



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

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Community Engagement Policy

Purpose

Mosman Council has a transparent and inclusive approach to governance which is enhanced by effective and meaningful engagement. By actively participating in the decision-making process the community can shape its own future and inform the vision and direction of Council. By doing this, Council believes that these decisions are significantly strengthened.

This Policy provides a broad framework and principles to guide engagement activity undertaken by Council and in doing so it meets Council's legislative obligations which require it to develop and implement a strategy for community engagement.

Objectives

The objectives of the Community Engagement Policy are to ensure that:

- The Mosman community is informed about issues, strategies or plans that may directly or indirectly affect them.
- The community has the opportunity to be genuinely involved in Council's decision-making and policy development.
- Council's capacity to make well-informed, sustainable decisions is enhanced, demonstrating community buy-in and support.
- Council seeks the views of a broad cross-section of the community, selecting engagement methods that are flexible, inclusive and appropriate to those being engaged.
- There is community awareness of the range of opinions on local issues and to enable community members to recommend appropriate solutions.
- Community engagement is based on social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights, with a mix of appropriate and accessible means for people to provide input.
- Council is meeting its legislative requirements regarding community consultation.
- Council's mandate when dealing with other organisations, such as Federal and State Governments, and private sector organisations, is strengthened by engagement.

Scope

This Policy applies to all Council staff and any consultants working on behalf of Council.

Application of the Policy

This Policy applies to Council's operations, including corporate, financial planning and Council's day-to-day business activities.

This Policy requires staff to undertake engagement on issues that have the potential to be of specific interest to individual community members, or the community as a whole, and where there is an opportunity for the community to influence decisions or actions.

Council has other plans or policies covering engagement such as those relating to planning functions which complement the provisions of this Policy.

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Council staff may undertake additional engagement activity for matters covered by other plans or policies, after considering this Policy and the related Mosman Community Engagement Toolkit.

This Policy acknowledges that there is diversity in activities and projects across Council and the type of engagement undertaken should vary accordingly.

Other than those functions which have specified engagement requirements, such as Council's planning functions, the decision on whether to undertake engagement on a specific issue will be made by Council staff, or by Councillors, after considering this Policy. Council staff will also consider whether there are public safety, legislative and regulatory requirements or other emergency considerations which mean consultation is not required.

Community Engagement Strategies - Overview

Council's community engagement is informed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum which defines the different levels of community engagement, from inform to empower. ¹

Table 1 - IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

| | Inform | Consult | Involve | Collaborate | Empower |
|----------------------------------|---|--|--|---|--|
| Public participation goal | Provision of balanced and objective information to assist with understanding of problems, solutions, alternatives and opportunities | To obtain feedback | To work with the community throughout the process ensuring that concerns and aspirations are consistently understood | To partner with the community in each aspect of the decision and the identification of the preferred solution | Placing final decision making in the hands of the public |
| Promise to the public | We will keep you informed | We will keep you informed, listen and acknowledge concerns and aspirations and provide feedback on how the decision was influenced | We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives | We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions | We will implement what you decide |

When conducting community engagement, Mosman Council will at a minimum seek to **inform**, and **consult** with, the community.

However, for matters which have greater impact (see Table 2), the preference is for Council to **involve** or **collaborate** with the community.

¹ <https://iap2.org.au/resources/spectrum/>

This reflects the fact that Council sees community engagement as an investment which adds significant value to the decision-making process, rather than a cost or impediment to the decision-making process.

Consultation for the Community Strategic Plan

The *NSW Local Government Act 1993* requires Council to establish and implement a strategy (in this case its Community Engagement Policy), based on social justice principles, for engagement with the local community when developing the Community Strategic Plan. This Policy seeks to meet this legislative obligation and in doing so to clearly inform the community of how they will be engaged on the Community Strategic Plan.

Council will seek to **collaborate** with the community when developing the Community Strategic Plan. This is in line with Office of Local Government requirements which state that the preferred level of engagement for the development of the Community Strategic Plan is the **collaborate** level, with the **involve** level being the minimum requirement.²

For this engagement process, stakeholders to be consulted include:

- Owner occupier and renting residents
- Absentee landlords
- Councillors
- Council staff
- Community and volunteer organisations
- Children
- Schools
- Business community
- Workers
- Neighbouring councils or relevant council groups
- Relevant NSW and Australian Government agencies
- Visitors (including tourists and shoppers)

When undertaking engagement on the Community Strategic Plan, Council will seek to undertake activities which directly target the above audiences, including using the following engagement tools:

- Sharing information on Council's website and social media channels
- Newsletters and e-newsletters
- Advertisements
- Media release(s)
- Randomly selected and independently conducted Community Survey
- Online surveys and potentially an online discussion forum
- Public area intercept surveys and stalls
- Liaison with existing consultative committees and potentially other face-to-face means

² <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/Councils/integrated-planning-and-reporting/framework/community-engagement-strategy>

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These tools will be supported by a comprehensive information campaign, including the production of summary material, so people are aware of and understand the initiative.

Methods of Engagement for Other Projects

Table 2 outlines how the differing engagement levels in the spectrum are proposed to be applied to other projects.

The table reflects the fact that the greater the level of impact, then the greater amount of consultation effort will need to take place, particularly a greater use of **involve** and **collaborate** tools alongside **consult** tools.

The various consultation tools available for staff to use in the various IAP2 participation spectrum levels are outlined in the Mosman Community Engagement Toolkit. The Toolkit is a companion document to this Policy and is primarily used as a resource by Council staff when they are planning and carrying out engagement.

Table 2: Impacts from different types of Council decisions

| Level | Explanation | Examples | Tools should be used from each of the following categories |
|------------------|---|---|--|
| Level 1: High | LGA-wide high level of impact on the whole/large part of Mosman LGA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic plan for youth, seniors, disability, events, access etc - Changes affecting an LGA-wide service, such as waste, libraries - Significant changes to a facility, open space that is of LGA-wide significance, such as the closure of a major park - Major changes to rates, fees and charges | Inform Consult Involve Collaborate |
| Level 2: High | Local high level of impact of a local nature, on a local area, specific community or user group | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Closure or changes to access for an individual Council-run facility - Changes to a local area road network - Changes to Plans of Management - Major changes to car parking | Inform Consult Involve |
| Level 3: Low | LGA-wide lower level of impact on the whole/large part of Mosman LGA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improvements or changes to services and/or infrastructure - Citizen of the Year nominations - Minor changes to facility access - Minor changes to fees and charges - Minor changes to open space infrastructure - Minor changes to car parking | Inform Consult |
| Level 4: Low | Local lower level of impact of a local nature on a local | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improvements or changes to a local service | Inform Consult |

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| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| | area, specific community or user group | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minor site-specific decisions under the Roads Act (ie: determine encroachments, sales, outdoor dining applications) - Minor changes to facility access | |
|--|--|---|--|

Where possible, Council will seek to **involve** and when appropriate **collaborate** with the community even on matters which have a lower level of impact, where the matter would benefit from a decision-making process where community members actively work with Council to resolve the final approach.

The **empower** category is unlikely to be used, as the Councillors are the ultimate decision-making body of Council.

Council also has a Community Participation Plan that specifically relates to engagement for planning and development matters.

Key Engagement Principles

There are a number of principles that Council will follow when undertaking engagement activity, after deciding on the relevant engagement effort and tools. Further detail on these principles is outlined for staff in the Mosman Community Engagement Toolkit.

Engagement material is transparent and easy-to-understand

Council highly values the use of clear, plain English and other useful visual elements in materials which are being supplied to the Mosman community to support engagement. Council will seek to avoid the excessive use of technical jargon, acronyms and references to unexplained legislative sections and provisions which disempower communities.

Engagement material should make clear:

- Why Council has decided to undertake engagement (including any decisions already taken by Council or other levels of government)
- The matter on which engagement is taking place (including both benefits and impacts of the matter)
- The wider context in which decisions are being made and how the community can influence future decisions; and
- What constraints there are on community input (ie: such as decisions from other levels of government or previous Council decisions)

Sufficient resourcing is in place

Council will seek to ensure that any proposed project has adequate resourcing, including sufficient staff and financial resources to enable the consultation process to satisfy the relevant predetermined objectives. Resourcing will be factored into project planning and budget preparation.

Engagement is well-timed

The target audience should have the opportunity to be involved in an early stage of the process, rather than when irreversible decisions have already been made. Engagement activity should also

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reflect the time that different target audiences will be most likely to be able to participate. The target audience should have sufficient notice of engagement activity and material.

Engagement is based on social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights

Council will seek to ensure that the groups or individuals invited to participate in the consultative process are representative of the overall target audience, and that outreach is designed to reach the broadest appropriate sections of the community and attract a broad range of community interests.

Council will seek to engage "hard to reach" groups, including children, people from a non-English speaking background and the elderly. It will seek to ensure that engagement activities are not able to be dominated by a small number of highly vocal community members, who have the potential to minimise input from other less vocal interests. Council will ensure that consultation venues are physically accessible for a wide cross-section of the community, including the elderly, people with disabilities, children, mothers with young children and those who rely on public transport.

A diverse range of channels are used

A diverse range of channels and methods are investigated to support engagement activity on individual projects, given that no one channel is ever likely to meet all audience targets. This includes both digital and non-digital channels.

Council will engage Community Consultative Committees and potentially its volunteer groups on appropriate topics relevant to their area of expertise. Council also has a solid network of business, resident and community groups and these should be encouraged to participate in, and amplify, Council's outreach efforts.

Engagement is genuine

Reasonable suggestions and feedback should be able to influence and potentially change the decision-making process.

Post-engagement reporting

Council may 'close the loop' by reporting back about how feedback was considered and applied or prepare standalone reports analysing community feedback on specific projects, to inform the final decision on those projects and to provide an ongoing record of how decisions were made. These reports are made public.

Direct feedback may also be provided to participants in engagement exercises about outcomes and decisions made.

Legislative Obligations

Section 8 of the NSW Local Government Act outlines the following principles which apply to decision-making by councils:

- Councils should recognise diverse local community needs and interests
- Councils should consider social justice principles
- Councils should consider the long term and cumulative effects of actions on future generations
- Councils should consider the principles of ecologically sustainable development and
- Council decision-making should be transparent and decision-makers are to be accountable for decisions and omissions

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Section 8 also requires councils to "actively engage with their local communities, through the use of the integrated planning and reporting framework and other measures".

Council also has to meet a variety of other engagement obligations under a range of other NSW and Australian Government statutes and regulations.

Mosman Council will always seek to understand and, where possible, exceed community engagement legislative obligations.

Related Information/Glossary

- Mosman Community Engagement Toolkit
- Council Code of Conduct
- Media Corporate Practice
- Media Policy
- Social Media Policy
- Local Government Act 1993
- Privacy Act 1988
- Roads Act 1993
- Community Participation Plan

Review

This Policy will be reviewed following the commencement of each term of Council unless otherwise directed by the Executive Team.

Contact

Enquiries should be directed to the Manager Communications on 9978 4026.

Amendments

| Date | Amendment | Reference |
|------------------|----------------|-----------|
| 4 September 2018 | Policy adopted | CD/23 |
| 4 October 2022 | Policy adopted | CD/19 |