

Community Engagement Policy

Purpose of this policy

The purpose is to define our commitment to engaging with our community and stakeholders on Council led projects. This involves communicating with, and listening to, our community prior to, during and following decision making.

Policy Statement

Engaging with our community is a vital part of local democracy.

We are committed to delivering best practice community engagement to support effective, robust and sustainable decision making which leads to better outcomes for our community and the Council.

We recognise that open, accessible and diverse engagement can help build social capital which in turn can also lead to deeper, stronger and more trusting relationships between Council and the community.

Objectives

Our key objectives are to:

- provide clear, accurate and easy to read information
- offer accessible and diverse ways for those impacted, or interested, to provide feedback
- transparently report back to our community to show how we considered the feedback received.

Scope

This policy applies to all Northern Beaches Council projects that require planning, implementation, reporting and evaluation of community and stakeholder engagement.

Projects for this purpose may include, but are not limited to:

- policies, frameworks, strategies, studies and plans including plans of management
- environmental assessments
- open space, streetscape, facility and other infrastructure improvements
- service and operational changes
- fees and charges.

Community engagement on strategic planning matters is covered separately under the Community Participation Plan (Plan Making and Development Assessments).

Community Engagement Principles

Outlined below are the seven community engagement principles that underpin our engagement practices. The principles are of equal importance. A full description of each is available in the Northern Beaches Community Engagement Strategy.

Principle 1: Prioritise community engagement

Principle 2: Plan thoroughly

Principle 3: Create open, accessible and diverse engagement opportunities

Principle 4: Communicate effectively

Principle 5: Build and maintain relationships

Principle 6: Listen and respond

Principle 7: Learn and improve

Considerations

- Community engagement does not necessarily mean achieving consensus.
- There are a number of factors that contribute to decision making including social, economic, technological, legislative and environmental constraints.
- Statutory and/or other legislative engagement requirements are considered a minimum.
- Our approach to community and stakeholder engagement reporting is based on emerging issues and themes to get better quality outcomes for the community.
- Engagement activities will be open for a minimum of 28 days with care taken to avoid key dates that may affect the ability of everyone to participate, e.g. school holidays, public and religious holidays, and other major social or community events.
- Engagement activities will be limited prior to the December holiday period and where this is not possible, extensions of time will be considered.
- Form letters and petitions will be treated separately to submissions and noted as such on community and stakeholder engagement reports.
- Conduct an Acknowledgement/ or Welcome to Country for both online and physical events.
- Community feedback received is regarded as public information and may be published on websites and in Council reports. The collection or holding of personal information is legislated in the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* (PPIPA).
- Committees, advisory groups and panels also provide opportunities for the community to participate in strategic priority areas. The different types of committees and governance arrangements are covered in a separate document, Northern Beaches Council Committees Framework.
- When developing on Council owned and managed land, a community engagement process consistent with this policy and supporting strategy will be required in addition to any statutory requirements.
- In some circumstances, Council may encounter situations that impact community engagement timing and/or the ability to conduct certain activities including where:
 - Council is not leading the project (e.g. state government lead projects)
 - specific knowledge or expertise is required
 - work is commercial in confidence

- work relates to critical operational matters
- there is an unacceptable safety risk posed to our community if we do not take immediate action.

Who is responsible for adhering to this policy?

All staff, contractors and consultants.

Document owner

Executive Manager Community Engagement and Communications

Authorisation

To be confirmed

Related documents

Integrated Planning & Reporting for Local Councils in NSW - Office of Local Government Guidelines (September 2021)

Northern Beaches Community Engagement Strategy (formally Matrix)

Northern Beaches Community Participation Plan (Plan Making and Development Assessment)

Northern Beaches Council Committees Framework

Relevant legislation

Council will undertake engagement where prescribed under the relevant legislation or regulations.

The engagement approach for every project will meet our statutory obligations as well as meeting the commitments outlined in this policy.

- Local Government Act 1993.
- Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979.
- Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (PPIPA).
- Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009.

Document History

Revision	Date	Change	HPE CM Ref
1	Feb 2017	Northern Beaches Council Community Engagement Policy	2017/012154
2	Nov 2022	Northern Beaches Council Community Engagement Policy – Post exhibition	2022/225685
3	Nov 2022	Northern Beaches Council Community Engagement Policy - Adopted	2022/759563