation to provide input and feedback. For people to be involved, they first need to understand the issue, then how their feedback can be made and considered. To do this our engagement needs to be carefully considered and planned.

We will provide community members with feedback in relation to their contributions. Providing feedback is an essential part of the process. All feedback will be considered and participants kept informed on the outcomes of these considerations.

We will make it as convenient as we can. We will attempt to use a range of engagement techniques so that we can maximise the numbers of people who can be involved. This may include multiple events or techniques.

Being involved is an individual's choice and right. We will provide appropriate and accessible mechanisms so the community can participate if they wish.

Our engagement will be based on mutual respect. This will be demonstrated through our engagement processes and the value we place on community involvement. We expect this to be reciprocated and the community to respect the diversity of views raised in any engagement.

Council is a stakeholder too. We recognise that our own officers are key stakeholders whose views also need to be sought. We are committed to ensuring effective internal engagement as well as community engagement.



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Section 2:

Community Engagement Tool Kit

The Community Engagement Tool Kit

This section provides a step by step guide for Council staff when undertaking an engagement process. It includes:

- A set of principles to inform Council staff in their engagement.
- A six step process to guide your engagement.
- A list of engagement strategies to choose from.
- A work plan pro forma for you to complete when drafting your Community Engagement Plan.

Principles for community engagement

When you are preparing to engage our community on a project it is important to reflect on the process. We believe that all community engagement should be based on the following principles:

1. Inform our community

It is essential when engaging our community that they have sufficient information to enable participation. This could include providing specific information about a project or broader information about Council's priorities or responsibilities under the *NSW Local Government Act, 1993*.

It could also include information on the constraints such as budget impacts or time. Providing this type of information will help our community to understand the reasons Council makes certain decisions in current and future projects.

When informing the community it is important to write in plain English, without the use of technical terms or jargon.

2. Consult before decision making

For much of the work Council does it is important to talk to the community before decisions are made.

If decisions have already been made it is important that we inform the community of the reasons why the decision was made. This in turn, will assist the community to understand issues faced by Council when developing or implementing projects.

3. Don't over-consult

There may be times where sufficient research and consultation has already occurred about the project. In this instance you need to be careful not to over-consult and you need to inform people about the work that was previously undertaken and the findings.

Over-consultation often results in the comment: „we've 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. It may still be appropriate to confirm the needs or issues you are already aware of.

In many instances it may also be appropriate to undertake joint consultations with other areas of Council or other agencies to minimise repeat consultations.

4. Be upfront and open

Be clear about intentions, the decision making processes and be open about issues and constraints. Share this information with community members so they can be more involved in the process. A transparent process allows the project to stand up to scrutiny from the community and Council throughout the project.

5. Ongoing communication

Communicate regularly to keep the community informed on progress with a project: delays, issues or milestones. It is also important to always explain the process and why and how it was decided. In all communication be careful not to create unrealistic expectations. Provide clear explanations of the nature of the project including constraints and decision making steps.

6. We are not always the experts

Whilst Councillors and Council staff have a wealth of knowledge and experience on local issues, so does our community. It is important that we respect community experience, views and opinions, and engage community members in our processes.

7. Provide feedback

It is essential to provide feedback to our community after consulting with them. People have given their time and knowledge and it is important to recognise this by keeping them updated.

Community members appreciate feedback about how input has been used, the next steps of the project and if there is further opportunity for input. This is particularly important when there are vastly different opinions within our community.

In many instances we will need to provide feedback through various stages of the project. To be able to provide feedback to people who have been involved it is essential to keep accurate records of participants and to utilise this information throughout the life of a project.

8. Evaluate

Evaluation is always important. It allows us to see what we did well and/or what things we could improve for the future. Did we get the information we needed? Did the community feel they were listened to? Did both Council and the community feel it was a positive experience?

Evaluating a project allows us to improve our planning and implementation for future projects. It is always extremely useful to share the evaluation results with other Council staff so we can learn from the experience. This helps to build capacity within the organisation and helps Council to avoid repeating mistakes.

9. Be representative

Blacktown has a diverse population, including large numbers of young families and people from non-English speaking backgrounds and a high proportion of Sydney's Aboriginal community living locally. Any work you do with the community should be representative of the total community (unless targeting a specific community / age / gender etc).

Steps to community engagement

Here is our six step process for engaging our community:

1. Understand the project.
2. Select the primary type of engagement. Is it: provision of information, consultation, involvement or collaboration.
3. Identify the level of impact your project has on the community (and as a result, who can sign off on your engagement plan).
4. Select the community engagement strategies you wish to use.
5. Develop your Community Engagement Plan.
6. Provide feedback to our community.

STEP 1 – Understand the project

In order to select the appropriate engagement processes and tools you need a solid understanding of all elements of the project.

For those projects that fall under legislation such as the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979* staff is required to undertake the process outlined in the legislation and at this stage this legislated process will take precedence over the Tool Kit. However, there may be some elements of the Tool Kit that can be implemented in conjunction with the legislative requirements.

For any project you need to know the following:

1. WHAT is your project? What do you hope to achieve?
2. WHY you are doing the project?
3. WHEN will you do the project?
4. WHERE your project will impact?
5. WHO your project will impact?
6. HOW does your project link to other projects across Council?

The following section provides you with a checklist of information that you should ask yourself in this first step of understanding your project. Here are some questions that will guide the development of your project plan.

Question	Checklist – what do you need to consider?	✓
WHAT is your project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the objectives of the project? • What is the outcome for Council? What is the end result you need to deliver? • You must be clear about what your objective and outcome is because you will need to come back to it to measure the success of your project and the community engagement strategies you have used. • Does your project fall under legislation such as the <i>NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979</i>. If so, the legislated requirements will take precedence over the Tool Kit. However, where you can, you should use the strategies outlined in the Tool Kit. • Does your Team / Manager / Director understand your project objective and outcomes? • Are there political issues you need to be aware of? • Does this need to go to Executive Management Committee (EMC) or Council? • Have you made any assumptions that you need to test? • Have you gathered / researched information on previous or similar projects (either at Council or through other search mechanisms)? 	
WHY you are doing the project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this an action in the Delivery Program / Operational Plan – and will you have reporting deadlines? • Is it because of legislation, policy, procedure or another formal requirement? • Is it because it meets a community need, a Council resolution or a request from another organisation? • Is there other information that you need to refer to or take into consideration? 	
WHEN will you do the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about the timeframe of your project and when does community engagement come into the process. • What is the appropriate form of community engagement? Does your timeframe take this into account? • Does your timeframe fall into the timeframe of other key projects at Council that you may be able to combine aspects of the work? • Are there key issues that need to be addressed by a certain time, and if so can your project be delivered in stages? 	
WHERE your project will impact?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about where your project will impact, is it a neighbourhood, suburb, Ward, the City or Western Sydney? • The scope of your community engagement and the types of engagement tools you will use will be determined by the area of impact you determine. 	

<p>WHO your project will impact?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will your project impact a particular group in the community, geographic area, a cultural group, an age group, a particular person? • It is important to also note that often people fit into a number of groups in the community, for example a young person with a disability who lives in Doonside, etc. • Our Blacktown community is comprised of people from 184 countries who speak 156 different languages. Do you need to provide interpreters or translated information? If so contact Council's Access Worker for assistance. • Council's on line demographic profiles will allow you to look at population characteristics for the whole City, or individual suburbs (or to project ahead by 5, 10 (etc) years. These can be accessed on the Council Intranet and Internet pages. If you need training in using these sites contact Council's Social Planner. • Have you identified all the stakeholders, including resident groups, businesses, other government departments, community / sporting organisations etc? 	
<p>HOW does the project link to other projects across Council and the City?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your project link to other Council or Community projects, and will you be doubling up (or be able to consult together and minimise impact on the community)? • Could you combine your project with another Council initiative? Check with your Manager and colleagues regarding who you should be liaising with. • It is important that you also recognise and understand legislative requirements and existing Council policies and procedures that need to be adhered to. All Council's policies and procedures are available on Council's Intranet. For assistance contact Council's Governance Section. 	

STEP 2 – Select the primary type of engagement

There are a number of types of engagement:

- Provide information
- Consultation
- Involvement
- Collaboration

Your community engagement process will fall into one or more of these four categories. Community engagement is a fluid process and depending on your project you may need to move between different types of engagement throughout the life of your project.

It is also important that you understand when you should engage. Is it at the concept stage when nothing has been decided and there is little or no information? Or is it at the decision stage when you have some information and you need to work with that information? Or is it at the implementation stage when it is usually just for information purposes only?

Informing the community about your engagement processes and the options they have to become involved is important. Therefore, the *provide information* type of engagement should always be implemented as a first step regardless of the type of engagement selected as the primary type.

Recognising and understanding legislative requirements and existing or upcoming Council policies and procedures that need to be adhered to is important. For projects that fall under legislation such as the *NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979* staff must undertake the process outlined in the legislation and this legislated process will take precedence over the Tool Kit.

It is your responsibility to decide on the type of engagement you will undertake for your project. Your decision should be based on the objective of the project and the outcomes you need. By involving the community at an early stage in your project you will address concerns and limit the possibility of problems or issues arising at a later stage.

The following table outlines examples of the four types of community engagement drawn from current open space practices. It is noted that the more extensive engagement types require more resources (time and staff) but produce the more sustainable outcomes.

Type of engagement	Brief description	When is it appropriate?	Open Space example
Provide information	Letting people know what is happening with a Council project and/or process	When Council has a standard design it wishes to use. When a decision has been made due to regulations or a project has very limited impact on the community. Information flow should occur throughout the life of a project.	Letters are sent to residents in an area advising about a playground being developed by Council in an area. A media release is written when the park is completed and open for use.
Consultation	The community provide comment and input (and their input is taken into consideration).	When there is an opportunity for the community to be involved and Council has already identified a number of options. When consultation time is limited.	A survey is distributed seeking community feedback on alternative sites where playground equipment could be located. Following Council's decision participants are advised of the decision and thanked for their participation.
Involvement	The community are involved throughout the whole process to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	When no decisions have been made and there is sufficient time and opportunity for the community to be involved. At the start of a project before any decisions have been made. When there are a number of possible options available. When the project is likely to have a significant community impact.	A focus group with local parents is organised to identify the types of playground equipment needed in a new park. Draft designs are developed and made available for community comment (for participants involved in earlier parts of the engagement as well as general community). These are displayed in local shopping centre and on line for comment. From the feedback received a playground is constructed in the area where the community need it and with the type of equipment that is suitable to that community.

<p>Collaboration</p>	<p>A partnership is formed with the community (and local organisations) in each stage of the decision making process including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution.</p>	<p>Where the issue is not the sole responsibility of Council (either statutory or in by influence).</p> <p>Where there are insufficient resources to undertake a project and the assistance of partnership organisations makes the project more viable.</p> <p>Where the development of partnerships will have long term benefits on the operational and maintenance regimes and increased community ownership.</p>	<p>The State Government invites Council to participate in development of a new regional open space area on State Government land within the LGA.</p> <p>A meeting of community members and relevant community and Government organisations agencies is called and agrees to work together to oversee the development of the open space area.</p> <p>A Partnership Agreement is signed between the partners describing how the partners will work together in the development, operation and maintenance of the open space area.</p> <p>Council facilitates local community and stakeholder participation in the planning processes. Community planting days are organised as part of the construction.</p> <p>The Community are invited to an official launch and thanked for their involvement and support.</p>
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STEP 3 – Identify the level of impact the project has on the community (and if you need to develop a community engagement plan)

In order to know what level of impact your project will have you need to think about two key things:

- Who is affected?
- What is the area that is affected?

The level of impact chosen will have an impact on the level of documentation and method of consultation required (i.e. will a *Community Engagement Plan* be required).

The table below outlines four levels of impact and a brief description of each:

Level of impact	Brief description	Will a Community Engagement Plan be required?
Level 1 (High LGA)	High level of impact on the whole or a large part of the Blacktown Local Government Area (LGA).	Plan required.
Level 2 (Lower LGA)	Lower level of impact on the whole or a large part of the Blacktown Local Government Area.	Plan is optional. However, you should consider the community benefits and economies that a Plan could deliver.
Level 3 (High Local)	High level of impact of a local nature, on a local area, a specific community or target group.	Plan required.
Level 4 (Lower Local)	Lower level of impact of a local nature, on a local area, a specific community or target group.	Not required. Follow standard practices and work instructions.

The approval sign off processes for your Community Engagement Plan is similar to the existing advertising sign off process (through your Manager, Manager Civic Events, Public Relations and Industry Relations, Director and General Manager). You may also wish to seek the advice of the Manager Community Development regarding the methodology you have proposed.

Projects that are being planned at a local level may also impact on projects being run at an LGA level (and vice versa). For example, a community safety program run by Council in Willmot Park will also impact on and need to relate to larger City Wide Plans such Council's Social Plan, Cultural Plan Community Safety Plan or Recreation and Open Space Strategy.

If you are unsure on what level of impact your project may have or what other projects you might need to connect with it is suggested that you liaise with your Manager and other relevant staff.

Where legislation requires a particular consultation process to be followed (such as the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979*) this legislated process will take precedence over this Tool Kit.

Following are the criteria for determining this level of impact, including examples. There may be times when your project meets some of the criteria, but not all. It is up to you to be flexible and use your judgement to decide the most appropriate level.

Level of Impact	Criteria for determining level of impact	Examples of projects / initiatives
<p>Level 1</p> <p>High LGA High level of impact on the whole or a large part of the Blacktown Local Government Area (LGA).</p>	<p>A project that impacts a substantial and significant range of the community (area or people).</p> <p>High level of real or perceived positive or negative impact, or risk across the LGA.</p> <p>Potential for a high risk controversy and / or conflict across the LGA.</p> <p>Likely high level of interest from the community.</p> <p>Any significant impact on attributes that are considered to be of value to the whole of Blacktown, such as the Hawkesbury / Nepean River or regional facilities.</p> <p>Potential high impact on state or regional strategies or directions.</p> <p>Any impact on the health, safety or wellbeing of the broader community.</p>	<p>Council's annual Operational Plan and its components such as Fees & Charges.</p> <p>Significant policies/plans/strategies such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability Action Plan • Capital Works Program • Social Plans • Environment Sustainability Framework • Recreation and Open Space Strategy <p>Development or upgrading of district or regional facilities (e.g. Stanhope Gardens Library).</p> <p>Changes to Blacktown wide services or service levels (e.g. resource management).</p>

<p>Level 2</p> <p>Lower LGA Lower level of impact on the whole or a large part of the Blacktown Local Government Area.</p>	<p>Some lower level real or perceived positive or negative impact or risk across the LGA.</p> <p>Potential for some controversy or conflict across the LGA.</p> <p>Potential for some (although not significant) impact on state or regional strategies or directions.</p>	<p>Revising the Capital Works Program.</p> <p>Minor modifications to fees and charges.</p> <p>Minor changes to service delivery.</p>
<p>Level 3</p> <p>High Local High level of impact of a local nature, on a local area, a specific community or target group.</p>	<p>High level of real or perceived positive or negative impact or risk on a local area, specific community or user groups of a facility or service.</p> <p>Significant change or loss to any facility or service to a specific community / target group.</p> <p>Potential for a high risk controversy and / or conflict in the local community.</p>	<p>Removal or changes to a local facility, service or facility such as public toilets, roads and parks</p> <p>Planning for new or upgraded local area facilities and services.</p> <p>Proposed major works on local facilities or infrastructure.</p>
<p>Level 4</p> <p>Lower Local Lower level of impact of a local nature, on a local area, a specific community or target group.</p>	<p>Lower level of real or perceived positive or negative impact or risk on a local area, small community or target group of a specific activity or service at a local level.</p> <p>Slight change or loss to any facility or service to a local community / target group.</p> <p>Low or no risk of controversy or conflict in the local community.</p>	<p>Implementation of a small localised community project for example developing a new program in a leisure or community centre.</p> <p>Minor maintenance to a local facility (park, road, footpath).</p>

STEP 4 – Select the community engagement strategies you wish to use

Having selected your primary type of engagement (step 3) it is now time to review the range of potential engagement strategies that you might wish to use

Following is a list of strategies. More details on each strategy can be found in the A-Z of Community Engagement (refer to Section 3 Resources of this Tool Kit). You are also encouraged to look at published practices elsewhere.

You are required to choose (based on your professional experience) those strategies that will be best engage your communities.

INFORM

To provide the community with balanced and objective information to help them understand a problem, alternatives, opportunities or solutions:

- Add information to Council webpage
- Issue Media Release
- Include in Mayors column
- Include in City News Newsletter
- Provide information to Council staff (intranet or GM Circular)
- Letter box drop neighbourhood
- Write to key stakeholders / direct mail out
- Place information in „on hold „ telephone message
- Write to key stakeholders / direct mail out
- Place article in community newspapers or new resident kits (new release areas)
- Produce a fact sheet / brochure
- Translate fact sheet
- Develop display – Shopping Centre outreach
- Develop display – Foyer Council buildings
- Develop display – Festival or Event

CONSULT

To obtain community feedback on alternatives/decisions:

- Consult within Council
- Public exhibition, inviting submissions
- Hold public meeting / forum
- Conduct a focus group or workshop (smaller and more interactive than public meeting)
- Community auditing/profiling
- Provide interpreters (if requested) at public meetings or forums
- Invite feedback through networks and e-mail lists
- Make a presentation at existing forums and Resident Action Group meetings and obtain feedback
- Use Council website to obtain feedback – survey or general comments
- Interview (face to face) – telephone, shopping centres, listening posts, vox-pops (refer to A-Z for more information).
- Provide suggestion boxes in foyers of Council buildings
- Interview people at existing events
- Use creative arts consultation techniques (art works, photography, theatre)
- Attend Council's Advisory Sub Committees and seek feedback (Youth ASC, Seniors ASC, etc)

INVOLVE

To work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that community concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered:

- Public or neighbourhood meeting
- Community Conference
- Establish an advisory / steering committee
- Develop a partnership agreement / memorandum of understanding with partner agencies
- Attend Progress Association or Resident Action Group meeting and develop partnership

COLLABORATE

To collaborate with the community in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution:

- Public or neighbourhood meeting
- Establish an advisory committee
- Develop a partnership agreement / memorandum of understanding with partner agencies
- Attend Progress Association or Resident Action Group meeting and develop partnership
- Undertake charrette / design workshop to develop design for park, centre, etc
- Citizen Panels

STEP 5 – Develop your community engagement plan

This section seeks to assist in the development of your community engagement plan. We suggest that you discuss it with colleagues before presenting it for approval through your Manager and Council processes.

A copy of the plan can be found over the next two pages.

BCC Community Engagement Plan:

Will need to be completed for all Level 1 and Level 3 projects, is desirable for Level 2 projects and Optional for level 4 projects.

Name of project:

File number:

Responsible officer:

Ext:

What other BCC plans, projects or services will your project impact on (and you will need to become familiar with)?

List the key BCC and community stakeholders (people and organisations) you will need to engage:

What level and types of community engagement will you use?

Are there any hard to reach community members you will need to engage (and how do you plan to)?

What BCC permissions / policies will you need to use (e.g. Media, Insurance, event)?

Step	Resources required	Budget	Who responsible to implement?	Specific approvals required this step. E.g. media	Key milestone (outcome)
Understand the project					
Select the primary type of engagement: inform, consult, involve, collaborate					
Identify the level of impact your project has on the community					
Select the community engagement strategies you wish to use					
Develop your Community Engagement Plan					
<i>(Use more rows/pages as necessary)</i>					
Provide feedback to our community					

Signed (officer):

Date:

Approved Manager

Approval Director

Approval General Manager (where required)

STEP 6 – Provide feedback to your community

This is undertaken after you have implemented your engagement processes or key stages of your engagement process.

It is important when working with the community to provide feedback to those people who have participated in your project. This will not only increase their understanding of the process and the decisions but will also improve your relationship with the community, which will assist you in future projects.

In order to provide ongoing feedback to the community it is important to maintain accurate records and databases of who participated in the consultation process. This will assist you to make contact with people involved throughout the life of a project.

The most appropriate way to provide feedback to participants is by direct letter or email. Some other ways you can provide feedback to the community include the following:

- General flyer
- Information on website
- Through the local media
- Holding a meeting
- Newsletter.

Some of the things you may want to provide feedback on, include the following:

- Outcome of the process
- Changes to the agreement or plan
- Date and content of a Council Report
- New information.



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Section 3:

Implementation Framework

Organisational coordination and delivery

The Community Engagement Strategy will be implemented in the following ways:

- All Council staff and teams will have responsibility for delivering community engagement processes.
- Council's Executive Management Committee will oversee the process to ensure that the Strategy is delivered effectively and cost efficiently.
- Council's Manager Community Development will oversee the delivery and reporting of the Strategy. This will be through Council's current Quarterly and Annual Reporting processes.
- To ensure that there is a whole of organisation approach to implementation, the Manager of Community Development will be supported by a cross functional team with representatives drawn from the various Directorates.
- That the cross functional team will champion community engagement processes by:
 - Establishing an Intranet page that provides information on useful contacts within Council, examples of survey forms, reports on previous engagement processes and other resources drawn from each Directorate.
 - An occasional series of training presentations where Council (and other) staff will share their experiences and learnings from community engagement processes.
- Council reports where appropriate will include a heading **Community Engagement** that will describe how the community were engaged in the development of that report, policy, plan, project, facility (etc). That this will include a description of the engagement processes used and the total number of people engaged (so that a collective total of people engaged across Council can be assessed each year).



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Section 4:

Whole of Organisation Community Engagement Processes

Whole of Organisation Community Engagement Processes

Three major community engagement processes are proposed to provide Council with the opportunities to engage the community for its integrated planning and reporting (and to provide a larger scale process for gaining community input):

Community Open House:

In the first year of each Council term it is proposed to hold five “Community Open House” type events (one per ward):

- Each event would include fun activities (jumping castles, BBQ) as well as information stalls on Council services available to that Ward (e.g. Library information, Leisure Services program advice, tree give-aways, recycling information).
- Each would not take the form of a public meeting. Rather people would come and go throughout the day and provide feedback about what they “like about their neighbourhood” and “the one thing I would want to change in my neighbourhood”.
- Information would be collected in different ways (e.g. children could draw, young people could record comments on a video, people could add their comments to an interactive display wall).
- Information from these days would be summarised and provided to Councillors to assist them in their planning for the upcoming Council term (and Council’s Four Year Delivery Strategy).
- The conferences are estimated to cost \$2,000 each (total \$10,000).

Online Community Engagement Tool

On line community engagement tools are used by other Councils. Community members participate in on line moderated forums providing feedback on particular issues or about particular Council plans or strategies on exhibition.

Large numbers of people visit Council’s website (for example in February 2010 there were 34,299 visitors to Council’s webpage). This is a large number of people who might be potentially engaged in other issues whilst they are visiting our website.

It is acknowledged that in certain levels of our City computer access levels are low. Council is supporting the establishment of computer training facilities in suburbs such as Wilmot and Lalor Park. We would also need to encourage on the ground survey support in these areas.

Annual telephone survey

An annual telephone survey with a statistically valid sample size provides an opportunity to engage community members.

- The Integrated Planning & Reporting Process requires Council to report annually using a Quadruple Bottom Line approach. Council's current indicators often measure the output of services (how many books borrowed from library, utilisation rates childcare, etc).
- A telephone survey (repeating the same questions annually) will allow Council to develop additional community customer service satisfaction indicators, social capital indicators and self reported environmental practice indicators.
- A telephone survey will also allow Council to ask respondents the extent to which the issues they identified at the community conference are being effectively dealt with by Council.

The cost of a telephone survey would depend on the number of questions being asked and sample size. It would be expected to be between \$60,000 and \$80,000.



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Section 5:

A to Z Resource Guide to Community Engagement

The A to Z of community engagement

This section provides a list of community engagement activities. Users are encouraged to seek more information on any of these opportunities by using a desktop audit / internet search.

Advisory Committees

Blacktown City Council operates a number of Advisory Sub Committees. These Committees serve an important role in providing specialist advice to Council. Advisory Committees are made up of community members and are guided by Terms of Reference that specify the role of the committee. Advisory Committees operate under Council's corporate policy framework, including the Code of Conduct.

Committees are elected for a four year term that runs parallel to Council's. Most Advisory Committees are chaired and supported by a nominated Councillor. Examples of Advisory Committees are Council's Aboriginal Advisory Sub Committee and Youth Advisory Sub Committee.

As well as directly participating in your consultations our Advisory Committees can assist you to develop and tailor your community engagement strategy.

Bang The Table

„Bang The Table“ is an on line community engagement tool used by many Councils. Community members participate in on line moderated forums providing feedback on particular issues or about particular Council plans or strategies on exhibition. Examples of forums being run by other Council's can be viewed at www.bangthetable.com.

City newsletter

Council produces a colour quarterly newsletter that is delivered to every household in the City. This provides an invaluable opportunity to provide to inform the community about a project, service or consultation.

Council's Public Relations, Civic Events and Industry Relations team are available to support and assist you develop content. „The Bulletin“ is best suited for engagement about processes that you are aware of sometime in advance.

Community auditing/profiling

This is often a good tool to use when first thinking about community engagement.

Community auditing means using a range of different techniques to build up a picture of the profile, needs and experiences of a group of people. This could be in a particular area or a particular community of interest.

They could be used to explore a particular issue. For example, you could undertake a community health audit or a community safety audit.

You should use a range of methods to gather information about the community. This can include:

- Gathering quantitative data about the community
- Surveys, focus groups and resident interviews
- Visual methods – for example mapping strengths and weaknesses of the area
- Bus trip or drive through an area
- Neighbourhood walks, etc

You should design the community engagement methods that you use based on your own local circumstances. It is important that you involve communities in designing the way your community audit will be undertaken.

Community conferences

Community conferences bring together local people to receive information and give feedback on issues of shared interest. Community conferences provide an opportunity to inform local people and receive feedback on the plans, service developments or strategies for an area.

Community conferences are one-off events and can be limited in terms of the depth of community engagement that can be obtained. They can also be the first step in developing more in-depth community involvement.

Community conferences can be advertised as public meetings to which local people are invited to attend. This can make it difficult to plan numbers so the advert should be backed up by direct invitations to representatives of community groups and other community networks.

Generally the conferences involve presentations on the topic or proposed plans followed by the opportunity for attendees to have any questions answered. Opportunities for more detailed, in-depth participation can be provided by breaking up participants into smaller workshop groups.

At the end of the conference there should be a review of the day and clear indications given to participants on what happens next and how their feedback will be used.

Community information directory

Council's online directory LINCS provides a list of thousands of Blacktown City organisations and groups. Information is updated on an annual basis. It is important to enter the nearest postcode of the area you are searching (or the directory will default to Mt Druitt). The directory is accessible from the home page of both Council's Intranet and Internet.

A hard copy of the directory is also available from Council's Library Services.

Community Meetings

Community meetings generally occur on significant issues facing Council, sometimes in response to a community interest in a particular issue. They may be held at a community venue, at the site of the matter under engagement or at the Civic Centre.

Invitations can be sent by one or more engagement methods including public notice in local newspaper, letterbox drop or other media outlets.

Council WebPages

Council's intranet (internal) and internet webpages (external) are important opportunities for engaging communities. Thousands of people visit Council's website each week all of whom are potential stakeholders for engagement.

Council has established guidelines and protocols for gaining content approval and uploading material onto both the intranet and internet. These can be found on the Council Intranet.

E mail groups:

Staff in many units across Council have established e-mail groups (i.e. lists of people interested in a particular issue). For example, bushcare, community safety, transport forum issues.

For confidentiality reasons these lists cannot be circulated generally – however the responsible e-mail list owner may send out your material to these groups if you ask.

Fact sheets

It is important to be clear about your message. What are you communicating and why? Developing a fact sheet of the information you are communicating and your key messages is often useful step in an engagement process. The fact sheets can also be edited to become brochures or pamphlets.

Focus groups

Focus groups are small-group discussions that give in-depth information and views on a specific topic. Focus groups are often a helpful addition to resident surveys as they will allow any emerging issues to be explored in more depth and in a less restrictive way.

Focus groups need to be kept relatively small so that everyone has the opportunity to contribute and there is scope for discussions between participants. Normally they should involve no more than 10 people.

You may need to hold more than one focus group around a topic. For example in understanding the community safety issues around a CBD area you may wish to hold separate focus groups with different stakeholder groups such as retailers, taxi drivers, and people with disabilities.

iD on line demographic data

Council's on line demographic profiles will allow you to look at populations characteristics for the whole City or individual suburbs (or to project ahead by 5, 10 (etc) years. These can be accessed on the Council Intranet and Internet pages. If you need training in using these sites contact Council's Community Development Unit.

Interactive displays

Interactive displays offer people the opportunity to make comments and give feedback on information or options presented to them through the display.

Interactive displays can be run in a range of different ways. Firstly, they could simply involve giving people the opportunity to ask questions about the display – for example through setting up a stall. Other methods can also be used - such as stickers, comment cards or graffiti walls which allow people to write or draw their views on the display.

Interactive displays can be a useful technique for involving people who are not used to being consulted on their views or who may be less confident about expressing their views using more traditional engagement methods. Displays can be mounted at shopping centres, Council's Civic Centre or the foyers of Council Leisure Centres, Libraries, etc.

Market Place

The Market Place is a technique for involving participants in creative thinking and promoting their solutions to a specific situation. Participants are grouped into workshops or small focus groups to come up with ideas or solutions to tackling identified issues or needs. Each individual workshop has to agree what they think are the best or most effective solutions to put to the rest of the participants.

The groups then enter into a market place to sell their solutions to all participating. The participants are given votes or stickers to vote with and have to choose and prioritise what they think are the appropriate solutions.

Multimedia displays

Multimedia displays (in foyers where people are waiting, in shopping centres and as part of a presentation to a community group help engage people by delivering messages through text, audio, music, still images, animation, video and interactivity.

Multimedia is usually played through computerised and electronic displays such as data projectors.

Council's Public Relations, Civic Events and Industry Relations, Graphic Services and Multimedia Services can assist you to develop a presentation.

Open House

An „Open House“ event involves using a local venue as a drop in centre, allowing people to gather information and share their views. An „Open House“ event should usually run over a period of time – such as a whole day and evening – allowing different people to access the event. The principle is that people are able to attend whenever and for as long as they wish, making involvement more accessible to a wider cross section of the community. Generally events are held in trusted and well known local venues. This will clearly depend on the community but may include libraries, family centres or schools.

At the event people should have the opportunity to gather information – for example through stalls and displays – as well as share their views – for example through workshops running throughout the day. People are able to choose which parts of the event they participate in.

The day should also include „fun“ elements – such as games for children and classes for adults. This can be a good way of attracting people to attend this kind of event.

Park Committees

Blacktown City Council operates a number of Park Committee's in our City. Park Committee's provide the mechanism and opportunity for residents and user groups to: develop a working relationship with Council; foster community development and harmony; provide input to Council's processes associated with the production of plans of management and master plans that meet the needs of park users and the wider community; and provide information to Council concerning the use of the facility and potential future needs.

As well as directly participating in your consultations our Park Committees can assist you to develop and tailor your community engagement strategy.

Partnerships

Working in partnership with communities or stakeholder groups involves a long term commitment to engaging with individuals and groups. This is often seen as the most intensive community engagement method.

Working in partnership with communities involves ensuring that people are able to influence the decisions that are made on a particular issue through long term involvement in decision making structures. This can involve setting up a community engagement structure which feeds into decision making. For example; Council's Social Planning processes involve an annual planning day where local agencies come together to develop partnership projects for the coming year.

This approach is a valuable way of ensuring that the skills and experiences of different communities in your area are able to influence the planning and delivery of services and activities. It can be a way of providing an overall structure to your community engagement activities.

Participatory Action Research

Action research means that local people or community groups carry out their own research into the needs and experiences of their community. Local people should largely define what research needs to be undertaken and how this will be done. They are then involved in actually undertaking the research – for example through community surveys, open days and so on.

The approach gives local people power in defining the issues that affect them and the way these should be explored. It is often an effective way of doing local research as local people often have good links with the community, and can encourage higher rates of participation.

Resident Action Groups

Did you know that there are resident action groups and progress associations across Blacktown? These groups meet on a regular basis and often have their own website or newsletter. You may engage the communities that these groups serve by writing to them (or attending a meeting) to seek their input. A list of these groups can be found on Council's Community Information Directory (see elsewhere in this list). These are potential stakeholders to connect with. Contact Council's Community Development Unit for more information on Ext 6054.

Scenario Planning

Scenario planning is a technique that tests out a number of "future scenarios" for the development of a community or neighbourhood. By looking into the future scenario planning can help communities or organisations explore the impact of decisions. These are usually quite specific scenarios such as school closures or the building of a new road.

Most scenario planning events usually run over a series of workshops. Participants work in small groups to envisage what things will be like in the future under a range of proposed scenarios. The aim is that this will enable consensus on how best to deal with the issues that either pose a threat or opportunity for the future of an area or organisation.

Social Plan

Council's Social Plan is an important tool for community engagement. Every five years Council undertakes a range of Community Engagement activities to develop its Social Plan. Then each year Council engages local community/human services workers to inform the implementation of the Social Plan and the development of an annual Social Plan Action Plan. The activities undertaken and the documents developed can inform and assist you in your community engagement strategy.

Surveys

Resident opinion surveys involve people responding to a questionnaire either through completing a form or answering the questions in an interview. For example, door-to-door, on line or street interviews.

Resident surveys are a way of finding out the opinions of local people on a particular topic in a structured way that can be extensively analysed. They are also a method for gathering data on the profile of an area and to act as a baseline for measuring changes in people's views.

They can also provide an opportunity for people to find out about the study or initiative that is taking place. Questionnaires can also be a prompt to further involvement, with participants asked if they would like to receive information or invitations to events in the future.

These surveys have the potential to reach a large number of people and can be a way of gauging the views of people who may not be in a position to engage in other ways.

Story Dialogue

This approach involves bringing together people with different experiences of an issue to raise awareness and create understanding.

Story dialogue involves sharing experiences of a particular issue. It can be a way of raising awareness about an issue, for example, if you wish to get people involved in community safety issues you may wish to bring together all the different people who have a view on an issue like street safety at night, for example; the police, ambulance staff, community workers, young people or older people.

A critical part of the story dialogue approach is to ensure that all participants are able to put across their views and experiences in a non-judgemental setting.

Story dialogue is best used when everyone has different opinions and views on an issue and you are keen to build understanding and joint working to address the issue. It can be a useful first step in bringing people together to work jointly.

Telephone survey

Telephone surveys, whilst an expensive process, provide an opportunity to engage and compare community responses over time. They need to have a large sample size to ensure they are statistically valid.

Translations

Remember that the people of Blacktown come from 184 countries and speak 156 different languages. Do you need to provide interpreters or translated information? Council Community Development Unit has a budget for translating fact sheets, survey forms and posters.

Working groups

Council may form a working group of interested community members and agency representatives to answer a question, develop a project, explore an issue or develop options.

Working groups should have clear terms of reference and time frame for reporting back. Membership of working group should be chosen to represent the diversity of stakeholders involved in the issue or project.