



Draft Communications and Community Engagement Strategy

BROKEN HILL

CITY COUNCIL

AUSTRALIA'S FIRST
HERITAGE LISTED CITY

QUALITY CONTROL

TRIM REFERENCES		
KEY DIRECTION	4. Our Leadership	
OBJECTIVE	4.2 Our community is engaged and informed	
FUNCTION	Communication	
STRATEGY	<p>4.1.1 Communication and engagement with the community increases confidence in decision-making</p> <p>4.4.2 Engage the community through information and activities aimed at increasing participation</p> <p>4.4.3 Increase knowledge and awareness of challenges and opportunities facing the city</p>	
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Communications & Community Engagement Coordinator	
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ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS	Community Strategic Plan, Smarter Communities Framework, Digital Strategy, Disability Inclusion Action Plan, Customer Service Framework, draft Social Media Strategy, Media Relations Policy, Disability Inclusion Act 2014, Local Government Act 1993	

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

BHCC - Broken Hill City Council

Focus Group - A form of engagement in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes towards a product, service, concept, advertisement, or idea.

IAP2 - International Association of Public Participation

Platform - Specific type of social media (eg Facebook, twitter, etc)

Stakeholder - Any person, group, business or government body with which Council will interact or affect as part of a project or initiative.

Steering Group - A mixed group consisting of staff, Councillors and stakeholders who meet to monitor a project or initiative, provide advice, and troubleshoot where necessary.

WCAG - Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your interest in Broken Hill City Council's Communications and Community Engagement Strategy.

Council makes decisions that impact our community in a variety of ways. If you live, work, learn, invest, or play in the Silver City, we want to hear your thoughts and feedback on Council projects and initiatives.

We are continually looking to further our engagement with the community to capture the knowledge, experience, and aspirations of residents and other stakeholders as we make decisions about the city's future.

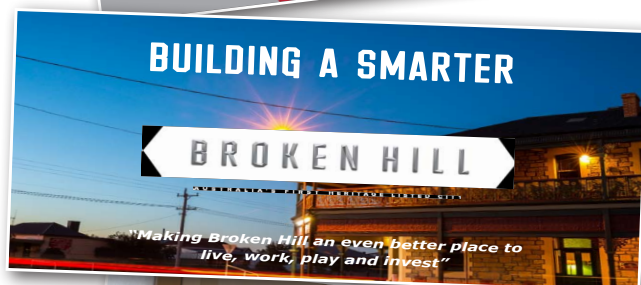
Community input is crucial to the direction of Broken Hill as a whole, and Council is committed to ensuring that everyone has access to fair and informed decision making opportunities.

We want to maintain an environment where community members from all backgrounds are heard, and feel they can make a meaningful and valued contribution to matters that affect our everyday lives.

In compiling this document, we have considered the results of an independent communications audit and survey conducted in 2017, along with the results of other community engagement initiatives undertaken in the last 18 months.

This strategy has also been developed with regard to our Community Strategic Plan, Smart Communities Framework, Digital Strategy, Disability Inclusion Action Plan, Customer Service Framework, draft Social Media Strategy and Media Relations Policy, along with relevant Local Government Acts and legislation.

We hope this document helps explain the strategy that will guide the way Council communicates and engages, now and into the future.





WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Community engagement is about involving the community and other stakeholders in Council's decision making process.

Council employs a variety of tools and techniques to engage, and the feedback from the community and stakeholders helps us to understand varied points of view, gather information, and identify common ground.

It also provides access to a greater range of solutions; The collective wisdom and experience of the people of Broken Hill and other stakeholders can help Council to achieve the visions and aspirations of the community.

Through effective, proactive, and responsive community engagement we develop relationships, build capacity, inform decision making, and take informed action.

Community engagement provides the opportunity for Council to learn about diverse views, insights, and issues in our region.

In essence, community engagement allows Council to work with others to make our city better.

HOW DOES COUNCIL ENGAGE?

Communication and engagement principles from the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) are used to shape Council's community engagement, as it is considered a world-leader in the field.

The IAP2 Community Engagement Model below shows that engagement between Council and the community can occur in a variety of ways.

You will notice that some instances of engagement are initiated by Council, some are initiated by the community, and some are shared equally between both parties.

IAP2 AUSTRALASIA COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODEL



HOW THE MODEL WORKS

The IAP2 Community Engagement model shows the five key types of community engagement that may occur. Each sphere of community engagement is explained below:

HOW THE MODEL WORKS (CONT)

Council leads and acts

In this sphere, community engagement is about enabling community members to stay informed of, and actively contribute to, the key decisions that are being made by Council on matters that interest or impact upon them.

Council initiates engagement because we recognise the invaluable contribution of community feedback and the role this plays in ensuring that Council facilities, services and priorities consistently meet the needs of our diverse and evolving community.

When working in this way, Council leads the engagement process, considers feedback, makes the final decision and implements the outcome. For example, the development of the Council budget and the associated strategies, plans, policies and projects all fit in this scope. Most of the community engagement activities at Broken Hill City Council fit in this sphere.



Council leads, community acts

In this sphere, community engagement involves Council leading the conversation with communities and stakeholders taking responsibility for action.

This occurs when Council cannot achieve the outcome alone and advocates for others to act. For example, Council may encourage the community to reduce smoking, eat healthy, or increase exercise.

Community leads, Council acts

In this sphere, the community identifies a problem or opportunity and proposes the required action. The community cannot achieve the outcome alone and advocates for Council to act.

For example, a community group identifies an environmental issue that is affecting the city, and wants Council to lobby the Federal Government to take action. The community group rallies support, and approaches Council with a request for support. Council agrees to take on an advocacy role and present the community's concerns to the Government.

Community leads, community acts

In this sphere, the community leads the conversation and has responsibility for taking action. Leaders engage community members to build understanding, gather support and deliver the project or initiative.

Council does not have a role in decision making or implementing action, but may provide support such as an advocacy role, resources, or funding where appropriate.

Shared leadership and action

In this sphere, Council and communities or stakeholders share roles in leadership, decision making, responsibility and action.

This can be seen when Council partners with another agency, government body, organisation or community group to jointly provide services for our community.

METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

There is no 'one size fits all' approach when it comes to communication and community engagement. Council realises that a number of communication mediums must be utilised to reach as many stakeholders as possible on a given issue.

To this end, Council will employ multiple communication techniques on each project/initiative to ensure a broad cross-section of the community can have their say.

Some of the methods Council will use include, but are not limited to:

- **Council's webpage**
- **Live streaming**
- **Social media**
- **E-mail**
- **Telephone**
- **Teleconferencing**
- **TV (editorial/advertising)**
- **Newspaper (editorial/advertising)**
- **Radio (editorial/advertising)**
- **Focus groups**
- **Steering groups**
- **Public forums**
- **Letterbox drop**
- **Letters**
- **Flyers/Posters**
- **Receipt of petitions**
- **Surveys and polls**
- **Site visits**
- **Personal briefings**
- **Word of mouth**



WHEN DOES COUNCIL ENGAGE?

Not every decision made by Council requires community engagement. However, when planning community engagement activities, Council's Communications staff will work to determine the most appropriate level of participation required.

Depending on the nature and complexity of the project/initiative being delivered, the level of community engagement may vary. Similarly, this level may vary for different aspects or stages of the project/initiative.


The following diagram provides an overview of the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, which Council uses as a guide in the development of community engagement plans:

IAP2'S PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM


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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Council staff will endeavour to plan their community engagement activities in a timely, effective, and innovative manner, ensuring that they assess their target audience and develop the most suitable tools and methods of communication to encourage a high level of participation that is appropriate to the project.



'We need concise reports on important, relevant Council business that affects local ratepayers.'



'Be more honest and transparent with the ratepayers and the community.'



'Update the Council website and make it easier to navigate.'

HOW WAS OUR STRATEGY INFORMED?

From early 2017 Council underwent an independent communications audit and conducted focus groups with staff to provide an internal assessment of its communication and engagement capacity.

The audit outlined that Council's communication and engagement was affected by budget constraints, poor brand reputation, a lack of community trust, and a challenging media landscape.

A community survey to gain feedback on how Council was performing in terms of communication and community engagement was also conducted.


The survey, which was held in late July 2017, produced mixed results.

An encouraging 66 per cent of respondents said they knew where to find information about Council, and around half stated that there are effective channels in place to provide feedback to Council.


However only 45 per cent said they felt well-informed about what is happening at Council, 32 per cent felt Council listened to feedback, and just 22 per cent felt Council was transparent in its decision making.

Locals were also asked to provide general comments on Council and its communications and engagement. Responses ranged from complimentary to scathing, however all feedback was considered when compiling this strategy.


Finally a draft copy of this strategy was sent to senior staff for feedback.



'Be able to take advice when it is given by community members.'



'More notices, more Facebook updates, more information in the paper.'



'We need more information, more transparency, and open discussion.'

OUR STRATEGY

KEY STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

- **Continue building trust**
- **Digital focus**
- **Website upgrade**
- **Maintaining media relationships**
- **Inclusive engagement**
- **Early engagement**
- **Shared communication**
- **Continual review**

CONTINUE BUILDING TRUST

It is imperative that Council continue to build community trust in its communication and engagement processes.

A 2017 survey of residents and businesses showed that 32 per cent of locals felt Council actually listened to feedback, and just 22 per cent felt Council was transparent in its decision making.

There is also the perception in the community, right or wrong, that Council has previously proceeded with projects and initiatives without adequate community consultation. It is important for staff to remember that public perception of Council will not change immediately, and an increase in the community's trust in Council and its communications can only be effected by continuing improvement in the organisation's transparency and engagement methods where possible.

Council can achieve its aim of building trust by:

- Live streaming Council meetings, engagement sessions, and presentations
- Providing succinct summaries of Council meeting outcomes
- Maintaining a high output of media releases explaining Council decisions
- Making information available to all stakeholders at the same time via the internet
- Maintaining focus on planned and thorough community engagement initiatives
- Acting on feedback received where appropriate
- Using simple language to ensure communication is accessible

DIGITAL FOCUS

The Federal Government has predicted that four out of five Australian citizens will choose to engage with all levels of government through the internet or other type of online digital service by 2020.

Australians are more mobile, more connected and more reliant on technology than ever before. A digital transformation is taking place in almost all industries as people increasingly look to get and receive their information online.

Broken Hill is no different, with around 70% of all households now regularly accessing the internet.

This number will only increase, and it is critical that Council takes steps now to ensure it is well positioned to meet the needs of the community as the reliance on digital communication inevitably increases.

Council is already looking to implement digital solutions across the organisation in line with its Smarter Communities Framework and Digital Strategy, and it is important that communication and engagement methods align with this approach.

Council can maintain a digital focus when approaching communications and engagement by continuing to:

- Embrace digital solutions to communication and engagement challenges
- Monitor the latest advancements in the digital space
- Maintain and upgrade existing digital communication methods
- Upskill staff to use digital mediums to engage with the community
- Ensure communication and engagement methods align with relevant strategies
- Make Council staff, services and information accessible by digital media platforms

WEBSITE UPGRADE

While an upgrade of Council's website could be considered part of the 'digital focus' listed above, its scope and importance makes it suitable to be a standalone direction for Council.

Every day Council processes hundreds of requests, and more than ever residents are interacting with Council online rather than visiting the Administrative Centre.

Council's website has essentially become the digital front door for Council, and as a result, it must be easy for users of all abilities to find what they are looking for and conduct their businesses via our website.

Council's current website is cumbersome and difficult to navigate, and is not compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 AA standards.

Council has committed meeting its obligations to provide a website that meets international accessibility standards as part of its Disability Inclusion Action Plan, which was created in accordance with requirements of the *Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (NSW)*.

WEBSITE UPGRADE (CONT)

In order to meet the aim of upgrading our website, Council will:

- Develop a business case with estimates of costs for updating vs replacing the Council website to WCAG 2.0 AA standard.

The business case will help inform Council as to whether our current website is still fit for purpose, in conjunction with our Digital Strategy, Smart Communities Framework, and this strategy.

However, in the event that it is no longer fit for purpose, Council will:

- Investigate options for an entirely new website in consultation with Council's IT Department
- Develop a business case with cost estimates for the preferred option
- Implement the new website upon its completion

MAINTAINING MEDIA RELATIONSHIPS

While Council will make every effort to ensure Council's communication and engagement methods keep pace with the growing demand for digital interaction, it is important that Council maintains its relationship with local media.

Respondents to a 2017 communication survey were asked to list their preferred methods of receiving information from Council, with Council's digital platforms (Website, video, social media, e-newsletter) accounting for around 40% of responses.

When combined, local TV, radio and newspaper accounted for 45.5% of responses, with the remaining 14.5% preferring face-to-face information or some other method.

These results show that there is still strong demand for traditional media.

However it is important to remember that Council's ability to reach residents who wish to exclusively receive their content via TV, radio and newspaper can be constrained by the media outlets themselves.

Council can only control the amount of information given to media outlets - it cannot control the amount of information those outlets pass on to the public, nor how that information is presented.

Council can maintain its existing media relationships by:

- Following the guidelines set out in Council's Media Relations Policy

INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT

It is important that all future communication and engagement activities include a focus on targeting traditionally “hard to reach” members of our community.

In Broken Hill these “hard to reach” groups are typically children and youth, aged and disabled residents, indigenous residents, and other minority populations.

If Council is to conduct truly inclusive engagement, it is essential that any communication or engagement methods or activities include targeted processes to ensure these groups can have input into any outcomes or decisions.

To achieve this goal, Council will look to:

- Work with local aged and disability service providers when engaging
- Work with local schools, pre-schools and community youth bodies when engaging
- Work with indigenous health and service providers and community groups including (but not limited to) Maari Ma, Aboriginal Affairs, 123 Community Hub, and the Aboriginal Community Working Party when engaging
- Undertake staff training to ensure Council is comfortable and skilled in dealing with people with a disability
- Upgrade Council's website to meet WCAG 2.0 AA standard, including language translation for minority groups

EARLY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement should form part of the foundation of any significant project or initiative. The views and needs of stakeholders should be considered at the earliest stages to help provide direction and ensure an outcome that is, where practicable, agreeable for all parties.

Council will pursue its aim of ensuring engagement is undertaken at the start of projects and initiatives by:

- Encouraging staff to consider community engagement in the first instance
- Encouraging staff to consult with the Communications team at the earliest convenience regarding the appropriate type and method of engagement required for an upcoming project or initiative
- Providing staff with a basic communication planner allowing them to consider milestones, key dates, stakeholders, communication budget, and other related facets of community engagement before undertaking works
- Providing a Community Engagement Toolkit to provide guidance in the event that Communication staff are unavailable at the outset of a project

SHARED COMMUNICATION

Council can provide improved quality of communication by allowing subject matter experts to communicate directly with their target audience.

By training individual Council departments in the use of their assigned social media platforms, Council can increase its communication flexibility, and in some instances improve the depth and accuracy of information being passed on to the public.

This increase in communication quality can, on occasion, also be achieved by allowing staff to have greater input in media opportunities and engagement initiatives.

Council can achieve its goal of communication and engagement opportunities being shared amongst staff by:

- Encouraging staff to participate in or facilitate community engagement
- Encouraging staff to address media on a topic with which they are the subject matter expert (when suitable and authorised by the General Manager)
- Continuing Council's collaborative approach to social media management as outlined in the draft Social Media Strategy
- Allowing staff to undertake internal and external training on community engagement and social media

CONTINUAL REVIEW

Continual review is a fundamental part of any Council service, including communication and community engagement.

Council can achieve its goal of continually reviewing and assessing its communication and engagement methods and their effectiveness by:

- Continuing to analyse data from engagement initiatives and social media platforms
- Conducting an annual survey to measure Council's progress in improving its communication and engagement
- Reviewing and updating any policies relevant to Council's communication and engagement within their allotted timeframe



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