



POLICY

TITLE:	Community Engagement Policy
SECTION:	Corporate Relations
DOCUMENT ADOPTED:	July 2008

1. INTENT

Ashfield Council is committed to strengthening and coordinating its community engagement activities, in order to improve its decision making processes for corporate planning, services and major projects. The intention of this policy is to broadly define Ashfield Council's approach to the engagement of our community. It has application across the full range of policy, program and service issues in local government and is integral to Council's integrated planning framework. It is intended this policy will clearly outline Council's commitment to community engagement, including the values that underpin our work with our community. Council anticipates more informed decision making as a consequence of the application of this policy and commitment to achieving the vision outlined in Council's Strategic Plan.

2. SCOPE

For the purposes of this policy, 'community engagement' is any process that involves the public in problem solving or decision making and uses public input to make decisions (International Association of Public Participation - IAP2). This policy applies to Council employees and to consultants engaged by Council. For the purposes of this policy, 'community' refers to individuals or groups associated with the Ashfield Local Government Area (LGA), including, but not limited to, residents, ratepayers, businesses, shopkeepers and business associations, community groups and organisations, emergency services, schools and educational institutions and churches. As elected community leaders, Councillors must also recognise their important role in facilitating robust dialogue and engagement with their constituents.

3. POLICY STATEMENT

Ashfield Council is committed to undertaking robust and comprehensive engagement with its community to facilitate a dialogue between the Council and its community on key decisions and projects. Council also recognises its obligations under the *Local Government Act 1993* as they pertain to participation, consultation and engagement. To facilitate this commitment to the Ashfield community, Council will continually improve its capacity and performance in community engagement through ongoing training, resource development, review and evaluation of its community engagement practices. Council will also work with communities to identify the most appropriate and effective engagement methods in order to continually improve the relationship between all parties.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT VALUES

Ashfield Council has identified a number of values that underpin its approach and commitment to community engagement:

1. Ashfield Council acknowledges our community's desire to participate in decisions that affect them and will provide a means for incorporating their values, interests, needs and desires into the decisions that affect their lives.
2. We believe we can be a more efficient, responsive and successful organisation if we seek the community's input on future plans, strategies and projects.
3. We believe effective community engagement facilitates understanding and improves decisions.
4. Our community engagement activities will be based on values including trust, inclusion, respect, commitment, flexibility and mutual understanding.

Ashfield Council is a member of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2).

5. BRISBANE DECLARATION ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Ashfield Council has resolved to note the Brisbane Declaration on Community Engagement, adopted at the first International Conference on Engaging Communities, held in Brisbane, Australia, August 2005. Council requires a commitment to these principles from all organisations engaging in community engagement for Ashfield Council. Please refer to Appendix 1 for a copy of the Declaration.

6. COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Ashfield Council's Strategic Plan clearly outlines Council's vision to be an organisation that prides itself on thoughtful consultation and a strategic, integrated approach to service delivery. The following initiatives will be implemented to enable Council to achieve its vision:

- **Build community engagement into our work practices**

The General Manager and Directors will drive community engagement as an integral part of Council's operations. It will be broadly communicated that engagement with our community and key stakeholders should be undertaken where the community has an opportunity to provide input into a decision that will affect them.

- **Community Engagement Toolkit**

This practical resource is available in soft and hard copy format for all Council staff to use when planning community engagement projects. The toolkit includes practical resources, templates, examples and checklists to assist Council officers when implementing their community engagement projects. This planning template is based on sound community engagement methodology and the principles of IAP2. The template can be used in conjunction with advice from the Corporate Relations Officer and will ensure Council officers apply a consistent approach to community engagement.

- **Training, Resources and Capacity Building**

Council will facilitate internal training for staff involved in community engagement. Practical resources available will be reviewed, improved and expanded to provide the tools necessary for staff to undertake effective engagement. This includes exploring the purchase of sophisticated technology to track public opinion.

- **Internal Consultancy and Quality Control**

The Corporate Relations Officer (CRO) will provide advice to officers in completing their community engagement plans and implementing their projects. Officers will be asked to keep the CRO informed of their community engagement projects. Where extensive projects are required, the CRO will work directly with project managers to plan and implement their community engagement projects. The Corporate Relations Officer will maintain a register of all Community Engagement Projects.

- **Regular Meetings**

The Director Corporate & Community Services and Corporate Relations Officer will facilitate quarterly meetings with officers involved in community engagement. The meetings will provide a forum to discuss the resources, challenges and future projects.

- **Evaluation**

We will continually review our community engagement processes to ensure we deliver the best possible service and meet community expectations. We will evaluate our engagement projects and check that participants:

- Feel valued
- Understand key concepts within a project

- Understand the decision-making process
- Comprehend the scope and purpose of our community engagement activities
- Know who to contact with enquiries and suggestions
- Feel they influenced the overall decision.

Ashfield Council will also keep up to date with best practice strategies and methodologies.

7. APPLICATION

Council will apply community engagement methodologies appropriate to the circumstances and desired outcomes of any specific engagement. By way of example, engagement methodologies may differ significantly across the following activities of Council:

- Policy development, implementation and application
- Planning scheme development, implementation and application
- Ongoing delivery of Council services and operation of Council facilities
- Capital works projects – concept design, detailed design and construction
- Community and social planning / identification of community needs
- Organisational planning and strategy
- Evaluating the community's level of satisfaction with Council's performance.

Where the activities are significant and community engagement necessary, Council will formulate a Community Engagement Plan for that activity, identifying the specific engagement methodologies to be employed and assigning responsibilities for the various tasks.

Community engagement plans for specific activities will ensure that:

- Council clearly identifies the problem to be solved or opportunity to be addressed
- Council sets clear goals and objectives for the project, based on the Community Engagement Spectrum
- The roles and responsibilities of the project team are clearly identified
- The role of Councillors in the engagement process is explicitly addressed
- Key stakeholders for the project are researched and identified
- Council clearly explains how community engagement will be integrated into the decision-making process for the project
- Planned engagement activities will be based on the Community Engagement Spectrum
- The project is evaluated by internal and external stakeholders



POLICY

8. POLICY REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Council's Corporate Relations Unit. Next review date: June 2009.

Brisbane Declaration

We, representatives of countries and communities, including Indigenous peoples, international institutions, national, state and local governments, academic institutions, and business and civil society organizations from across the world, participating in the International Conference on Engaging Communities, held at Brisbane, Australia, from 15 to 17 August 2005,

1. *Acknowledge* the universal interest and importance of community engagement, founded in the inherent dignity of people and the values, rights and responsibilities of all people expressed in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.
2. *Welcome* the Seoul Declaration on Participatory and Transparent Governance¹ in its call for all actors² in societies to work together to expand and promote participatory, transparent governance for the benefit of their people.
3. *Underscore* that community engagement is essential to the achievement of the Millennium Declaration including the Millennium Goals for Development.
4. *Express appreciation* for the efforts of the United Nations and its specialised agencies in helping to advance the practice of community engagement and support of greater participatory and transparent governance.
5. *Express appreciation* to the Government of the State of Queensland, to the Indigenous peoples for their welcome to country, and to all the people of Queensland, Australia for hosting the inaugural International Conference on Engaging Communities.
6. *Express appreciation* to the other Australian governments, tertiary institutions and organisations that have sponsored and partnered in the organisation of this gathering, to the staff and volunteers, and to all those who have through participation shared their expertise and experience to build greater understanding, capability and commitment to the practice of community engagement.

Community Engagement

7. *Affirm* that community engagement is critical to effective, transparent and accountable governance in the public, community and private sectors.
8. *Recognise* that community engagement is a two way process:
 - by which the aspirations, concerns, needs and values of citizens and communities are incorporated at all levels and in all sectors in policy development, planning, decision-making, service delivery and assessment; and
 - by which governments and other business and civil society organisations involve citizens, clients, communities and other stakeholders in these processes.
9. *Affirm* that effective engagement generates better decisions, delivering sustainable economic, environmental, social and cultural benefits.
10. *Also recognise* that effective community engagement enables the free and full development of human potential, fosters relationships based on mutual understanding, trust and respect, facilitates the sharing of responsibilities, and creates more inclusive and sustainable communities.

¹ The Seoul Declaration on Participatory and Transparent Governance made at the Sixth Global Forum on Reinventing Government at Seoul, Republic of Korea, 24-27 May 2005.

² The 'community' or all 'actors in society' are all those who are potentially affected by or have an interest in an issue, decision, service delivery or evaluation, and include government, businesses, trade unions, civil society organisations, non-Government organisations and individual citizens.

11. *Further recognise* that meaningful community engagement seeks to address barriers and build the capacity and confidence of people to participate in, and negotiate and partner with, institutions that affect their lives, in particular those previously excluded or disenfranchised.
12. *Further recognise* that inclusive engagement requires that Indigenous peoples and the poor and marginalized, are adequately resourced to participate meaningfully in the broader community and that they have a stake in the outcome and benefit equitably as a result of being involved.
13. *Endorse* the core principles of integrity, inclusion, deliberation and influence in community engagement:
 - Integrity – when there is openness and honesty about the scope and purpose of engagement;
 - Inclusion - when there is an opportunity for a diverse range of values and perspectives to be freely and fairly expressed and heard;
 - Deliberation – when there is sufficient and credible information for dialogue, choice and decisions, and when there is space to weigh options, develop common understandings and to appreciate respective roles and responsibilities;
 - Influence – when people have input in designing how they participate, when policies and services reflect their involvement and when their impact is apparent.
14. *Recognise* the availability of a wide range of methods and technologies, including new and emerging tools associated with the internet, to facilitate appropriate and effective community engagement.
15. *Affirm* the value of education, ongoing monitoring and evaluation, and knowledge sharing about active citizenship and community engagement processes and outcomes.
16. *Draws attention* to the materials and recommendations of the specialized panels and workshops which supplement this Declaration

Next steps

The participants from all over the world at this conference:

17. *Request* the Host Country to bring to the attention of the General Assembly of the United Nations the Declaration of this inaugural International Conference on Engaging Communities so that it may provide leadership globally for its promotion and implementation.
18. *Further call on* international institutions as well as national, provincial and local governments to give effect to the values and principles of this Declaration.
19. *Express* support for more dialogue between international institutions and others with the people of the world about issues of global interest, and the availability of digital and other means to support such interaction.
20. *Encourage* the tertiary sector and other public and professional organisations to facilitate research and teaching, policy and practice development, organizational development, evaluation and networking to sustain the learnings and connections created at this inaugural International Conference on Engaging Communities.
21. *Further encourage* the private sector and civil society organisations to implement practical and meaningful ways to be responsive to, representative of, and enabling of the participation of citizens, clients, communities.
22. *Note* with appreciation the willingness of the Queensland Government to support knowledge-sharing and capacity-building for community engagement and to be involved in the follow-up to this Conference.
23. *Request* the United Nations, building on the success and legacies of this Conference, to assist countries and communities to foster effective community engagement practices by supporting research and training, and documenting successful outcomes and disseminating these widely.