

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY



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## Introduction

The Community Engagement Strategy outlines the process for involving the Warren Shire community in Council’s strategic planning and decision making processes, ranging from the development of Council’s Ten Year Community Strategic Plan to day-to-day activities. Council supports the right of citizens to participate in decision making that affects their future.

The strategy:

1. Defines community engagement and identifies the methods of engagement Council uses for the key stages of engagement—inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower;
2. Identifies the broad categories of Council projects which require engagement; and
3. Provides an Engagement Matrix to align the methods of engagement with the category of Council projects.
4. Will provide a broad based process on how Council will engage with the community in regard to its projects, programs and plans.



*Councillor Brewer absent from photo.*

## Scope

The purpose of a Community Engagement Strategy is to encourage a participatory culture and to create meaningful new bonds driven by shared values or goals.

A number of organisations and scholars have identified core principles of community engagement. Warren Shire Council's seven core principles that effectively reflect the common beliefs and understandings of those working in the field of community engagement – conflict, conflict resolution, and collaboration.

In practice, these principles and others, are applied in many different ways. The principles are as follows:

1. *Careful Planning and Preparation.* Through adequate and inclusive planning, ensure that the design, organisation, and convening of the process serve both a clearly defined purpose and the needs of the participants;
2. *Inclusion and Demographic Diversity.* Equitably incorporate diverse people, voices, ideas, and information to lay the groundwork for quality outcomes and democratic legitimacy;
3. *Collaboration and Shared Purpose.* Support and encourage participants, government and community institutions, and others to work together to advance the common good;
4. *Openness and Learning.* Help all involved listen to each other, explore new ideas unconstrained by predetermined outcomes, learn and apply information in ways that generate new options, and rigorously evaluate community engagement activities for effectiveness;
5. *Transparency and Trust.* Be clear and open about the process, and provide a public record of the organisers, sponsors, outcomes, and range of views and ideas expressed;
6. *Impact and Action.* Ensure each participatory effort has real potential to make a difference, and that participants are aware of that potential; and
7. *Sustained Engagement and Participatory Culture.* Promote a culture of participation with programs and institutions that support ongoing quality community engagement.

This Community Engagement Strategy relates to most activities undertaken by Council, except for notifications of development applications and other related statutory notifications. If legislative requirements or other Council policies exist which address specific information/consultation processes, they take precedence, but the implementation of that legislation and those policies should take account the Community Engagement Strategy.

There are external factors that sometimes limit the level of engagement possible. For example, state or federal legislation may prescribe specific activities or project characteristics may determine what can or should be done. Community members also have opportunities to participate beyond the Community Engagement Strategy by the use of Council's customer request process.

Council Staff can utilise a Project Engagement Plan with the Marketing and Communications Team when planning to undertake community engagement for a specific event or project. Council Department's should advise the Marketing and Communications Team of projects and together determine the need for a formal plan.

The plan will:

- Define the project;
- Determine objectives;
- Outline appropriate communication and engagement methods;



- Detail timeframes and responsibilities; and
- Consider feedback, reporting and evaluation.

## Benefits

Effective engagement makes communities feel more connected with their Councils, strengthening trust, goodwill and respect.

There are a number of benefits from the Community Engagement Strategy which:

- Commits Council to be open and accountable;
- Helps Council plan services better to meet community needs and aspirations;
- Helps Council prioritise services and make better use of resources;
- Allows a broader range of views to be expressed, more information to be assembled, and more possible solutions to be considered before making decisions;
- Enables Council and the community to work together to achieve balanced decisions;
- Offers opportunities for residents to contribute to and influence outcomes which directly affect their lives; and
- Encourages greater community ownership and acceptance of Council decisions.

## Objectives

1. Involve the local community in the development, implementation and review of Council's strategic planning and decision making processes, within its legislative abilities;
2. Provide a framework for a co-ordinated well planned approach to engagement that is genuine and inclusive and meets the needs of each stakeholder group (not one size fits all);
3. Monitor and evaluate Council's engagement activities and incorporate feedback to improve and enhance Council's community engagement activities and capabilities into the future;
4. Build a positive reputation for Warren Shire Council by demonstrating that Council is listening, informing and being informed by a broad cross section of the community; and
5. Ensure Council and Councillors receive quality information representative of the views of a broad cross section of the community, sourced from a range of methods to assist in effective decision making.

## Legislation/Principles

### *NSW Local Government Act*

The *NSW Local Government Act 1993* requires all Councils in NSW to have a long term Community Strategic Plan to enable better outcomes focused on the needs and aspirations of the community. To ensure that the Plan reflects community needs, the Act states that Councils must prepare and implement an Engagement Strategy.

The strategy needs to specifically address the issues around determining ‘Levels of Service’ that the community expects from Council. This information can then be used to plan and guide the quality and effectiveness of policy development, service level planning, infrastructure works, major projects, advocacy and partnership development.

### *Public Participation Principles*

Council believes that all citizens should have a say in decisions about actions that affect their lives. Council implements best practice guidelines developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) to ensure that engagement is genuine.

The IAP2s core values of public participation:

1. Is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision making process;
2. Includes the promise that the public’s contribution will inform the decision;
3. Promote sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers;
4. Seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision;
5. Seeks input from participants in designing how they participate;
6. Provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way; and
7. Communicates to participants how their input affected the decision made.



### ***Social Justice Principles***

The *NSW Local Government Act* also stipulates that the Community Strategic Plan should reflect the principles of Social Justice and that these social considerations are adequately addressed in the planning and development process. The principles for social justice are:

#### ***Equity***

There should be fairness in decision making, prioritising and allocation of resources, particularly for those in need. Everyone should have a fair opportunity to participate in the future of the community. The planning process should take particular care to involve and protect the interests of people in vulnerable circumstances.

#### ***Access***

All people should have fair access to services, resources and opportunities to improve their quality of life.

#### ***Participation***

Everyone should have the maximum opportunity to genuinely participate in decisions which affect their lives.

#### ***Rights***

Equal rights should be established and promoted, with opportunities provided for people from diverse linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds to participate in community life.

### ***Engaging with Hard to Reach Groups***

Traditionally, some groups of people have been more challenging to engage with effectively.

These have included:

- People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds;
- Indigenous people;
- Older people;
- Youth;
- People with a disability;
- People with low levels of literacy; and
- People from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

Warren Shire Council will use a variety of strategies to engage hard to reach groups.

These include:

- Ensuring community engagement activities are promoted through a number of different media e.g. newspapers, free publications, over the radio, online and through flyers;
- Using plain english both to promote community engagement and during community engagements;
- Following appropriate cultural protocols and ensuring that the person/s involved in engagement have the authority to speak on behalf of their community or group;
- Avoiding using assumptions, generalisations, or insensitive language about people from CALD backgrounds or their beliefs;
- Seeking the support of agencies (including sections of Council) that provide services to special needs groups;
- Providing incentives to encourage groups and/or individuals to become involved in community engagement;



- Using age appropriate methods for children and young people;
- Taking the opportunity to carry out engagement at activities, events or festivals in the Community; and
- Councillors and staff going out to conduct engagement sessions in the communities.

## Engagement Basics

### ***What is Engagement?***

For the purposes of this strategy, community engagement is defined as the processes and structures in which Council:

1. Communicates information to the community; and
2. Seeks information, involvement and collaboration from the community with the primary aim of informing Council's decision making.

Best practice community engagement as prescribed by the International Association for the Public Participation (IAP2) defines community engagement as:

*'Any process that involves the public in problem solving or decision making and uses public input to make decisions.'*

In general terms, it is an inclusive process to ensure the community has the opportunity to participate in decisions that may impact them.



## Our Community

### **Stakeholders**

Warren Shire Council stakeholders include:

**Warren Shire Residents:** Those who reside in the Warren Shire Local Government Area.

**Warren Shire Ratepayers:** Those who own rateable land located in the Warren Shire Local Government Area.

**Community Organisations and Groups:** This includes not-for-profit, civic, cultural and religious organisations, groups and networks, and village progress associations etc.

**Councillors and Council Staff:** The elected body of Council and Council employees.

**Schools, Education and Training Institutes:** This includes vocational and training providers and schools.

**Businesses/Industry:** Owners, operators and employees of small, medium and large businesses, business groups, utility companies, economic development, Chamber of Commerce and tourism industry groups.

**Government Agencies and Statutory Authorities:** State and Federal government agencies and statutory authorities, including emergency services.

**Other Orana Councils and Regional Bodies:** Bogan, Bourke, Brewarrina, Cobar, Coonamble, Dubbo Regional, Gilgandra, Narromine, Walgett and Warrumbungle Shire Councils.

**Interest Groups:** Representative groups with an interest in particular issues, such as sporting or cultural organisations and peak bodies, youth organisations, disability advocacy and indigenous organisations.

**Council Committees:** Plant Committee, Showground/Racecourse Committee, Warren Shire Traffic Committee, Warren Water and Sewerage Committee, Warren Town Improvement Committee, Warren Sporting Facilities Committee, Economic Development & Promotions Committee, Council Chambers Development Sunset Committee, Ewenmar Waste Depot Sunset Committee, Water Conservation Committee, Airport Operations Committee, Roads Committee, Warren Public Arts Committee, Australia Day Committee, Local Emergency Management Committee and Warren Interagency Support Services Group.

## How we will Engage

### **Levels of Participation**

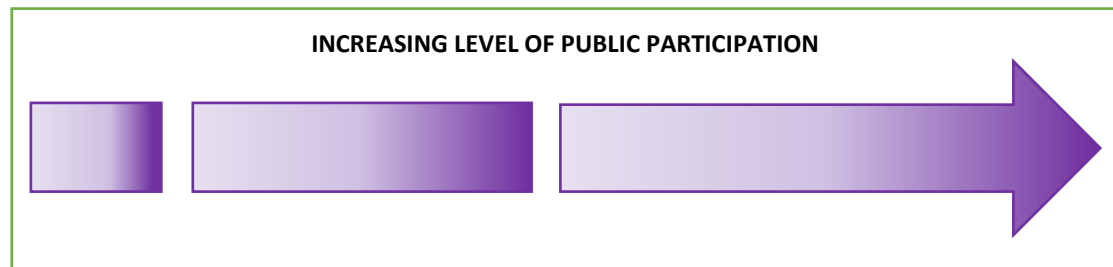
The Public Participation Spectrum developed by IPA2 identifies five different stages of consultation relative to the level of impact the community should have on decision making.

The stages are:

1. Inform;
2. Consult;
3. Involve;
4. Collaborate; and
5. Empower.

The spectrum is outlined in the table below:

<b>Inform</b>	<b>Consult</b>	<b>Involve</b>	<b>Collaborate</b>	<b>Empower</b>
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	To give the public a real voice in the final decision making*



\* Council functions under the *NSW Local Government Act NSW 1993*; therefore except in very limited circumstances only the elected body of Council is ‘empowered’ to make decisions and implement actions. Hence, engagement activities conducted at the Empowerment level will be unusual.

For Warren Shire Council purposes the key stages can be described as:

- Inform;
- Consult; and
- Involve/Collaborate.

## Inform

**Commitment to Community :** We will keep you informed.

**Community's Role:** Listen.

**Council's Role:** Give stakeholders balanced, accurate and relevant information on decisions, policies, plans and strategies.

The inform stage is for day-to-day use, often when Council has already made a decision, to communicate the outcome or status of projects, or when there is only one way that Council can inform the community.

## Inform Engagement Methods

**Customer Service:** Council's Administration Centre along with Services NSW Office in Dubbo Street in Warren provide a 'one-stop-shop' for Council services using customer service, visual displays and printed materials for Council related business.

**Warren Shire Council Website:** One of Council's primary communication tools, the website should be a comprehensive source of information for all Council services and programs.

**Advertising and Features:** Council will consider the use of advertising/features with any local media servicing the area e.g. The Warren Weekly, The Daily Liberal, Western Magazine, 2DU, 2WEB and United Christian Broadcasters etc.

**Media Releases:** Regular media releases ensure Council provides reliable, timely and accurate information to all media servicing the Warren Shire Local Government Area, including print and broadcast.

**Publications/Information Material:** Warren Shire Council publications about Council specific programs, services and initiatives are a valuable source of information.

**Social Media:** Provides a platform for Council to provide information, receive feedback and hold discussions.

**Council Facilitated Community Events:** Council hosted events which provide opportunities for Councillors and staff to provide information to the community. Council also strongly supports and participates in other community events.

**Letterbox Drop:** Non addressed letter/flyer that advises citizens of an outcome/works to be undertaken and informs how feedback can be provided.

**Targeted Direct Mail:** Addressed letters sent directly to customer. This is usually specific to a project, geographic location or members of a particular group or demographic.

**Presentation/Public Speaking:** Councillors and staff speak at relevant meetings or events such as community events.

**Site Specific Signage:** Erected temporarily or permanently to inform the public of the project and relevant project details.

**Community Displays/Stalls:** Councillors and Council officers are available at a nominated venue and for a specific period of time, encouraging citizens to attend and discuss topics.

**Site Meeting/Tour:** Interaction at specific locations, usually facilitated by Council for invited participants.

**Personal Briefing:** Inform relevant community groups/ratepayer associations/businesses/individuals that they may request a personal briefing with Councillors or Council staff to discuss a particular issue.

**Meetings by Invitation:** Community leaders, stakeholders and representatives meet with Councillors and Council staff for discussion, debate and exchange of views on a specific issue.

## Consult

**Commitment to the Community:** We will listen to you, consider your ideas and concerns and keep you informed.

**Community's Role: Contribute**

**Council's Role:** Generate active two-way communication between Council and the community. At this level, Council seeks feedback to identify important community issues and perspectives that can influence and assist decision making. Informing is a prerequisite for consultation.

## Consult Engagement Methods

**Customer Service:** Council's Administration Centre along with Services NSW Office in Dubbo Street in Warren provide a 'one-stop-shop' for Council services using customer service, visual displays and printed materials for Council related business.

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**Social Media:** Provides a platform for Council to provide information, receive feedback and hold discussions.

**Letterbox Drop:** Non addressed letter/flyer that advises citizens of an outcome/works to be undertaken and informs how feedback can be provided.



**Targeted Direct Mail:** Addressed letters sent directly to customer. This is usually specific to a project, geographic location or members of a particular group or demographic.

**Community Forums:** These provide an opportunity for members of the community to attend a structured two way information session hosted by Council, usually about specific projects and topics.

**Presentation/Public Speaking:** Councillors and staff speak at relevant meetings or events such as community events.

**Public Exhibitions and Submissions:** Required by legislation for certain types of issues, items on exhibition and development applications are open to submissions from the public. The information is made available to the public to comment on within a certain time frame, while informing citizens how they can make their submissions/comments to Council.

**Community Displays/Stalls:** Councillors and Council officers are available at a nominated venue and for a specific period of time, encouraging citizens to attend and discuss topics.

**Targeted Direct Mail:** Addressed letters sent directly to customer. This is usually specific to a project, geographic location or members of a particular group or demographic.

**Surveys:** Target audience surveys should be integrated with broader consultation for larger projects, using independent market research companies or survey specialists where possible.

**Site Meeting/Tour:** Interaction at specific locations, usually facilitated by Council for invited participants.

**Personal Briefing:** Inform relevant community groups/ratepayer associations/businesses/ individuals that they may request a personal briefing with Councillors or Council staff to discuss a particular issue.

**Meetings by Invitation:** Community leaders, stakeholders and representatives meet with Councillors and Council staff for discussion, debate and exchange of views on a specific issue.

## Involve/Collaborate

**Commitment to the Community:** We will work with you on an ongoing basis to ensure your ideas, concerns and aspirations are considered. We will provide feedback on Council's decisions.

**Community's Role:** Participate

**Council's Role:** Create a collaborative relationship/partnership between Council and the community, facilitating involvement in shaping decisions that affect community life. Informing and consulting are components of involving/collaborating.

## Involve/Collaborate Engagement Methods

**Customer Service:** Council's Administration Centre along with Services NSW Office in Dubbo Street in Warren provide a 'one-stop-shop' for Council services using customer service, visual displays and printed materials for Council related business.

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**Letterbox Drop:** Non addressed letter/flyer that advises citizens of an outcome/works to be undertaken and informs how feedback can be provided.

**Targeted Direct Mail:** Addressed letters sent directly to customer. This is usually specific to a project, geographic location or members of a particular group or demographic.

**Presentation/Public Speaking:** Councillors and staff speak at relevant meetings or events such as community events.

**Surveys:** Target audience surveys should be integrated with broader consultation for larger projects, using independent market research companies or survey specialists where possible.

**Meetings by Invitation:** Community leaders, stakeholders and representatives meet with Councillors and Council staff for discussion, debate and exchange of views on a specific issue.

**Large Group/Stakeholder Collaboration:** As forums to address a strategic issue or plan, these collaborations bring together Councillors, Council staff, Committee Members, stakeholder groups and individuals with relevant expertise and knowledge to formulate a response.

## Empower

**Commitment to the Community:** We will give the community greater opportunity to participate in a transparent flow of information and feedback to Councillors, who have been empowered as the community representatives to make decisions in accordance with the *NSW Local Government Act 1993*.

**Community's Role:** Decide

**Council's Role:** As noted above, engagement activities conducted at the Empower level will be unusual. However, engagement with Councillors is encouraged and facilitated.

## Council Projects for Engagement

Consultation methods vary according to the type of project/issue. The strategy sets guidelines for engagement on project/issues which are classified into four categories:

1. **Shire-wide / High Impact:** Strategic plans, major projects and resource issues. *For example, Community Strategic Plan, Local Environmental Plans, shire-wide Development Control Plans.*
2. **Shire-wide / Low Impact:** Management Plans and Policy Development, minor projects and major projects with limited impact. *For example major festivals and events.*
3. **Locality Based / High Impact:** Locality improvement and site specific matters and events. *For example, Development Applications in accordance with statutory requirements, construction of Council facilities and works in central business districts.*
4. **Locality Based / Low Impact:** Council service/program planning and delivery. *For example, local road works, operational services such as traffic management and general maintenance of public areas or upgrade of parks and recreational areas (minor works level).*

This Strategy relates to many activities undertaken by Council. However, legislative requirements and other Council policies regulate the procedures and outcomes of some Council activities, limiting the opportunities for public input and the scope for community engagement.

## Engagement Matrix

	What to do?	When you are dealing with...			
		Shire-Wide / High Impact	Shire-Wide / Low Impact	Locality Based / High Impact	Locality Based / Low Impact
	<b>1 = every time</b> <b>2 = in most circumstances</b> <b>3 = on specific circumstances</b> <b>4 = on rare occasions</b>				
<b>INFORM</b>	Administration Centre	1	1	1	1
	Warren Shire Council Website & Social Media Tools	1	1	1	3
	Newspaper/Advertising/Features	1	1	2	3
	Media Release	1	1	2	3
	Publications/Information Material	1	2	2	4
	Council Facilitated Events	4	4	4	4
	Letterbox Drop	4	4	3	3
	Target Direct Mail	2	2	2	3
	Presentation/Public Meeting	2	3	3	4
Site Specific Signage	3	3	3	3	
<b>CONSULT</b>	Community Forum	3	3	2	3
	Public Exhibitions/Submissions	1	2	3	4
	Community Displays/Information Sessions	2	2	3	4
	Surveys	3	4	4	4
	Site Meeting/Tour	2	3	2	4
	Personal Briefing	1	1	2	2
<b>INVOLVE</b>	Meetings by Invitation	1	2	2	4
	Meetings by Council Committees/ Advisory Groups	1	3	3	4
	Large Group/Stakeholders Collaboration	2	2	3	4

## Evaluation and Feedback

Following the implementation of an involve/consult engagement project, Council will evaluate the effectiveness of the program in reaching the desired audience and achieving the required outcomes. Council will then provide feedback to the people who participated in the program in order to increase their understanding of how the input gathered during the program was considered/utilised in the decision making process and what direction was ultimately taken.

By providing open and timely feedback to participants and all stakeholders, Council will enhance the transparency of its decision making and further strengthen its relationship with the broader community. Feedback will also improve future engagement programs through a greater understanding of the engagement process.

## Acknowledgements

The following acknowledgements are made, recognising institutions and documents that informed and influenced the development of this Community Engagement Strategy:

- NSW Division of Local Government, 'Integrated Planning and Reporting Manual for Local Government';
- International Association for Public Participation 'Foundations of public participation';
- Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education – Core Principles of Community Engagement; and
- The Gilgandra Shire Council's 'Community Engagement Strategy'.