Contents

What do we want to do? ............................................................................................................................................................ 3
What is community engagement? ............................................................................................................................................ 3
Rationale .................................................................................................................................................................................. 3
Objectives ................................................................................................................................................................................ 6
Benefits .................................................................................................................................................................................... 6
IAP2 spectrum of community engagement ............................................................................................................................. 6
Engagement methods ............................................................................................................................................................... 7
When will we engage? .............................................................................................................................................................. 9
Key considerations ................................................................................................................................................................. 10
Who should we engage with? ............................................................................................................................................... 11
The steps we will follow ........................................................................................................................................................... 12
Creating the engagement plan ............................................................................................................................................... 13
Implementing the plan .............................................................................................................................................................. 14
Closing the loop ......................................................................................................................................................................... 14
Evaluation ................................................................................................................................................................................. 14
Measuring success ................................................................................................................................................................. 15
Social Media ............................................................................................................................................................................... 16
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................................................. 17
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

What do we want to do?

Indigo Shire Council wants to strengthen its relationship with the Indigo Shire community to create a more cohesive approach to developing the liveability of the Shire. Stronger engagement with the community will lead to stronger partnerships, improved outcomes and a more involved community.

Indigo Council’s community engagement approach is designed to genuinely involve community members in the work of Council and the future of the Shire, with opportunities for participation across traditional methods and digital platforms.

What is community engagement?

Community engagement is a planned process whereby Council and the community exchange information through different methods and take actions to solve common problems, deliver services or make decisions.

Community engagement provides the opportunity for the community to have a say and contribute to the decisions and actions of Council. This is the essential difference between engagement and communication, marketing or advertising. Community engagement therefore is required when the aim is to make informed decisions and deliver better services.

This strategy outlines what we will do in our approach to community engagement activities. It sets out a design to focus our actions in building a collaborative partnership with the community. It is supported by internal guidelines and templates for staff reference.

Rationale

Effective, meaningful engagement is part of good governance and good business practice. Council’s approach is based on key premises:

1. We know why we are engaging and communicate this clearly
2. We know who to engage
3. We know the background of issues
4. We begin early
5. We are genuine, creative, courteous and relevant.

Council’s commitment to community engagement is stated in the Community Engagement Policy 2018, and is set out below.
POLICY STATEMENT

‘Indigo Shire Council is committed to timely and effective community engagement and participation processes that lead to better community outcomes.’

This commitment means

We:

• Share knowledge and information in a timely manner
• Work to develop trust and positive relationships in our community
• Are proactive, innovative and creative in ways in which we engage to ensure all demographics can be involved
• Provide the communications tools to ensure the community is aware of, and has the opportunity to be meaningfully involved, in two-way community engagement activities.

We will:

• Communicate engagement in a timely way, providing our community with sufficient notice and opportunity to partake in activities and share their views
• 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 processes.

This Community Engagement Strategy recognises the changing landscape of community engagement. It harnesses the benefits of on-line engagement whilst retaining the best of print and face-to-face consultation. It recognises that community engagement requires that those who are affected by or interested in an issue have the opportunity to participate in the decision making process.

This strategy uses the internationally renowned IAP2 Spectrum to guide engagement activities and aligns with the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office Better Practice Guide on Public Participation in Government Decision-making.

This strategy is built on these and other principles:

Clear remit:
A community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope.

Informed:
Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.

Representative:
Participants in community engagement must be representative of the people and groups affected by the matter which is the subject of community engagement.

Supportive and inclusive:
Participants in community engagement are entitled to support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.

Transparent and accountable:
Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement will influence council decision making.
Respect:
Demonstrates a mutual respect for the needs, aspirations and opinions of all in the community.

Responsiveness:
Establishes engagement plans that are flexible and adaptable to changes in circumstances.

Ethics:
Councillors and staff will adhere to relevant Codes of Conduct.

Continuous improvement:
Establishes a reporting system to ensure that Council learns from the community engagement activity and can monitor and evaluate success to enable improvements.

Objectives
The objectives of this strategy are to:

1. Acknowledge the skills and expertise within the community and seek to utilise this where appropriate
2. Establish a two-way engagement process for Council and the community to work together for the greater good of the whole Shire
3. Establish an appropriate approach for community engagement, relevant to the individual circumstances of each project
4. Acknowledge and respond to the many and various ways community engagement can take place
5. Acknowledge and respond to the community’s different requirements for engagement
6. Ensure appropriate engagement processes are implemented by Council staff
7. Ensure that relevant decision making takes account of outcomes acquired from such processes along with relevant legislative requirements and other Council policies
8. Ensure the community is kept informed throughout the engagement process and of decisions emanating from Community Engagement
9. Acknowledge the skill of external consultants employed by Council and work with them to align Council engagement practices with their community engagement procedures
Benefits

When effectively delivered community engagement can lead to better outcomes for all, including the following benefits:

Community

- Improved community participation in Council activities
- Fostering a shared problem solving capability to meet the current and future needs of the community
- Enhanced sense of community pride and greater sense of belonging
- Establishing a framework for respectful relationships where all take responsibility for the way in which they engage
- A better informed and resourced community with an improved understanding of Council’s policies, projects actions and decisions
- Improved levels of satisfaction and ownership of problems and solutions
- Greater appreciation of local knowledge and expertise
- A sense of empowerment in creating social change

Council

- Helps the Council plan services better to meet community needs and aspirations
- New perspectives can test assumptions and serve as a reality check to ensure solutions are appropriate
- Early notice of emerging issues which allows a more proactive response
- Allows a broader range of views to be expressed and more information to be gathered prior to Council making decisions
- Commits the Council to be open and accountable
- Helps the Council prioritise services and make better use of resources
- Gains early buy-in and strengthens trust in Council and builds community/council partnership
- Builds a positive image and confidence in Council’s ability to deliver on services

IAP2 spectrum of community engagement

The IAP2 spectrum provides the framework for Council’s community engagement activities. This strategy implements this framework and makes overt what we already do, as well as setting out aspirational goals for future improved engagement activities.

The IAP2 model defines public participation as the involvement of those people affected by a decision in the decision-making process. Council uses the term ‘community engagement’ to describe these situations, and to cover elements of engagement including communication, participation, community stakeholder consultation, and public participation.

The IAP2 spectrum sets out five pillars of engagement depending on the level of community involvement required. The diagram below includes engagement methods that Council currently uses and will use in future engagement activities.

Community aspirations and research will continue to inform and expand the range of methods used to ensure new and fresh approaches for community engagement are utilised where most effective. Council will be guided by the community in their preferred methods of engagement, recognising that different communities prefer different methods.
Engagement methods

Community engagement is not a single activity; it is a way of working. It is about inclusion and involvement, input and influence. Engagement comes with an equal need for responsibility, accountability and a willingness to work with others towards a common goal.

Council recognises that different community engagement issues require different approaches that are flexible and adapt to different circumstances. Engagement activities will be supported by engagement plans appropriate to the relevant circumstances. These plans will include an outline the engagement issue, identify the stakeholders, assess the level of engagement required, and determine the appropriate engagement methods for the circumstances. The IAP2 engagement spectrum below lists some examples of engagement. The increasing level of impact outlines a wide variety of engagement methods, tools and channels for engagement activities conducted under each pillar. This list is by no means exhaustive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORM</th>
<th>CONSULT</th>
<th>INVOLVE</th>
<th>COLLABORATE</th>
<th>EMPOWER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Goal:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Goal:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Goal:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Goal:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide the public with balanced and</td>
<td>To obtain public feedback on analysis,</td>
<td>To work directly with the public throughout</td>
<td>To partner with the public in each aspect of</td>
<td>To place final decision making in the hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>objective information to assist them in</td>
<td>alternatives and/or decisions</td>
<td>the process to ensure that public concerns</td>
<td>of the decision including development of</td>
<td>of the public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding the problem, alternatives,</td>
<td></td>
<td>and aspirations are consistently understood</td>
<td>alternatives and identification of preferred</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opportunities and/or solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td>and considered</td>
<td>solution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Promise:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Promise:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Promise:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Promise:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Promise:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We will keep you informed</td>
<td>We will keep you informed, listen to and</td>
<td>We will work with you to ensure that your</td>
<td>We will look to you for advice and innovation</td>
<td>We will implement what you decide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and</td>
<td>concerns and aspirations are directly</td>
<td>in formulating solutions and incorporate your</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>provide feedback on how input influenced</td>
<td>reflected in the alternatives developed and</td>
<td>advice and recommendations into the decisions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the decision</td>
<td>provide feedback on how input influenced</td>
<td>to the maximum extent possible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>that decision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The role of the community</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Listen</em></td>
<td><em>Contribute</em></td>
<td><em>Participate</em></td>
<td><em>Partner</em></td>
<td><em>Decide</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFORM</td>
<td>CONSULT</td>
<td>INVOLVE</td>
<td>COLLABORATE</td>
<td>EMPOWER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods:</td>
<td>Methods:</td>
<td>Methods:</td>
<td>Methods:</td>
<td>Methods:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Media releases</td>
<td>- Community forums</td>
<td>- Committee</td>
<td>- Citizen jury</td>
<td>- Citizen jury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Radio, TV</td>
<td>- Open house</td>
<td>- Community panel</td>
<td>- Co-design</td>
<td>- Reference groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Website</td>
<td>- Comments forms, post card</td>
<td>- Workshops</td>
<td>- Round tables</td>
<td>- Some s.86 committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Social media</td>
<td>- Discussion paper</td>
<td>- Open Space</td>
<td>- s.86 committees</td>
<td>- Ballots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Facebook</td>
<td>- Public comment</td>
<td>- World café</td>
<td>- Consensus building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Photographs</td>
<td>- Focus groups</td>
<td>- Kitchen table conversations</td>
<td>- Working groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Information sessions</td>
<td>- Surveys</td>
<td>- Public hearing</td>
<td>- Polls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Indigo Informer newsletter</td>
<td>- Suggestion box</td>
<td>- Site tour</td>
<td>- Help communities create their own facebook pages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Rates notices</td>
<td>- Online forums</td>
<td>- Card storming</td>
<td>- Stakeholder groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Letters</td>
<td>- Drop-in information sessions</td>
<td>- Community leaders</td>
<td>- Participatory decision making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Flyers by letterbox drop</td>
<td>- Hotline or phone in</td>
<td>- Stakeholder groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Signage</td>
<td>- Interviews with key people</td>
<td>- Community panels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- On-hold phone messages</td>
<td>- Listening posts</td>
<td>- S.86 committees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reports</td>
<td>- Local community meetings</td>
<td>- Deliberative polling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Print material eg Fact sheets, brochures, flyers, newsletters</td>
<td>- Written submission</td>
<td>- Participatory editing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Pop-up stands at community spaces</td>
<td>- Stakeholder networks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Empower:** Providing opportunities and resources for communities to contribute to solutions by valuing local talents and skills.
When will we engage?

A number of questions need to be answered in considering when Council will conduct engagement activities. Firstly, consideration will be given to what the purpose is of community engagement for a project, decision or issue. Is the purpose to identify community need, generate ideas, gather local information and knowledge, share information about problems and potential solutions or obtain feedback on a proposed change or activity?

For example, if it is to inform the community of some upcoming road sealing, the IAP2 Spectrum provides examples of the type of communication that can be used under the first pillar of ‘Inform’. The IAP2 Spectrum will be utilised to determine the extent and methods of engagement for individual matters.

Some examples where Council may conduct community engagement include:

- The development of new Council policies, plans and strategies
- The review and evaluation of existing Council policies, plans and strategies
- The setting of priorities for Council in relation to social and strategic planning, services and infrastructure
- Issues that impact on and or are of concern to the community or any group within the community, including:
  - broad community issues
  - specific issues that impact on a group
  - matters that affect people in a street or neighbourhood
  - matters that affect a particular site.

Council will conduct community engagement where required by legislation, for example for the draft budget each year and the Council Plan.

Not all actions of Council require community engagement, for example, staff recruitment, general infrastructure maintenance or some changes to funding imposed by State of Federal Government.
Key considerations

Key considerations in when to engage involve determining the level of impact of the issue on the community, as below:

**Will the project/initiative:**
- Have significant impact on the quality of life in the community?
- Impact on services or facilities for residents and ratepayers?
- Have a significant impact on the budget?
- Involve a level of conflict, controversy or sensitivity?

**Specific issues**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local or Site Specific</th>
<th>Issues regarding a specific site e.g. improvements to a street or local planning issue such as change in the use of a site.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood</td>
<td>Issues having an impact on a neighbourhood, district or community e.g. development of a neighbourhood park or traffic management plan, re-zoning of an area, applications for gaming licences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Planning and Delivery</td>
<td>Any change, review or impact on a particular service e.g. library or child care services, rubbish collection. This includes Best Value service reviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Development</td>
<td>The development of, change to or review of Council policy e.g. an amendment to the Planning Scheme or review of the Animal Management Policy. This may have an impact on the entire Indigo Shire community or may be focused on a particular area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Projects and Strategic Plans</td>
<td>Any projects, planning or strategic initiatives that have a major impact on the Indigo Shire community, e.g. the Council Plan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the response to any of the above items is yes, then a Community Engagement process will be undertaken following the guidelines in the Community Engagement Toolkit.

**Before beginning**

Council will consider the project and the following four questions to determine which of the 5 pillars of the IAP2 Spectrum will be the focus of the engagement.

1. Is the decision genuinely negotiable or has it already been made?
2. Would seeking community involvement bring new perspectives and enhance decision making?
3. Would it be a risk to proceed without seeking community views?
4. Does the likely cost of engagement represent good value for the community, given the scope and scale of the decision?
5. What are the risks? What are the likely consequences of those risks? What steps could we take to mitigate the risks?
Who should we engage with?

The community engagement plan for a particular matter will identify stakeholder groups who may be impacted by a project. Council will consider who will have the opportunity to engage and how they wish to be engaged with. Key questions that will be considered include:

- Who is likely to be directly impacted?
- Who may be indirectly impacted?
- Will particular groups (example: seniors, young people, local business, industry groups, Indigenous and people with a disability) be affected?
- How will Councillors, staff and/or subject matter experts within Council contribute to engagement and communication?

Stakeholders will vary according to the issue, but could include:

- Residents
- Ratepayers
- Council committees
- Businesses
- Volunteers
- Those who visit or work in the Shire
- Other service providers/agencies
- Specific community groups
- Other levels of government
- Peak bodies, etc.
The steps we will follow

The flowchart below outlines the steps involved in deciding what a community engagement process will entail, according to the circumstances and specific parameters of the issue.

It is important that an engagement plan is flexible and can be adapted to changing circumstances. The flow chart indicates the steps we will take, however, each community engagement plan will be tailored specifically to meet the requirements of the individual circumstances of each engagement issue.

Indigo Shire Council – Community Engagement Process
Creating the engagement plan

A tailored engagement plan will be created for engagement activities using the tools in the Engagement Toolkit, which sets out an approach that can be adapted to the requirements of each individual issue.

Key considerations in creating an engagement plan will be:

1. What information will stakeholders need to contribute to informed decision making?
2. What timelines are needed to ensure community members can be genuinely involved?
3. How will data be gathered?
4. How will the information be used in decision-making?
5. How will it be reported back to our community?

Each community engagement plan will be created according to the 11 steps in the wheel below.
Implementing the plan

Once created, each engagement plan will be ‘owned’ by a key staff member who will drive and monitor the actions set out in the plan. This will provide a central point of control through which information will flow and internal and external stakeholders will be kept up to date on progress. The community will be involved in accordance with the methods outlined in the plan.

Closing the loop

Council will report the outcomes of the community engagement process to all stakeholders using a variety of communication methods. This is the step that tells the community that Council did what it said it would do and kept them informed and engaged.

The report of outcomes to the community will cover:

- A summary of the issue
- What engagement occurred
- What our community told Council
- How that informed or influenced Council’s decision making?
- Outcomes will be shared across the broader community, beyond the stakeholder group, to enhance knowledge and awareness.

Evaluation

Evaluation and learning is part of community engagement. An evaluation will be completed at the end of each community engagement activity to both provide evidence that good practice community engagement is being delivered at the project level and reinforce a culture of continuous improvement.

The evaluation process will cover promotional techniques, who was involved, numbers involved, method/s used, timescale, information provided, feedback from participants, and will be reported to Council.

Council will analyse each engagement process and evaluate the outcomes according to key questions:

1. What did we learn?
2. What worked?
3. What didn’t work?
4. What would we do differently next time?
5. Have we engaged at the level we said we would?
6. Did people feel involved and engaged?
Measuring success

Each year Council participates in the Local Government State-wide Community Satisfaction Survey conducted on behalf of the State Government across the Local Government sector in Victoria.

This is one method of measuring success. Other measurement tools include questionnaires, feedback, electronic measurement tools such as Google Analytics to measure website hits, and Facebook insights.

Challenges in community engagement

Even with the best intentions community engagement can sometimes encounter difficulties. Many of these challenges can be mitigated with proper early planning. Some of these challenges include:

- Decision and actions may be slower to reach than planned
- Community representation may be limited. That is, a small group may not be representative of the broader community.
- Controversies, multiple demands or opposition may arise during the process.
- Misinterpretation – some key stakeholders may perceive that the ‘right to be consulted’ equals the ‘right to be heeded’ or the ‘right to have their view implemented’
- Disillusionment and unrealistic expectations eg. feelings of inability to make a meaningful contribution. Community members may feel previous engagement processes did not lead to promised actions
- Stronger voices in the community may dominate and influence the outcome
- The minority may make a stronger case during the engagement process and the view of the majority is not heard or rejected
- Lack of plain English (inadequate communication of technical information) may adversely affect the outcome
- Engaging hard-to-reach parts of the community can be challenging.

This strategy and its toolkit will help Council to meet these challenges by following a cohesive engagement plan, developed early and monitored through an engagement process, followed by a comprehensive evaluation of each process and closing the loop with the community by reporting back to them the outcomes of their involvement.
Social Media

For the purposes of this Strategy, Social Media includes, but is not limited to:

- Facebook
- Website
- Engagement portal on Council's website
- Linked In
- Video
- Digital photo albums
- Blogs

Social Media has grown in importance as an engagement tool. In order to better communicate and engage, Council has to ‘go where the people are’, using their preferred communication method. This is true of many Indigo Shire communities, although not all.

Where Council uses paper-based communication, and personal engagement a section of the public will still expect and rely on these formats. Therefore, social media should be considered as just one communication and engagement tool in a multi-faceted approach to effective community engagement.

Social media enables quick and easy development, creation, dissemination and consumption of information, knowledge and entertainment. It is distinguished from more traditional communication by enabling one-to-many or many-to-many interactive online communications, in real time, regardless of location.

Facebook is Council’s main Social Media tool and to continue to be successful with facebook, content and practice will be strategically coordinated. This has been addressed in the Toolkit via an engagement calendar and protocols for facebook use both in general and in emergency situations. In emergencies, many people access Facebook first for information, and Council’s site would share posts and links to key agencies such as the CFA, SES and Police.
Acknowledgements

This Community Engagement Strategy and the associated Community Engagement Toolkit and Social Media Procedural Guidelines have been informed by:

1. Desktop research, with reference to similar strategies at Local Government Councils including Boroondara, Bass Coast, Wodonga, Shepparton, Burwood (NSW), Pyrenees, Murrindindi, Geraldton (WA), Glenorchy (TAS), VicRoads, South Australian Government, Victorian Government.


4. Consultation with members of the LGPro Special Interest Group – Communications

5. The International Association of Public Participation

6. Feedback from stakeholder groups

7. People Power, Findings from the Commission on the Future of Localism, UK

8. Feedback from the Executive Management Team and staff.