

Communications and Engagement

Strategy

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PURPOSE

The purpose of the Communications and Engagement Strategy (the Strategy) is to:

- Identify and address the key challenges and opportunities and to support the Council in continuing to improve its communications and engagement processes consistent with the intent of the Communications and Engagement Policy – January 2016 and the Social Media Acceptable Use Policy – January 2016¹; and
- To build internal capability in the Council’s broad communications and engagement activities. Community engagement is the process of communicating, cooperating and working with communities to gather information, build relationships and inform the Council’s decision making.

The Communications and Engagement Policy – January 2016 provides guidance to improve the way the Central Coast Council (the Council) communicates internally and externally. This includes the way the Council communicates and engages with people in our communities and involves them in dealing with the challenges and opportunities that matter most. It is the process of working collaboratively with interest groups within the community to make well-informed decisions about major developments and strategic directions for the Central Coast.

The Social Media Acceptable Use Policy – January 2016 has been developed to ensure the effective service delivery of Council business through the use of social media whilst mitigating risk and establishing the proper use of the Council’s social media services.

Whilst the Policies reflect an increased willingness by the Council to improve the way that it communicates and engages internally with the community and other key stakeholders, there will be a number of related internal and external constraints, challenges and opportunities involved including²:

- Having appropriate support systems and processes;
- Having resources including funds available for effective community-oriented engagement activities;
- Having staff adequately skilled in new and improved forms of community engagement;
- Balancing risk versus the benefit of effective use of social media;
- Striking the right balance between the benefits and effectiveness of technological advances; and
- Identifying different ways to engage the especially hard-to-engage community members.

¹ Central Coast Council, (January 2016), ‘*Communications and Engagement Policy*’; Central Coast Council, (January 2016), ‘*Social Media Acceptable Use Policy*’.

² COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT In Rural-Remote and Indigenous Local Government; Dr Robyn Morris; Report for Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government; October 2012

INTRODUCTION

Effective communication is the glue that holds organisations together. Everyone within the Council is responsible for ensuring effective and appropriate internal and external communications. Accurate, transparent, two-way communication is fundamental to good governance. It underpins how we work, improves services to and engages with people within and beyond our community.

Engagement goes beyond informing and consulting. It extends to:

- Having open conversations and dialogue;
- Building communications and working relationships and developing partnerships with business and community sectors;
- Integrating local community participation into important strategic policy-making and directions; and
- Developing and supporting effective communications and working relationships, between the Council and other agencies and tiers of government that deliver local public services.

The evolving role of local government is increasingly focusing on place and people, in addition to the more traditional roles. Whilst the Council continues to play an important role, communities are increasingly becoming more willing and capable of taking responsibility for their own growth trajectories. This means reviewing and continuing to improve the ways that the Council communicates and engages with all of its stakeholders³ in terms of:

- The changing expectations communities have of local government;
- The changing roles and responsibilities of local government;
- New ways of thinking about community governance;
- The principles and frameworks of effective engagement; and
- The associated resources and capability required for effective engagement.

The Strategy is linked and contributes to the Council's Strategic Plan 2014–2024⁴. The Strategic Plan recognises that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved related decision-making processes. This implies improved community engagement and coordination between the Council's efforts and community-led approaches to development.

The greater the public impact of decisions and related actions, the more participatory and inclusive the related communications and engagement processes should be. This suggests

³ LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN AUSTRALIA Working Paper No. 5 November 2011; Jade Herriman; ACELG

⁴ Central Coast Council (2014), '*Central Coast Strategic Plan 2014-2024*'. Aus.

that different capabilities, management practices, resources and approaches are required depending on the point of contact and the purpose of the need to engage.

The benefits of good internal and external communications and engagement include:

- Fostering inclusiveness and transparency by actively engaging the community and other key stakeholders in decision making and public processes;
- Improving trust and understanding and minimising the chances of conflict due to miscommunication;
- Improving organisational performance, including Council decision making and service delivery;
- Increasing cooperation across business units leading to improved efficiency and effectiveness and reduced duplication;
- Better-informed grant applications – grant eligibility criteria are increasingly requiring demonstrable and effective community engagement as part of the development of funding applications;
- Providing an opportunity to promote what the Council and the community stand for;
- Managing community expectation;
- Building networks, relationships, cooperation and partnerships amongst stakeholders to act collectively on things that matter most; and
- Informing/educating, empowering and building capability in our community.

The Council has adopted and commenced training staff in the use of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum as the framework for its communications and engagement⁵.

Effective communications and engagement is more about a process than a plan. This Strategy provides a roadmap to address key identified challenges and opportunities, build capability and develop the resources to support the Council in continuing to improve its communications and engagement processes.

⁵ IAP2 (International Association for Public Participation) is an international member association which seeks to promote and improve the practice of public participation or community engagement, incorporating individuals, governments, institutions and other entities that affect the public interest throughout the world. IAP2 Australasia is the leading public participation Association in Australasia. See attachment 1 for more information.

The Strategy includes:

- A set of values and key guiding principles;
- An Action Plan;
- Initial Council Communications and Engagement Capability Mapping and Gap Analysis; and
- A Communications and Engagement tool and suite of related templates and resources – a user-friendly, web-based navigation tool and toolbox to provide guidance and resources to help Council staff develop and conduct effective communications and engagement processes.

KEY VALUES

- Giving people a voice;
- Those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process; and
- Tapping into community spirit – engaging with our local communities in new ways that reflect their concerns and aspirations.

KEY GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The key to building consistency in the practice of communications and engagement is the use of a principle-based approach. The Council's Communications and Engagement Policy identifies the following principles.

Inclusive planning

The planning and design of engagement processes will include appropriate input from relevant stakeholders:

- We will seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision;
- We will provide participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way; and
- We will communicate to participants how their input affected the decision.

Transparency

There will be a clarity and transparency about the engagement purpose, design and how decision-makers will use the process results.

Authentic intent

A primary purpose of engagement is to generate public views and ideas to help shape local government action or policy, rather than persuade residents to accept a decision that has already been made.

Collaboration

This includes cooperative arrangements where individuals and groups can work together towards a common purpose. Collaboration is an effective method of transferring 'know how', breaking down silos and reducing inefficiency and waste. This should include more adaptive and agile partnership approaches between the Council and key not-for-profit and government service providers. Such arrangements can include memoranda of intent; public-private partnerships and service agreements. Rather than being a direct service provider in these contexts, the Council is well positioned to fulfil the role of enabler, coordinator, facilitator and supporter of such arrangements.

Capability building

This includes enhancing the capabilities of staff and the community to communicate and engage around matters of mutual interest – this is particularly important when developing/ supporting more community-led and/or collaborative forms of development.

Empowerment

This involves enabling communities to increase control over their lives. It is the process where they increase their knowledge and build capacities to create partners, networks and/or a voice, in order to gain control. Empowerment involves community ownership and actions that aim for social change or community-driven project outcomes.

International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)

The Council commits to adapting the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum as a best practice framework for community engagement processes.

SYSTEM CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

Leadership

Internally, this means senior management leading by example and being role models for staff.

Externally, the Council has a leadership role to play in improving the connections, relationships and trust within the community to work together to deal with things that matter most. This requires a more collective and inclusive leadership style.

Communication and engagement from a corporate governance perspective:

- The Mayor is the Council's spokesperson for the Council; and
- The General Manager is the Council's spokesperson for the Council's operational matters.

Improving organisational culture

This means embedding effective communications and engagement in everything we do.

Effective resourcing

Ensuring appropriate staffing levels, access to training, budgets and tools for effective communications.

Internal capability

The Council needs to continuously review/improve communications and engagement capability and processes.

Managing risk

This means striking a balance between inclusive and effective engagement and managing the Council's risk.

Inclusive participation

Engagement needs to be broadly accessible in terms of location, time, and language, and support the engagement of participants.

Appropriate process/channels

Engagement needs to utilise one or more discussion formats/communications channels that reflect the needs of identified participant groups, and encourages full, authentic, effective and equitable participation consistent with process purposes.

Authentic use of information received

The ideas, preferences, and/or recommendations contributed by stakeholders should be documented and seriously considered by decision makers.

Feedback to participants

The Council should communicate ultimate decisions back to process participants and the broader public, with a description of how the public input was considered and used.

Evaluation

Evaluation should take place relating to engagement processes with the collected feedback and learning shared broadly and applied to future engagement efforts.

INTEGRATED/SYSTEMS APPROACH

Effective communications and engagement involves more than content development and management. It also includes effective, integrated development and management of the associated communication systems and processes/channels through which the content is conveyed. The key elements include:

1. System tools and resources (the website and intranet/intraweb);
2. Communications and engagement channels (social media, e-newsletters, community surveys, meetings, workshops and forums);
3. Capability and resources (availability of appropriate written and oral communications, engagement and facilitation skills and support guides and resources); and
4. Content development and management (objective of communications, content, format, target audience and timing/frequency).

A required improvement in one element of the system may have implications for other elements. Adopting an integrated systems approach can help:

- Identify inter-dependent/prerequisite actions across the elements;
- As a basis for cross-functional responsibilities and coordination (e.g. cross-organisation process teams); and
- Monitor/evaluate performance of the support systems/processes as well as content development and management.

CURRENT CAPABILITY MAPPING AND GAP ANALYSIS

With the support of the Senior Leadership Team, a communications and engagement capability and gap analysis was conducted across the Council's Business Units. The process identified initiators and recipients, purpose and communications/engagement types. The output of the process informed this Strategy and will also continue to inform the Council's internal continuous improvement and staff professional development/training process.

Key Findings of the Process⁶:

Several key findings resulted from the capability mapping and gap analysis. It would be fair to make the point that the review tended to focus on traditional thinking and approaches. As the Council continues to embrace new, agile and more collaborative forms of communications and engagement, then there will be new demands on capability, systems and process. As a result, a more detailed review/analysis is proposed in 2016–2017.

The findings reinforce the importance of a policy context to mitigate risk for the Council, relevant training and Information Technology purchasing. The key findings include:

- Reviewing all internal standard sheets and forms;
- Providing access to digital platforms including Skype, Made Open; Linked-in, Facebook and other forms of social media;
- Contemporary recruitment processes including expos and street stalls; and
- A responsive, interactive and instant community engagement tool, such as 'Bang the Table'⁷, or a similar more affordable alternative.

⁶ See attachment 2 for a more detailed analysis of the process.

⁷ Bang the Table provides an online platform where people can discuss public policy at a grassroots, community level. <http://bangthetable.com/>.

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

Key Action	Related Tasks	Responsibility	Resources	Timing
1. Redesign of the Council's websites and intranet (intra-web)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tender for three quotations to redesign the website and intranet 	GM		Complete
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate redevelopment of the Coast to Canyon website 	GM		Complete
2. Implement the redesign the Council's website and intranet (intra-web)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a change management process to manage internal resistance to change 	GM/Directors	\$25,000 Dependent on factors including the number of intra-webs developed	June 2016
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audit content through a participatory approach to identifying information gaps and inaccurate information across Departments 			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create interactive forms of communications and engagement for the website 			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create procedures to ensure the ongoing accuracy of content 			
3. Continue to develop Made Open Tasmania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish long-term governance arrangements 	GM	TBC	2016-17
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate a business case for a Made Open Tasmania Community Foundation 	GM		2016-17
4. E-newsletter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outsource design and distribution to a professional e-newsletter designer company to produce quarterly e-newsletter 	GM	\$550.00	Complete
5. Council Facebook page	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement a Council Facebook page 	GM		2015-16
6. Twitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate the Council's use of Twitter 	GM		2016-17

Key Action	Related Tasks	Responsibility	Resources	Timing
7. New methods of communications and engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate new internal and external communications and engagement methods, including digital platforms 	GM		June 2016
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement new internal/external communications and engagement methods as agreed 	GM		2016-17
8. Become a corporate member of, and participate in the IAP2 network in Australia and Tasmania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link to IAP2 resources via the Council's intranet (inraweb) 	GM	Annual fee is approx. \$1,600 pa	Complete
9. Process reviews/gap analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop Departmental/process improvement plans 	GM/Directors/Group Leaders		2016-17
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop business cases for plans that involve cost 	GM/Directors/Group Leaders		2016-17
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop Policy context for plans that involve risk 	GM/Directors/Group Leaders		2016-17
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop staff PD/training plans 	GM/Directors		2016-17
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detailed review/analysis 	GM/Directors		2016-17
10. Navigation tool and toolkit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop/implement appropriate integrated communications and engagement tools to create an online toolkit available on the intranet (inraweb) 	GM/Directors		June 2016
11. Key staff training on different community engagement approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the need for specialist front line communications, engagement and facilitation training (such as community engagement, marketing and communications and social/digital media) 		IAP2 offers a variety of in-house and attendance workshops	2016-17

Key Action	Related Tasks	Responsibility	Resources	Timing
12. Key staff training and in the use of digital platforms/social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create the Policy context around social media use and systems management 	GM/Directors		Complete
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement the application of Facebook to engage with the community around Council activities 	GM/Directors		In progress
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement application of social media platforms to inform the community 	GM/Directors	Local training can be sourced in the use of digital marketing/ social media	In progress
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of digital platforms to collaborate and engage with the community, such as Made Open, Bang the Table, Twitter, Blogs (for internal communication) 	GM/Directors	Local training can be sourced in the use of specific digital platforms	In progress
13. Councillor training on participation in different community engagement approaches		GM		2016-17
14. Community training on different community engagement approaches and community-led forms of development		GM		2016-17
15. Develop/trial a range of standard service agreement templates to support collaborative forms of engagement		GM		2015-16
16. Media engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media training for Mayor, Councillors and key staff in areas of television appearances and radio interviews 	GM/Directors	TBC	2016-17
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training key staff in the preparation of routine and non-routine press releases 	GM/Directors	TBC	2016-17

Key Action	Related Tasks	Responsibility	Resources	Timing
17. Develop and implement an annual media and communications plan		GM/Directors		2015-16
18. Develop an online civic consultation/ engagement tool that gives people a voice on civic matters		GM		2016-17
19. Develop Place Marketing Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a combined Council/community online place marketing presence 	GM/Community Services Dept		2016-17
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish photo/video library 	GM/Community Services Dept	Estimate \$10,000	2016-17
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review/update the Coast to Canyon Brand including style guide, interpretation and communications plan 	GM/Community Services Dept	Estimate \$20,000	2017-18
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect and collate Central Coast's key connection to place stories 	GM/Community Services Dept		2016-17
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the relevance/benefits of the Devonport and Cradle Country cooperative approach to marketing 	GM/Community Services Dept		2017-18
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner with key community groups (e.g. Regional Tourism Authority) to provide free/subsidised relevant place marketing/story telling training to key community groups 	GM/Community Services Dept		2016-17
20. Review/refine the current corporate brand and style guide		GM/Directors	TBC	2017-18

ATTACHMENT 1 – THE IAP2 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM

The Communications and Engagement Policy 2016 identifies the Council’s commitment to adapting the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum (the Spectrum)⁸ as a best practice framework for community engagement processes. The Spectrum was designed to assist with selecting the appropriate level of community participation, which then defines the community’s role in the communications and engagement process. The Spectrum shows that levels of participation are varied, depending on the goals, time frames, resources, and levels of concern in the decision to be made, refer Figure 1, IAP2’s Public Participation Spectrum.



Figure 1: IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

In addition, the Council recently adopted its 2014–2024 Strategic Plan and Local Economic Development Framework (2014). Both strategies also emphasise the importance of improving the way that the Council communicates and engages with its community. Engagement is broad ranging and varies, depending on the objective, context and community impact, refer Figure 2, IAP2’s Hub and Spoke model of the various uses of engagement.

⁸ Follow the link for more details on the IAP2 Spectrum - <https://www.iap2.org.au/resources/iap2s-public-participation-spectrum>



Figure 2: IAP2’s Hub and Spoke model of the various uses of engagement

The Spectrum recognises that the Council’s engagement activities can extend well beyond traditional consultation. Levels of engagement such as collaboration and empowerment reinforce the fact that councils do not exist in isolation, and emphasises the importance of engaging and building relationships and trust with the community and other key players to better achieve common outcomes. Access to IAP2 resources assists the Council to fulfil this emerging role for local government.

ATTACHMENT 2 - THE ONLINE TOOLKIT

The Council is a Corporate Member of IAP2⁹. Professional Development in the form of staff training delivered by an accredited IAP2 Trainer provides staff three months access to IAP2's Member Centre webpage. The IAP2's Methods Matrices document is available on the IAP2 Members Centre webpage. The Methods Matrices document contains 67 methods of community engagement, including a description of the method and the scale, purpose and context for each. Additionally, IAP2 training provides access to the Design, Plan, Manage (DPM) model, refer Figure 3. Each segment of the DPM model is explained within the training manual.

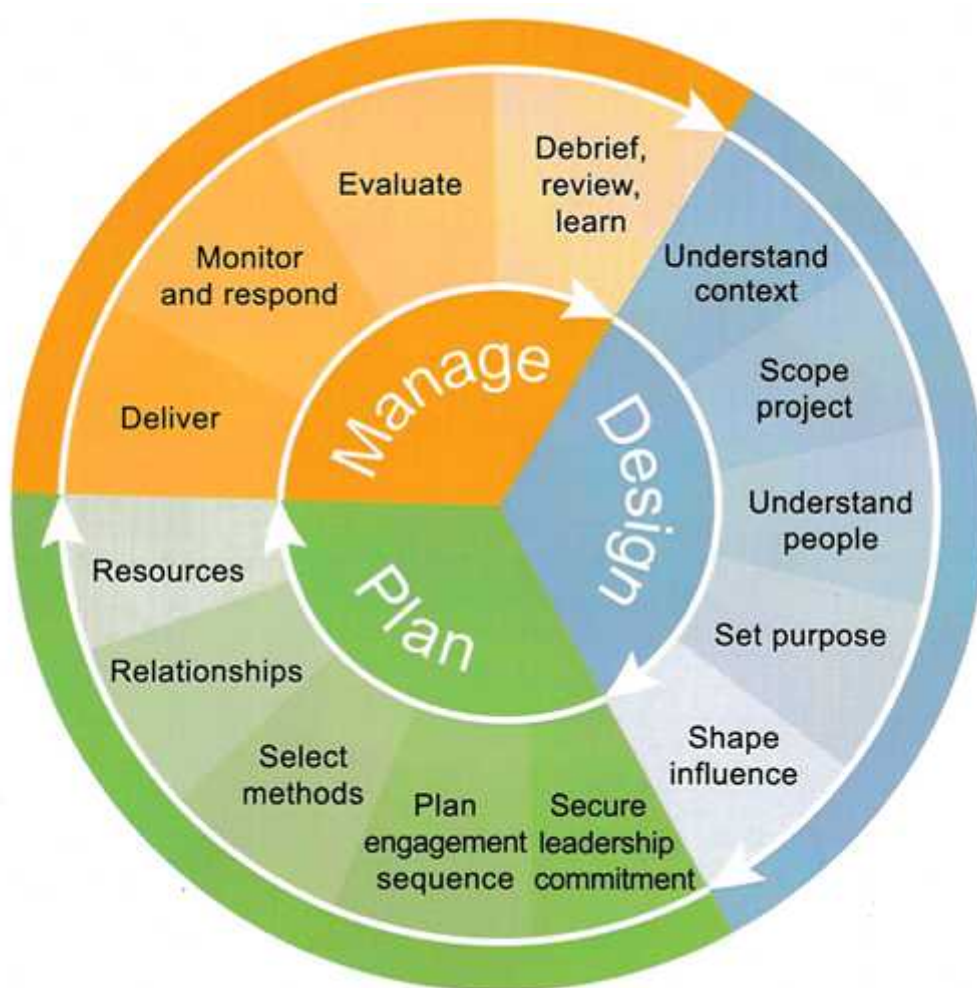


Figure 3: IAP2 Design, Plan, Manage Model

⁹ The Council became a Corporate Member of IAP2 in August 2014. Unlimited Council staff can now be registered, with individual IAP2 Corporate Membership logon details.

IAP2 Corporate Membership combined with staff training builds the Council’s internal capability for communications and engagement processes. Access to IAP2’s Members Centre provides the Council with resource materials that are produced and reviewed by IAP2; an internationally recognised best practice framework for community engagement.

Periodical access to the IAP2 Members Centre enables the development of a Guiding Document, a ‘how to guide’ for communications and engagement processes. Additionally, an online resource page, conceptually based on the Local Government Centre of Excellence ‘Online Toolkit’¹⁰ for Regional and Remote Community Engagement’, refer Figure 4, creates the foundation for the Council to conduct consistent and planned communications and community engagement activities.



Figure 4: Intraweb concept design: Communications and Community Engagement Toolkit

¹⁰ Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government, (2015). ‘Online Community Engagement Toolkit for Rural, Remote and Indigenous Councils’. <http://www.acelg.org.au/online-community-engagement-toolkit-rural-remote-and-indigenous-councils>. Accessed August 27, 2015