



Community Engagement Strategy 2018

1. The Purpose of the Community Engagement Strategy

Balonne Shire Councillors and its Officers are collectively committed to the long-term vision of leadership in local government that enables a continual improvement in the wellbeing of our communities.

It is with this commitment that community engagement becomes an essential part of our decision making.

This strategy was devised to assist the Councillors, Council Officers and the community in choosing the most appropriate community engagement process relevant to the issue at hand. The Strategy is not intended to be a prescriptive “how to” document, but rather acknowledges the adaptive nature of any community engagement process. The overall objective for the community engagement process is to provide techniques and tools which are designed to involve people, solicit their opinions in the process, planning and decision making of Council.

In some instances, a range of techniques and processes may be required to suit particular circumstances. Using more than one technique may result in greater participation and representation; it all depends on the circumstances at any given time.

2. Understanding Community Engagement

2.1 What is Community Engagement?

Community Engagement has become an essential part of planning, policy development and service delivery and is a recognised method of how Balonne Shire Council can be responsive to community needs. It is a process of working collaboratively with people to address issues affecting their wellbeing and the development of the Shire. Community engagement promotes responsible and informed decision making by understanding the needs and interests of participants, the broader community and the Council.

2.2 Why a Community Engagement Strategy is Important

This strategy has been developed to highlight the benefits of Council and the community working together. The strategy will provide a framework for selecting the most appropriate Community Engagement process relevant to the circumstances and issue being addressed. This will allow the Council and the broader community to have an understanding of how they can be involved in large and small projects or policy making in a co-ordinated and meaningful way.

2.3 What are the Core Values about the Community Engagement Process?

The following values help identify those aspects of public participation which cross all cultural and religious boundaries. The purpose of these values is to help make better decisions which reflect the interests and concerns of people and their organisations:

The public should have a say in decisions about actions that could affect their lives:

- Public participation promotes responsible and informed decision making by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants within the broader community
- Public participation includes the promise that the public’s contribution will be meaningfully considered in decision- making processes

- Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by, or interested in, a decision
- In significant projects public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate
- Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way
- Public participation communicates to the community how their input affected the decision

3. Council Actively Seeks Community Participation

3.1 Council's Commitment for Inclusion

Balonne Shire Council will encourage all interested parties to be involved in the Community Engagement process by providing equal opportunity and accessibility for participation. Council will endeavour to make all Community Engagement processes sensitive to the needs of particular people and groups to maximise their ability to contribute.

3.2 Council's Commitment for Process

All Community Engagement plans should be delivered in consultation with the Community Development Officer, and where deemed appropriate, the Senior Leadership Group (SLG) and the Communications Officer.

The purpose of each engagement process will be clearly documented and state whether the purpose is to inform, consult, involve, collaborate or empower.

A Community Engagement Plan will be developed for every relevant Council project. The plan should be devised with flexibility to suit any changes in the consultation process to gain better outcomes.

The engagement process will be timed to ensure that community input is able to be considered in decision-making. Council will allow a reasonable timeframe for community response during all consultation processes.

Evaluation is also a very important part of the ongoing development of Community Engagement processes. Evaluation should focus on the impact and process of the engagement and should include views or feedback from its participants.

3.3 Council's Commitment to be Responsive

The engagement process will provide the community with knowledge and understanding of how their inputs will be used.

Council will consider the submissions of all community members.

The engagement process will include feedback to participants and ensure that all input is considered.

Council will make reasonable attempts to resolve conflicts if they arise and reach appropriate equitable solutions.

Council will communicate its decisions with those involved in the engagement process.

3.4 Council's Commitment for Accessibility

Council will provide options for Council information to be available in accessible formats including large print upon request. It will facilitate interpretation of any Council communication material upon request from the State or Federal Translating and Interpreting Service.

The first part of engaging the community is to ensure that all communication will be in plain English, free of jargon. If technical terms are used, they will be adequately explained.

Whenever possible, Council will conduct all community engagement meetings at universally accessible venues.

Decision making should be based around the needs of the broader community and should take into account the views of all persuasions, whether they are the strongest voice or the smallest. When making information available about decisions, Council will endeavour to inform the public of any technical constraints which must be covered.

3.5 How Community can get Involved

Community members should be encouraged to talk with Council about issues that may affect them. Although Community Engagement processes usually have a designated time for feedback and participation, the public is always welcome to put their point of view to Council and there are a number of ways in which this can occur by:

Contacting a Councillor

All Councillors are representatives of the community; as such people should feel free to contact them and discuss issues. The contact details as available on Council's website and at the Council Offices.

Contacting Council

Writing to:

Chief Executive Officer
Balonne Shire Council
PO Box 201
St George QLD 4487

Or

Speaking to

One of our Customer Service Staff
118 Victoria Street
St George QLD 4487
Phone 07 4620 8888

Or

Emailing us: council@balonne.qld.gov.au

Or

By visiting our website at www.balonne.qld.gov.au and go to our "Email" link

3.6 Advisory Committees

In a number of community engagement activities Council will, either on a short-term basis or on an ongoing basis, use an advisory committee to assist. The roles and responsibilities of a Balonne Shire Council advisory committee unless otherwise stated are as follows:

Terms of Reference and Role of an Advisory Committee of the Balonne Shire Council:

The Community Engagement Advisory Committee will be appointed in an advisory capacity and will have no executive authority.

The Advisory Committee Will:

- Advise on strategies to enhance and promote community participation
- Identify and advise the Balonne Shire Council on priority areas and issues requiring community participation
- Assist the Balonne Shire Council in their communication with the community

- Generally advocate on behalf of the community to the Balonne Shire Council
- Assist the Balonne Shire Council in the development and monitoring of service quality and accessibility.

4. What Level of Community Engagement is Appropriate to the Issue?

Community Engagement and decision making must be considered within the context of the issue at hand. Some issues are easily defined with basic considerations, other issues are extremely complex and are often the focus of media scrutiny, lobbying by interest groups and require detailed technical information.

The first step in planning of any community engagement process is to be clear about the aims and objectives. A table with Balonne Shire considerations is provided on the following pages.

Balonne Shire Council acknowledges many ways to approach Community Engagement and it has adopted the International Association of Public Participation – IAP2 Spectrum (below) as its guiding framework to provide a clear approach and understanding of expectations within the Community Engagement process.

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
To provide the community with balanced and objective information to assist with understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions	To obtain community feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions	To work directly with community representatives throughout the process to ensure concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with community 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 community
Corresponding commitment to each engagement level				
We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and feedback on our community input influenced decisions	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how community input influenced the decisions	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible and provide feedback on how community input has influenced the decision	We will implement what you decide

The following table provides ways in which the five levels of Community Engagement processes can be defined. It should be noted that not all of the processes listed in each category may (or should) be

used for each issue or event, but there may be several combinations used depending on the circumstances and the level of participation realistically available to Council and/or any participating group.

INFORM	Advantages	Potential Pitfalls
Public information sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content of information can be controlled. • Can be more cost effective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be seen as propaganda – one side of the story • Does not build two-way relationships
BSC website information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electronic information can reach larger audiences • Most up-to-date information can be made available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all Balonne Shire residents have any or efficient communications • Some distrust of electronic processes
Notices to residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be targeted to specific groups 	
Advertisements in the local paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertisements can be multilingual and easily include pictures, diagrams and plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be costly • Readership of the traditional format is declining
Briefings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful method in building network relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can raise the level of expectation/influence of those being briefed may have over the total process • Could be viewed as one sided • Some processes may be seen as alienating for some
Education & awareness activities/programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essential in behavioural change – i.e. animal control programs, compliance requirements • Other agency dedicated staff for particular projects – i.e. St George Chamber of Commerce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excludes people with low literacy levels or visual impairments
Newsletters (including electronic)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficient way to get succinct information to a broad range of people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-electronic newsletters can be relatively costly to publish and distribute • Electronic newsletters distribution constrained by extent of distribution database
Media releases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be produced to target particular audiences – or 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May miss target groups • Uncontrolled editing may cause misinformation or

	<p>designed to attract a particular demographic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be in different languages • Reaches a larger number of people • Cost effective • Quick to arrange and execute 	<p>key items being omitted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not encourage two-way relationships • Sometimes limited in its scope
Council office, library and/or shop front displays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be held at established community places of interest, places where people go to get information • Can build relationships with attending staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource intensive – staff to attend and answer questions • All information may not be able to be displayed in appealing visual format • Are only available to people using those particular venues. May disadvantage some groups or individuals

CONSULT	Advantages	Potential Pitfalls
Information via media and call (ask) for public comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concise targeting can provide detailed responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited to those who wish to write a response
<p>One to one</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Question/answer and response sheets, asked in person or sent out to residents then followed up with a phone call</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Phone calls made to randomly selected people</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good process to explore in depth issues for sensitive or complex matters • Can be multilingual and an effective method for those with limited literacy skills • Enables comparative research on different issues • Empowering for participants as they get to provide “their side” of the issues in a narrative manner • Achieves random opinion • Can coincide with other events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May raise “over consulted issues” and not be a positive or constructive response • The collection and analysis of data may require specialist skills to produce accurate reporting • Resource intensive • May not be a broad ranging as other techniques • May be limited survey data, depending on resources • Outcomes may be difficult to interpret due to complex answers • Collation of data after survey may be difficult

<p>Open days and public meetings where displays are on show and aims/input is clearly requested</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates open and transparent processes • Provides “first hand” learning about proposals and projects • Is time limited • A good way for staff to get to know the community • Engages in conversation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be resource intensive • Can raise issues about loudest voice is heard and all else ignored
<p>Web-based consultation</p> <p>All online consultation tools should be considered along with the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactive websites • Internet surveys • Discussion boards • Email feedback • Online forums • Online chat rooms • Facebook 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential to reach large audience • Single use survey or gauging of public sentiment has ability to open the age demographic of participants • Uncensored information gathering • Quick time turnaround of opinion • Can be cost effective particularly if using an established site • Can be far reaching • Participation times can be scheduled to suit individuals/groups • Anonymity may appeal to give honest responses • Can encourage individual responses rather than group responses (group think) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May require suitable targeted questions as information may be hard to decipher as part of chats or online topics • Assumes all have access to technology • Anonymity may provide people with ability to skew responses as they are able to have multiple responses • Uncensored information gathering may require a moderator or facilitator to lead online discussions • May not be representative of general public opinion • Privacy and confidentiality issues may arise • Limited to those with internet access

INVOLVE	Advantages	Potential Pitfalls
<p>Community engagement workshops, focus groups – brainstorming sessions, direct ideas and concepts, visions, writing workshops</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targets specific groups • Best way to rapidly engage and receive input • Structure can vary to increase number of outcomes • Improved capacity building and ownership • Can evolve over the scope of the project • Can be flexible and responsive and may change the initial direction of the issue • Community ownership of the process • Brainstorming is easy to organise and conduct and closely involves those who take part helping them realise their ideas are considered valuable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation may not be representative • Produces qualitative, not quantitative information which is more difficult to collate and interpret • May not add any more value to an information session unless structured to obtain particular outcome/s • Background information may not sufficient, resulting in little response to brainstorming • Requires quality facilitators to get the best from processes • Some irrelevant material will be collected as process allows free thought and discussion
<p>Polling – closed questions (yes or no) Solicit involvement by direct conversations with residents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows a quantitative, measurable assessment • Quick way to obtain a response from a large number of people on many issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assumes a level of knowledge • Significant effort to ensure response sample is representative of broader community • Does not generally provide information about the topic, just as a response • Does not generally build two-way relationships and exchanges

COLLABORATE	Advantages	Potential Pitfalls
Specific purpose committees – invited reps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports community engagement relationship building within community • Capacity building of individual members • Generates ideas • Usually representative of larger community opinion • Could create intra-group relationships and trust • Sharing of knowledge base 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs to be well resourced and supported • May attract only vocal members • Difficult to ensure genuine representation • Longer term commitments may not be sustainable by community reps • May fail to engage marginalised groups or people
Concepts workshops or enquiry by design (where interested people come together to identify issues, deliberate on preferred outcomes and create plans for the future)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes joint problem solving and creative thinking • Creates working partnerships with the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships may not be representative of whole community • Difficult to engage groups usually marginalised from consultative processes

EMPOWER	Advantages	Potential Pitfalls
Delegated decisions Community panels, committees in charge of the whole process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full community ownership and decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If process fails, the burden may lay with the authority that has the ultimate responsibility for the issue/project

5. WHAT NEEDS TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN?

Throughout the planning stages of the proposed Community Engagement activity, several questions may need to be considered. Once the technique of Community Engagement has been identified these questions may also be of value before, during and at the time of evaluation for any community engagement process undertaken.

Balonne Shire Issues	Considerations may include
GOALS & OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is Balonne Shire Council engaging the community? • What does Balonne Shire Council hope to achieve from the process? • What time commitments must be met? • Do the benefits of engaging outweigh the costs of not engaging?

COMMUNITY TO BE TARGETED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A geographic community? • Why is Balonne Shire Council engaging the community? • What does Balonne Shire Council hope to achieve from the engagement? • What time commitments must be met? • Do the benefits of engaging outweigh the costs of not engaging? • Are other organisations/authorities also engaging this community? • Is collaboration possible or necessary?
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POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What level of political support or awareness exists about the proposed engagement? • Is the process part of a broader government agenda? • Is this a contested issue?
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CAPACITY TO INFLUENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this a government or a community initiated activity? • What decisions have already been made? • What decisions can the community have input into? • Legislative environment • Is engagement required by legislation? • Are any parts of this project or engagement process supported or constrained by legislation?
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Balonne Shire Council Issues	Considerations may include
POLICY AND PLANNING CYCLES CORPORATE CULTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where does your engagement fit within the policy or planning cycle? • Is there a high level of understanding of, and commitment to, community engagement within Balonne Shire Council? • Is there openness to use more innovative engagement processes?

RESOURCES **NOTE – COMPETENCIES AND AVAILABILITY OF STAFF AND OR CONSULTANTS WITH SKILLS TO IMPLEMENT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS A KEY CONSIDERATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What resources are available to support the engagement, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Skilled facilitators and managers? ○ Information and communication technologies? ○ Engagement structures such as Advisory Committees? ○ Budget allocation? ○ Staff time?
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Community Issues	Considerations may include
DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the age and gender mix? • What levels of literacy exist? • What is the socio-economic mix – is it representative of the whole community? • What languages are spoken in the community? • What cultural protocols need to be adhered to? • What percentage of the community is employed and when do they work? • Do community members have access to transport?
PREFERENCES FOR ENGAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have community members expressed particular preferences regarding engagement e.g. to be involved in information sharing, consultation or active participation?
PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE(S) WITH THE BALONNE SHIRE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has previous engagement with Balonne Shire Council been largely positive or negative? • What percentage of the population has not previously engaged with Balonne Shire Council? • Is there trust and connectedness within the community with the Balonne Shire Council?
CAPACITY FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do community members have the knowledge needed to participate? (e.g. to critique planning models, understand architectural/engineering plans) • Do community members have the resources needed to participate? (e.g. time, internet access) • Do community members have the skills needed to participate? (e.g. public speaking) • Do community members have access to necessary infrastructure needed to participate? (e.g. childcare, transport, disability access)

EXISTING ENGAGEMENT STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there existing networks, committees, structures to support a Community Engagement process within the community? • Who are these contact people? • Are there sporting, religious, professional and other groups who already engage with the community? Will they support this engagement? • Are there existing newsletters, radio stations, website, etc that the community accesses?
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NATURE OF IMPACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is directly impacted by the issue? • Who is indirectly impacted by the issue? • Who is interested but not necessarily impacted? • Is public opinion positive, negative, divided or indifferent?
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Process Issues	Considerations may include
INCLUSIVENESS & DIVERSITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What consideration needs to be given to venues, language, print type, timing, etc to ensure that engagement is accessible to all? • Is capacity building required to enable all people to be effectively engaged? • What techniques are required to enable all voices to be heard? • What promotion is required to encourage wide participation? • Are there groups of disengaged or unengaged people within the community who could be engaged? • What will it take to engage these groups? • Can engagement processes be implemented in times and places that are comfortable to the community? • Can engagement processes link with community radio stations, newsletters, websites etc? • What transport arrangements need to be organised to support participants who would not otherwise be able to attend? • Can we provide disability access for differently aided people? • Does information need to be provided in languages other than English and/or large font format? • Can the information be articulated to those who are illiterate or those with disabilities?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will diverse groups interact well in group situations or are parallel processes required? • Are there cultural protocols which need to be honoured? • Will targeted processes and/or culturally, age and gender appropriate facilitators enhance the effectiveness of engagement?
BEING LISTENED TO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will community members gain from being engaged? • How will community members' contributions be recognised and valued? • How will community feedback on the engagement process be received and used? • Will engagement processes be flexible to accommodate changing community issues? • Is Balonne Shire Council listening or just talking?
INTEGRITY OF PROCESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can the honesty, openness and accountability of the engagement process be demonstrated? • Is there a commitment to carefully planning, implementing and evaluating the engagement technique? • Are there sufficient resources to implement the technique effectively , including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Advertising and publishing, printing and circulating information? ○ Hire of venue, facilitators, translators, childcare, staff, catering, meeting costs? ○ Professional, technical, casual and support staff? • Will the technique build government and/or community capacity for future engagement? • Will the technique build trust between Balonne Shire Council and the community? • Will the technique support sustainable community and/or State/Federal Government outcomes and funding requirements/

6. Community Engagement Plan and Template

All Community Engagement activities conducted by Council will have an engagement plan developed which has been endorsed by the Community Development Officer, Senior Leadership Group and Communications Officer where appropriate. Appendix 1 contains a template for a Community Engagement Plan.

7. Follow Up and Feedback

As people are often asked to contribute in a voluntary way and give many hours of their time in Community Engagement processes, it is essential to provide feedback to participants. It is equally

important to recognise that this feedback allows participants to see if their opinions, views and ideas have been accurately represented in the decision- making process which will increase their sense of ownership of the outcomes of that particular issue.

It is wise to establish very early on in the Community Engagement process 'the how', 'the when' and 'by whom' this follow up and feedback process will occur.

Generally, within any Community Engagement process, questions and answers throughout the meetings always play a large part, as feedback spontaneously occurs, however it is vital that participants know the process follow up and feedback arrangements.

In short, follow up and feedback will:

- Give confidence in continuing participation
- Clarify if community views have been understood
- Foster relationships between all parties
- Build trust in the community engagement process
- Provide measures of effectiveness of the community engagement techniques used
- Answer questions raised by participants
- Detail and changes made along the way
- Provide any information about future participation

Some methods of how follow up and feedback will be provided could include:

- Writing letters or emails to all participants
- Providing summary report workshops or community information sessions
- Acknowledging written submissions
- Presentations to community groups
- Publishing newsletters, posters, etc
- Publish on the internet or interactive website (chat room, Facebook, etc)
- Media releases and communications
- Using informal networks
- Talking to participants individually – phone or face to face
- Sending SMS messages on where information can be found

8. Evaluating Community Engagement Activities

Every Community Engagement project should have a level of evaluation; this will provide an insight as to the appropriateness of the Community Engagement process and any pitfall or successes which may be helpful for future engagement sessions.

All aspects of the Community Engagement plan should be evaluated, with particular attention given to the following:

- Who is doing this role and how is feedback being provided to those involved?
- Was the engagement level used appropriate?
- Did the tools used help achieve the stated aims and objectives?
- Did the process benefit stakeholders?
- What has changed as a result of the engagement process?
- Did the engagement process influence the outcomes of the project?
- Did the participants receive appropriate feedback throughout the process?
- Were timeframes met?
- Was there anything about the process that could be improved for the next time? If so, how will this information be documented, passed on to others and used in future planning of Community Engagement activities?

Some of this evaluation should be performed along the way and should involve participants. Some options that will assist in accurate evaluation could include:

- Asking participants to fill out a simple evaluation survey at the end of each phase of engagement so reflection can become part of the engagement process and that the desired goals of the Community Engagement process are being achieved
- Keeping a record of meeting attendance numbers, contact details and where the participants came from at each stage of the engagement process