

# Community Engagement Policy

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## **Preamble**

To ensure the communities of Bass Coast work together to make important decisions about their region, Bass Coast Shire Council has made communications and engagement a key priority.

This policy outlines Council's statement of intent regarding community engagement and aims to increase Council's performance in relation to community engagement.

Council is committed to actively encouraging individuals, groups and communities to be involved in local government through community engagement. Bass Coast Shire residents and ratepayers have diverse needs and opinions, innovative ideas, and a wealth of local knowledge. Council is able to make better decisions on behalf of the community it serves when it draws on those resources.

Sharing information through genuine community engagement allows Council to make well informed decisions about issues which directly affect the Bass Coast community. It will also promote community ownership of project, policy and strategy decisions, which can support the long-term sustainability of those initiatives and generate a sense of belonging and pride in Bass Coast's achievements.

A strong partnership between Council and its constituents is necessary to support the democratic process. An informed, empowered and connected community that is involved in the decisions that affect quality of life in the region will make Bass Coast a better place to live and work.

Council decision-making should always seek to take into consideration the diverse views of the community, laws and regulations, finances, human resources and social impacts. Within the communities of Bass Coast, there will be different opinions on many decisions.

The community is more likely to accept and understand decisions if we build stronger processes to listen to diverse views and more clearly explain how the variety of views were considered in making a final decision.

## **Policy objectives**

The objectives of the policy are:

- To support good decision-making by Council
- To undertake community engagement activities:
  - with respect
  - by building trust
  - with openness and accountability
- To build a strong partnership with our community

## Policy statement

Council will always engage the community where there is a legislated requirement to do so, but will also ensure the appropriate level of community engagement is applied to ensure informed decision making.

The best decisions will be made if those affected by the outcome have had the appropriate opportunity to participate in the process.

Council will be required to consider community engagement when a proposed change or decision is likely to:

- have significant impact on quality of life in the region
- impact on services or facilities for residents and ratepayers
- have a significant budgetary impact
- involve a level of conflict, controversy or sensitivity

Different levels of community engagement are appropriate for different scenarios or types of issues. The cost of engagement (including the demand it makes on community and staff time) should represent good value for ratepayers, given the scope and scale of the decision.

In order to achieve the policy objectives, Council will adhere to the following policy principles and implement the Communication and Engagement Strategy:

- Connect with our community.  
Council will be inclusive and actively seek to connect with the community, including those who are hardest to reach.
- Work with our community  
Council will endeavour to improve the ways in which Council and the community work together, focusing on solutions and making a difference. It will support staff to increase their capacity to engage effectively;
- Listen and understand  
Council will listen and understand the needs and expectations of our community.
- Be open and accountable  
Council will follow ethical principles of conduct, making engagement processes open and accountable, identifying together with the community the rules of engagement and reporting on the outcomes. Council will explain what community engagement was conducted and how it influenced decision-making.
- Recognise diverse views  
Council processes will recognise the diverse range of values and interests present in our community.

### Additional documents

Council has developed a Communication and Engagement Strategy to assist with the implementation of the policy.

The International Association of Public Participation resources found at [iap2.org.au](http://iap2.org.au) will be utilised to guide Council's community engagement activities.

- The IAP2 Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation.
- The IAP2 Code of Ethics for Public Participation Practitioners.
- The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum.

### IAP2'S PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM



The IAP2 Federation has developed the Spectrum to help groups define the public's role in any public participation process. The IAP2 Spectrum is quickly becoming an international standard.

		INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION				
		INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL		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 place final decision making in the hands of the public.
	PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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### Reference to other documents

This policy was developed in partnership with the Communications and Engagement Strategy 2015, and in response to the Bass Coast Shire Council: Better Listening, Better Outcomes Community and Stakeholder Consultations (May 2015).

A 'Community Engagement Toolkit' is currently being developed to support staff with implementation of the Policy and Strategy. This is an internal resource document.

### **Review process**

This Policy will be reviewed by the Council within five years of its adoption. This Policy replaces the Community Engagement Policy 2013.

### **Accountability process**

Council will be responsible for ensuring that the objectives of the policy are taken into consideration when making decisions in relation to processes that involve community engagement. The Chief Executive Officer will be responsible for ensuring General Managers and Service Managers in the organisation adhere to the objectives of the policy.

### **Approval**

Adopted by Council at its meeting held on

Date 16/09/2015

Signed by the Mayor, Cr Kimberley Brown



Date 28/09/2015