STRATEGY

Corporate Image Communication & Customer Service Strategy

KEMPSEY
Shire Council

Consultation Strategy

CONSULTATION STRATEGY

The importance of community input is clearly indicated in Kempsey Shire Council's Mission Statement:

> *"We will work with the community to provide high quality services and facilities through excellence in leadership and with consideration for the needs of the environment and of future generations"*

Jill Hannaford, from Gutteridge, Haskins and Davey Pty Ltd states that "community consultation is a means of involving the community in a decision making process by seeking the views, opinions concerns and reactions from the community as individuals or groups. By involving the community, community consultation enables people to understand issues and often to have a sense of ownership in a project."

The quotation below encapsulates this:

> "Tell me and I will forget;
> show me and I may remember;
> involve me and I'll understand."   Chinese Proverb

Effective consultation provides the community with a greater understanding and sense of ownership in a project, encourages local knowledge and input and allays suspicion about local government processes and activities. In order for a decision making process to be considered fair, the public should be given an opportunity to air an opinion or make a submission and must have the assurance that this will be properly considered.

The Local Government Act, and the Council charter set forth in the Act, broadly requires that Councils have policies and procedures to ensure that :-

The local community is adequately informed of its activities
Members of the local community are adequately informed and given an opportunity to make submissions to the local Council in writing and/or in person and submissions receive due consideration insofar as they are relevant.

Good practice recommends that the quality of submissions improves if members of the local community get simple advice on framing effective submissions to their Council. The NSW Ombudsman's "Better Service and Communication – Guidelines for Local Government" recommends the following to assist the community with their submissions.

- "Inviting submissions rather than objections in order to reflect the intention to attract comment rather than merely procure opposition
- The considerations the Council will take into account in reaching a decision

- How to get further information relevant to the matter under consideration
- The desirable length of submissions
- The need to provide supporting information when challenging issues of fact
- The need to avoid using intemperate language
- The need to avoid casting personal reflections on individuals including Councillors, staff and third parties
- The availability of submissions for inspection by decision makers and the public and
- A clear statement on the effect of making a submission."

To increase the opportunity of receiving comment on advertised Draft Plans and Strategies, after they have been approved by Council, the following procedure is recommended.

Minimum Requirements for Advertising Draft Plans and Strategies.

- Advertising in Macleay Argus and/or Macleay Valley Happynings for a minimum of three weeks
- Supported by a Media Release
- Reminder in Mayoral Column

Display of Advertised Draft Plans and Strategies

- Copy to be included on Councils website
- Colour copy to be placed in various locations including the Civic Centre, Council's libraries and other venues depending on content of plans (*Mark originals with "For Display Only - please do not remove from the building"*)
- Additional photocopies of the documentation available for the public to take home
- A3 poster to draw attention to the fact that the documentation in on display a this venue

A public meeting will be held to coincide with all displays of Draft Plans and Strategies.

Options

- Letters to stakeholders
- Letterbox drops
- Increase in advertising – include radio/Mid Coast Observer.
- Focus groups
- Information booths

N.B. The following information will help to ensure the process runs smoothly:-

- Staff members are to ensure that ample time is given to the community for comment.
- Staff members are to ensure that plans and associated documentation are available at the advertised locations prior to the advertisement being published.
- Ensure counter staff and the switchboard operators are aware of the items being displayed for comment.

Council's with a deep understanding of the needs and expectations of the local community are able to achieve more effective communication with the local community. Each day, Council is faced with a number of decisions relating to consultation with the community and there is a need to determine:-

- When consultation is appropriate
- What level of consultation is needed
- What methods of consultation will be used
- Who will manage the consultation process and
- How the consultation process will be evaluated

Council has in place existing avenues for community input however, on occasions, there is a need for additional consultation. The Local Government Act, 1993 states that a Council has the following Charter:

"To provide directly or on behalf of other levels of Government, after due consultation, adequate, equitable and appropriate services and facilities for the community and to ensure that those services and facilities are managed efficiently and effectively;

To facilitate the involvement of Councillors, members of the public, users of facilities and services and Council staff in the development, improvement and co-ordination of Local Government."

WHEN IS CONSULTATION APPROPRIATE?

Traditionally, community consultation has been limited primarily to controversial issues, particularly in relation to development applications. With increased community demand for involvement in Local Government, Councils are recognising the importance of consulting across a broad spectrum of issues affecting the local community. These issues could include:-

- The future use of land within the Shire
- There is community concern about an issue
- The proposal may have significant impact on the economy, lifestyle or environment of the Shire and its residents
- Government agencies have a stated interest in any policy or plans being considered by Council
- The resolution of an issue may require significant redirection of funds

- Information is needed by Councillors or staff about community needs, priorities or values to ensure appropriate and responsive planning
- Statutory obligations
- Minority or disadvantaged groups having access to information.

The following procedure has been developed to ensure effective consultation with the community takes place on issues which Council believes are significant:-

Council to determine if the issue is considered to be a matter of significance.

IAP2 has developed the following assessment grid, based on the level of public interest and concern, which could help Council to determine if an issue has the potential to become, or is, a matter of significance.

Question	Very low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
What is the probable level of difficulty in solving the problem?					
What is the level of existing controversy on this or related issues?					
How significant is the potential impact on the community?					
What is the level of significance of the issues to the major stakeholders?					
Number					
Multiply number by this ranking	**X1**	**X2**	**X3**	**X4**	**X5**
Total for each category					
Total		N.B. The higher the score/average, the more potential for the issue to be classed as significant.			
Average					

Identify key stakeholder groups and or individuals who have an interest in the matter of significance.

There is a need to determine in advance of an issue arising the general interest levels of groups and individuals and to develop a database which can be added to in a more specific way once an issue has been identified. Target listings for generic issues could include development, environmental issues, social/cultural issues, area specific interests, planning, Aboriginal, access, heritage etc.
Extensive publicity is required to ensure that the broadest cross section of the community possible has the opportunity to be identified. Considerable

effort should be made to ensure that the following groups or people are included in the identification process:-

- people who are affected by the existing situation
- people who could be affected by any decision
- people with a strong interest in the issue
- stakeholder groups
- people who may benefit from any decision

NB. ***To be part of the significant issues consultation process, all identified groups will need to be a constituted body and have publicly elected officials***.
Methods to be used in the identification process of stakeholders will include:-

- media releases – opportunities for expansion on the subject through subsequent interviews
- advertisements
- inclusion in community newsletter
- web survey
- calling for submissions and
- compiling a list of known stakeholder groups/individuals (identified by letters, review of media coverage, complaints, referral from other organisations including government bodies).

Determine a position statement from the key stakeholders on the matter of significance.

Invitations are to be extended to identified groups/individuals to participate in the process. Based on input from these groups, a position statement can be developed.

Techniques, including potential benefits and problems, (selected from IAP2 Toolbox) may include:-

Technique	Benefits	Problems
Community facilitation (well trained facilitators)/focus groups	Promotes community involvement Capitalises on existing networks Enhances credibility	Can be difficult to control information flow Can build false expectations Can be expensive and time consuming
Advisory Committees	Detailed analysis for project issues Participants gain understanding of other perspectives, leading towards compromise	General public may not embrace committee's recommendations Members may not achieve consensus Time and labour intensive
Meetings with existing groups	In-depth information exchange in a non-threatening forum	May be too selective and can leave out important groups
Interviews	Opportunity for in-depth information exchange in non-threatening forum Opportunity to gain feedback from all stakeholders Can be used to evaluate potential citizen committee members	Time consuming Expensive
Mailed surveys and questionnaires.	Input from those who may not attend a public meeting Provides a mechanism for extending a mailing list Provides information from a cross section of the community not only activists Statistics are valuable in determining a decision	Response rate can be low To get statistically valid results, can be labour intensive and expensive. Level of detail may be limited.
Telephone Surveys/Polls	Input from those who may not attend a public meeting Provides input from a cross-section of the public Higher response rate than mailed surveys	More expensive and labour intensive than mailed surveys.

Facilitate a public meeting in an appropriate location, present the key stakeholder's position statements and seek additional community input on the matter of significance.

To gain input from the broadest cross section of the community as possible:-

- ensure that the community is aware of the issue and the consultative process,
- maintain regular and sustained communication with the community
- make the process welcoming, appropriate and accessible
- go to where the public are

- provide feedback to show that the input from the community is valued and
- evaluate the success of the program.

Where an issue is contentious, a public meeting held in advance of position statements being sought from individuals or groups may result in confusion, hostility, conflict and little opportunity for informed discussion. Vocal minority groups or individuals with very strong views may highjack the meeting and intimidate other attendees from presenting their opinions.

Conversely, a public meeting held after position statements and input from the broadest possible range of groups/individuals has the advantage of building credibility, maximising feedback and may even foster a degree of community ownership. Importantly, Council has consulted with the community and is in a far better position to make an informed and considered decision on the issue of significance.

Critical Ingredients to the Success of Meetings

- Adequate publicity,
- an appropriate venue and meeting time,
- a prepared agenda,
- visual aids to define or support position statements and
- trained facilitators.

Council uses the information gathered from the community consultation to make a decision on the issue of significance.

In addition to issues based consultation, Council has the opportunity to involve the community in:-

- Identifying needs and issues
- Exchanging information
- Establishing objectives
- Identifying strategies
- Formulating solutions
- Evaluating council programs and services
- Resolving differences and exchanging feedback.

In all cases, consultation should be **open, two way and ongoing**.   To be effective, consultation should occur **before** Council makes a decision.

THE LEVEL OF CONSULTATION NEEDED

The level of consultation varies with the size of the target audience and the nature of the issue/proposal.

TARGET AUDIENCE	
SMALL **e.g. community group**	Letters Meetings Presentations
MEDIUM **e.g. village or town**	Newsletters Meetings Presentations Submissions*
LARGE **e.g. Shire wide**	Advertisements Meetings Newsletters Telephone hotline Comment forms Fact Sheets Submissions*

TARGET GROUP	
PEOPLE DIRECTLY AFFECTED	Letters Leaflets/newsletters Fact sheets Telephone hotlines Meetings
PROFESSIONALS	Submissions * Letters Presentation to organisations/groups Meetings
NON GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS	Submissions * Letters Meetings Presentations Discussion Papers
OTHER GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS	Meetings Letters Workshops Submissions * Presentations

* Submissions are ideal for organisations as they provide an official record.

METHODS OF CONSULTATION

There are numerous methods of consultation available to consider including:-

Newsletters	Toll free telephone lines
Letterbox drops	Fact sheets
Mailing lists	Open days and discussion days
Static and staffed displays	Consultation reports
Comment/feedback forms	Sites visits
Surveys and questionnaires	Workshops
On-line forums	On-line chat rooms
Media material	Focus groups
Paid advertising	Information booths/kits
Community liaison groups	Presentations to special interest groups
Public meetings	Reply paid addressed envelopes
One to one discussions	Community representative

IAP2 CORE VALUES

In 2002, Council joined the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). They have developed the IAP2 Core Values for Public Participation for use in the development of public participation processes. The purpose of these core values is to help make better decisions which reflect the interests and concerns of potentially affected people and entities. In addition, IAP2 has also developed a chart which provides suggestions on how to increase the level of public impact on decision making.

As these are considered to be worldwide best practice models, Council should consider the Core Values and Participation Chart when planning any consultation process.

Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation

- The public should have a say in decisions about actions that affect their lives.
- Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
- The public participation process communicates the interests and meets the process needs of all participants.
- The public participation process seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected.
- The public participation process involves participants in defining how they participate.
- The public participation process provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
- The public participation process communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

IAP2 Participation Chart

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Objective To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives and/or solutions	**Objective** To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions	**Objective** To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public and concerns are consistently understood and considered	**Objective** To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	**Objective** To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public We will keep you informed	**Promise to the public** We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	**Promise to the public** We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	**Promise to the public** 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.	**Promise to the public** To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
Example Tools Fact sheets Web sites Open house	**Example Tools** Public comment Focus groups Surveys Public Meetings	**Example Tools** Workshops Deliberative Polling	**Example Tools** Advisory Committees Consensus Building Participatory decision making	**Example Tools** Citizen juries Ballots Delegated decisions

MANAGING THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

After it has been determined that consultation is required, it is important to:-

- Clarify the purpose.
- Identify who will be involved in the process.
- Establish the best method of consultation to use for each target group.
- Planning. What outcomes do you want? Prepare a clear and concise briefing paper as background information for the public.

- Determine resource requirements. How much do you have to spend?**
- What timeframe is involved?
- Implement the process.
- Seek feedback.

** Consultation processes can be costly as they involve human, financial, material and temporal resources. Potential impact could be:-

LEVEL OF CONSULTATION	NUMBER OF STAFF	WAGES AND COSTS	STAFF HOURS
Low	Four	$3,000+	20+
High	Twelve	$60,000+	400+

When appropriate, external facilitation costs need to be factored in to consultation processes involving public meetings and focus group. This can add significantly to the success of public meetings as the external facilitator is seen as fair and impartial and can therefore present the facts and gather the findings in an independent manner.

EVALUATION OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

The need to evaluate the success of any consultation process is imperative. You can do this by using feedback forms, quantifying the number of responses, inviting informal feedback during the process and holding a debriefing session at the end of the process.

SUMMARY

Each opportunity for Community Consultation should be considered using the five steps outlined above and summarized below.

- When consultation is appropriate
- What level of consultation is needed
- What methods of consultation will be used
- Who will manage the consultation process and
- How the consultation process will be evaluated

By following these steps, and referring the procedure for dealing with issues of significance, the IAP2 Core Values for Public Participation and Council's Matrix, an effective level of consultation should result.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: *Gutteridge, Haskins and Davey Pty Ltd, NSW Ombudsman "Better Service and Communication – Guidelines for Local Government, Bankstown City Council, Hastings Council, Warringah Council, IAP2 and the RTA*