



Communications Policy

Adopted by Council at its meeting
on September 8, 2009

Updated June 8, 2010

INTRODUCTION

Communication involves creating and sharing common ground. It underpins all that we do at Indigo Shire Council including community engagement, consultation and public relations.

Communication and consultation are issues of concern grappled with by Local Government generally, and Indigo is no different. Their importance to Indigo residents became obvious during the community consultation process to gather information for the new *Council Plan 2009-12*. An unprecedented 1312 participants told us at the five 'dinner table conversations' in our main towns and in a survey that we don't engage with them enough. The new Council Plan reflected these concerns and outlined strategies to deal with them. This community-driven consultation process was a joint winner with the City of Melbourne of the LGPro Corporate Planners Network 'Excellence in Local Government Corporate and Community Planning Award' in November 2009. The award underpins the importance of Council continuing to build better relationships with our community.

A second community survey, similar to the one conducted for the initial Council Plan, was repeated earlier this year and overall acknowledged a strong improvement in Council's communication and engagement processes.

The community roundtable process in 2009 began a shift in relationship between residents and Council which is continuing to build momentum through Community Forums, public meetings and improved content of Council publications such as the *Indigo Informer* and weekly *Indigo Connection* in the *Ovens & Murray Advertiser* newspaper. A new website, currently under production, will enable further improvements in communication.

The updated *Council Plan 2010-13* continues Council's commitment to enhancing its communications and working with residents to foster community involvement in council decision making.

It is clear our residents want to be more involved in their community; they want to have more influence in their future and they are looking to Indigo Shire Council to work with them to achieve this. This updated policy continues to develop our partnership with our residents.

RATIONALE

Our Council continues to demonstrate a willingness to work closely with residents to identify a common vision for the shire and to put that vision into action. This policy builds on that willingness. The policy has been instrumental in creating better partnerships with residents.

With this policy in place (proactively used as a springboard for all that Indigo Shire does) the wider Indigo community will be enriched, developing greater strength and resilience – hallmarks of a solid, working partnership.

DEFINITION

'Communication' includes all written, verbal, electronic and personal interactions by all staff with any member of our community, visitors, all levels of government and other agencies. 'Timely' means occurring within a suitable amount of time or occurring at a suitable time, particularly from the perspective of the receiver of the communication. 'Considered' means thoughtful, respectful and with regard to the receiver of the information.

POLICY STATEMENT

‘Indigo Shire Council is committed to timely, considered, open and honest communication.’

This commitment means

We

- share knowledge and information
- work to develop trust and positive relationships in our community
- are proactive, innovative and creative communicators
- are brave about communicating the hard stuff
- have the will to implement this policy.

We will

- demonstrate a transparent willingness to work in partnership with people and organisations
- encourage local knowledge and input
- build community ownership in Council projects
- involve the community in our plans for improvement and share successes
- continue professional development in community engagement and communication processes.

PRINCIPLES

This policy is underpinned by the following principles

- we believe good communication drives cultural change and improves performance
- all communication will consider and value community perspectives
- all communication will be in plain English
- good communication is both a duty and an opportunity and is everyone’s responsibility
- all communication matters – equally.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy and guidelines is to

- build a strong, resilient, united community where communication flows easily between the Council and residents
- raise awareness of community issues and Council's role in them
- boost public confidence in the Council
- provide a mechanism for seeking and acting on feedback
- increase awareness of Council's procedures and responsibilities
- encourage pride, community spirit and social unity
- tailor communication processes for targeted groups and projects.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Mayor and the Chief Executive Officer are the media spokespeople on Council issues. Senior Managers, or their nominated staff, may speak on operational matters relating to their specific department, with prior approval.

Councillors may wish to comment on specific areas of interest to them with the prior approval of the Mayor or CEO. They are reminded that statements they make are their own and not necessarily the collective view of the Council. Comments made in times of crisis often have far-reaching effects and can be used in legal proceedings against Council or individuals.

Media inquiries will be responded to on the same day where possible. Media outlets covering Indigo Shire are daily radio and television broadcasts, the daily newspaper *The Border Mail*, the weekly *Ovens & Murray Advertiser*, Beechworth, the *Corowa Free Press* and various community newsletters.

It is the responsibility of Senior Management to ensure that consultation on community issues begins as early as possible to allow for community involvement and comment before decisions are made.

All staff are the public face of the Indigo Shire Council and their commitment to good communication will build pride, trust and public confidence in them and the Council.

IMPLEMENTATION

In the light of Indigo Shire's commitment to timely, considered, open and honest communication, we will

- demonstrate a transparent willingness to work in partnership with people and organisations
eg. by
 - continuing the outreach program of public forums across the shire
 - improving content and frequency of the *Indigo Informer*.
- encourage local knowledge and input
eg. by
 - developing an inventory of community skills and interests
 - inviting community input.

- build community ownership in Council projects
 - eg. by
 - inviting schools and community groups to be involved eg. Beechworth wetlands project
 - ensuring a youth perspective on Council planning and projects that affect young people.

- involve the community in our plans for improvement and share successes
 - eg. by
 - increasing access to staff
 - generating positive media stories
 - constructing a new website and intranet
 - establishing community noticeboards in each major town for use by council and community groups
 - conducting informal 'coffee' meetings between senior staff and community representatives
 - encouraging community groups to invite Councillors to their meetings and vice versa.

- continue professional development in community engagement and communication processes
 - eg. by
 - conducting training in media skills for councillors and staff
 - providing community engagement workshops
 - developing guidelines and a style guide to ensure accurate, consistent communication.

METHODS

Consultation and communication are the key means of understanding what our community wants and the actions that we may undertake.

Communication with the community can be via

- paper
 - media releases
 - advertisements
 - Indigo Informer
 - Indigo Connection
 - brochures
 - fact sheets
 - annual report
 - photographs
 - council plan
 - public notice boards
 - signs
 - letter box drops
 - Neighbourhood Watch/Chamber of Commerce newsletters
 - Community/service club newsletters
 - council forms/applications
 - written material in plain English
 - letters via direct mail
 - invitations to attend council meetings.

- electronic
 - media interviews, press, radio and TV
 - website
 - email mailing lists
 - information and help lines
 - telephone communication
 - records management
 - Merit customer service program.

- face-to-face
 - Council meetings
 - community forums
 - advisory committees to Council
 - greater accessibility to senior staff and Councillors
 - events
 - word of mouth
 - workshops
 - partnerships with other organisations
 - opportunities to make submissions
 - presentations
 - public displays
 - onsite inspections.

Communication within Council can be via

- staff briefings
- meetings
- surveys
- social club
- training and professional development
- quarterly reviews
- staff newsletter
- copies of media releases
- email
- intranet
- telephone
- information management (Trim, Merit).

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

This policy will be monitored against the *Council Plan 2009-12* through the year and will be reviewed annually as part of the *Council Plan* review process. Evaluation will include

- surveys about our communication, consultation and engagement processes
- annual reporting of Merit
- attendance at community forums
- number of people involved in working groups
- annual *Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey* results.

Officer: _____

Communication Checklist			Project:																
Tasks and Timeline				Progress and Completion Date															
Item No	Task/Activity	✓	Who is responsible?	Venue/ Location	Month:					Month:					Month:				
					WK 1	WK 2	WK 3	WK 4	WK 5	WK 1	WK 2	WK 3	WK 4	WK 5	WK 1	WK 2	WK 3	WK 4	
Paper																			
1	Media releases																		
2	Advertisements																		
3	Indigo Informer																		
4	Indigo Connection																		
5	Brochures																		
6	Fact Sheets																		
7	Annual Report																		
8	Photographs																		
9	Council Plan																		
10	Public notice boards/signs																		
11	Letter box drops																		
12	Neighbourhood Watch/chamber newsletters																		
13	Community/service club newsletters																		
14	Council forms/applications																		
15	Letters via direct mail																		
16	Invitations to attend Council meetings																		
Electronic																			
1	Media interviews, press, radio and TV																		
2	Website																		
3	Email mailing lists																		
4	Information and help lines																		
5	Telephone communication																		
6	Records management																		
7	Merit																		
Face to face																			
1	Council meetings																		
2	Community forums																		
3	Community advisory committees																		
4	Greater accessibility to senior staff																		
5	Events																		
6	Word of mouth (networking, feedback, liaison with industry, business, other councils)																		
7	Workshops																		
8	Partnerships with other organisations																		
9	Opportunities to make submissions																		
10	Presentations																		
11	Public displays																		
12	Onsite inspections																		

Authorised by Senior Manager: _____