



LITCHFIELD
COUNCIL



DRAFT

Community Engagement
Strategy and Action Plan 2018-2021

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Introduction







Litchfield Council is committed to effective community engagement and open and accountable governance. Council is passionate about the future of the municipality; bringing together the needs of the community, our stakeholders and the requirements from government is key to achieving balanced decision-making.

Litchfield Council makes decisions and takes actions that impact upon the community in different ways. Through effective and inclusive community engagement practices, Council looks to capture the vast knowledge, experience and aspirations of our community.







This Strategy will describe how Litchfield Council will engage with the community and acknowledges the desire of Council to share information in keeping with our vision to position Litchfield as the best place to live in the Top End.

Council’s Strategic Plan 2016 – 2020 comprises four priorities for our community, and within those, we work on 20 outcomes that we know matter to our communities. This is underpinned by actions taken to ensure an effective and sustainable Council. The Community Engagement Strategy is the key strategy to ensure that we ‘Engage Our Community’.






Priority # 1 Everything you need

-  Roads
-  Waste
-  Water
-  Public Transport
-  Cleanliness
-  Drainage




Priority # 2 A great place to live

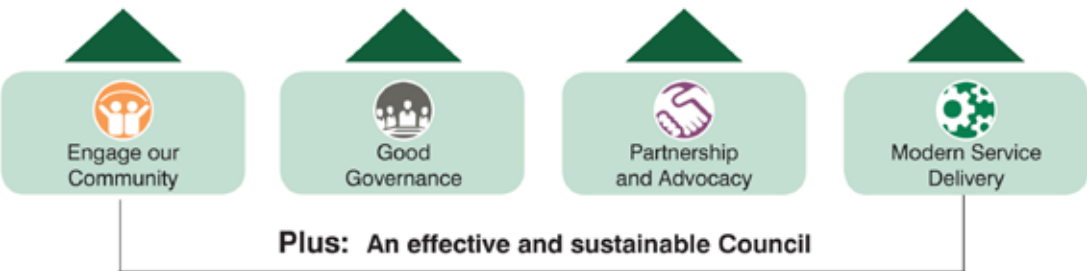
-  Social Activity
-  Culture
-  Community
-  Recreation
-  Animal Control
-  Sense of Place

Priority # 3 A beautiful natural environment

-  Protection
-  Open Space
-  Weeds
-  Sustainability
-  Fire

Priority # 4 A vibrant economy

-  Economic Development
-  Local Employment
-  Strong Local Business



Community Engagement Framework

There are two key Litchfield Council documents that guide community engagement.



Community Engagement Policy

This is an overarching document that sets the standards of community engagement at Litchfield Council.



Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan 2018 – 2021

This document sets out where we are now and the key activities to achieve our community engagement objectives.

Engage Our Community

We aim to ensure that Litchfield Council's community engagement results in an engaged and connected community contributing to our vision "*Litchfield – the best place to live in the Top End.*"

The implementation section of the Strategy is the Action Plan and this will be assessed and reviewed annually to ensure that community engagement remains focussed and relevant to the Litchfield community and stakeholders.

This Strategy and Action Plan provides a framework and key activities to guide Council to achieve our five community engagement objectives:

- To ensure a commitment by Council Members and staff to engage with the community in a meaningful and appropriate way about decisions that affect them
- To provide a best practice approach in all community engagement activities
- To provide a consistent and flexible process to guide staff in the selection of the most appropriate method and level of engagement for projects or decisions
- To develop and foster an environment of trust and confidence between the community, stakeholders and Council
- To utilise online communication and engagement techniques, complementing traditional engagement methods to create an online Litchfield community of interest.

What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement, or public participation, is defined by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) as:

“any process that involves the public in problem solving or decision making and uses public input to make better decisions.”

Community engagement allows community members to actively contribute to Council decisions and actions by creating an environment in which community feedback is embraced and considered.

Community engagement can be both proactive and responsive. Proactive community engagement can include, but is not limited to; how Litchfield Council seeks and uses community input when making a decision, regulatory processes and major projects.

Effective, proactive and responsive community engagement develops relationships, builds capacity, increases community confidence in Council, informs decision making and produces informed action.

Council recognises the importance of a best practice approach to community engagement and is guided by IAP2 which is internationally recognised as leaders in community engagement practices.

Levels of Engagement

The following table provides an overview of the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, which guides Council in the development of community engagement activities and the required level of engagement.

Increasing influence on the decision

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public Participation Goal	Provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions	Obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions	Work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns are aspirations and consistently understood and considered	Partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	Place final decision making in the hands of the public.
Council's promise to the public	Keep you informed	Listen and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	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.	Work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	Implement what you decide.

When planning community engagement activities, Council will determine the most appropriate level of participation required, depending on the nature and complexity of the activity being delivered. These levels may vary for different stages of the activity.

It is important that Council identifies how projects and activities may impact the community and assess if they have a high risk or are required by law, policy or agreement.

The spectrum shows that the level of participation can differ depending on the goals, time frames, resources and community interest.

Council will plan community engagement activities in a timely and effective manner, assessing their target audience and developing the most suitable tools and methods of communication to encourage a high level of participation.

It is important to note that there are some areas where community engagement activities may not occur. These include, but are not limited to: Ministerial exemptions and health, safety and wellbeing of the community in which Council may need to respond quickly, such as an emergency.

Council also must conform to statutory requirements that may define how Council must engage on certain matters.

We're Listening

In developing this Strategy members of the community, Elected Members and staff were asked what community engagement success would look like.

Success for our community participants would include:

- Accessible, targeted and relevant information
- Evidence that their input is being listened to and enacted upon

Our Elected Members identified success as having a sound process that:

- Actively contributes and adds value to Council's decision making
- Advocates for Council to take action on community priorities
- Is empowered to mobilise community members to make decisions and take action
- Works collaboratively with Council to make shared decisions and implements joint actions
- Is responsive to Council-led projects and initiatives

Our staff identified successful engagement as:

- Having a clear framework
- Being active in the community
- Bringing the community along from the start of projects

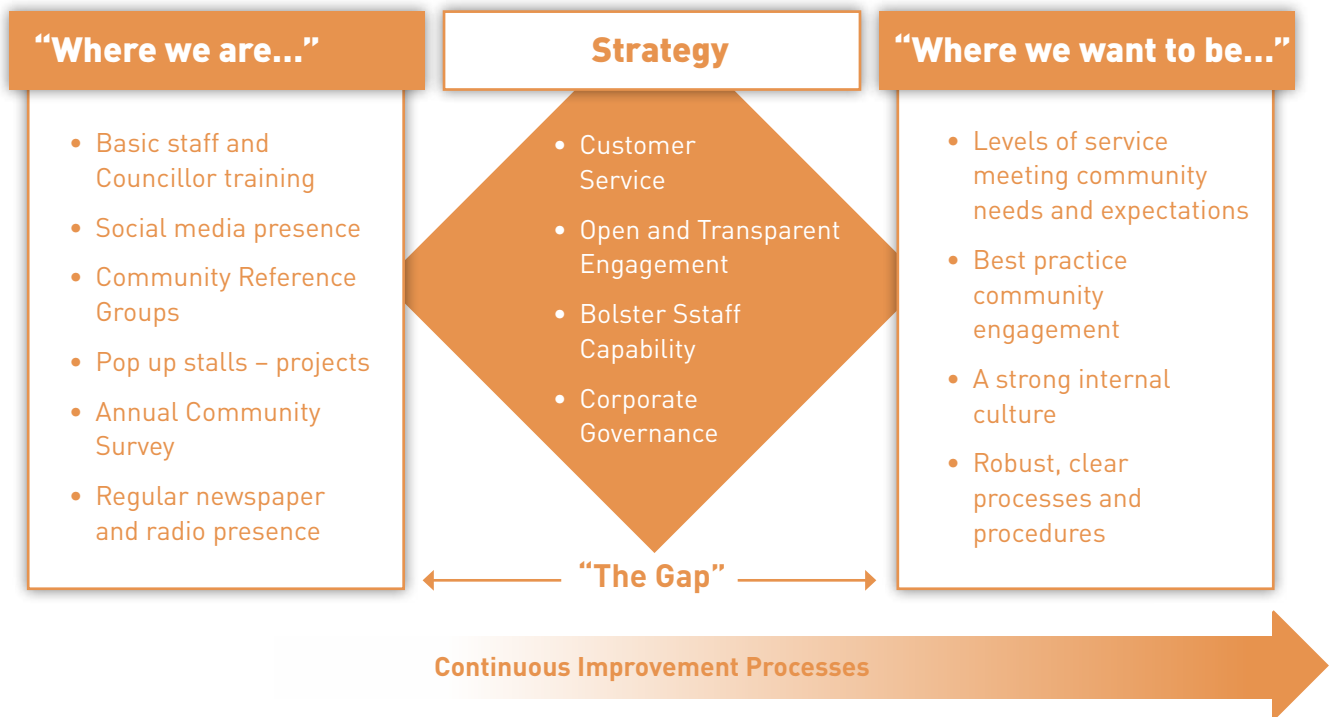
Council understands that to achieve this success we need to have a proactive, positive attitude towards community engagement and provide an open exchange of information between Council and the community.

Feedback to Council also indicated the importance of ensuring robust communication processes to participants on how their feedback is valued, how their input was considered and why the final decision was made.

Our Plan for Success

This Strategy outlines Council's desire to ensure that community engagement opportunities are both created and embedded into daily Council interactions.

We understand our current community engagement practices and where we want the organisation to be. This has helped us to develop the Strategy and Action Plan to guide us to achieving our goals. The diagram below outlines our path to successful community engagement.



How Will We Achieve This?

To achieve our five community engagement objectives, we will focus on the following four key areas:



1 Customer Service

- We will ensure our customer service is responsive and easy to deal with.
- Our community will see us as a trusted service provider who is listening to their needs, available and willing to take feedback.

2 Open and Transparent Engagement

- We will provide access to information so that the community has the opportunity to contribute to and/or understand the decision-making process.
- We value community feedback and will ensure that information is timely and relevant to facilitate sharing ideas and understanding community and stakeholder needs.
- We will show the community how their input has been considered in the outcomes.

3 Bolster Staff Capability

- We will have the right training, processes and resources in place to greatly enhance Council’s ability to engage effectively.
- We will develop a coordinated approach to internal communication and promote a culture that is proactive.

4 Corporate Governance

- We will use a combination of representative and participatory democracy, particularly during the development and review of key strategic plans.
- Our community engagement will be guided by the standards developed by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2).

How We Measure Success

To Litchfield Council, successful community engagement results in an engaged, collaborative and informed community.

We acknowledge that every member of the community will have a different view of what successful community engagement looks like.

Council will measure our community engagement success on an annual basis as indicated below:

Annual Community Survey	Participation Rate	Social Media Engagement
>65%	20%	500+
satisfaction with overall community engagement	increase in feedback submissions	unique engagement clicks on Council’s Facebook posts



Community Engagement **Action Plan 2018-2021**

The Community Engagement Action Plan contains key activities to guide Council to achieve our five community engagement objectives.



1 Customer Service

- We will ensure our customer service is responsive and easy to deal with.
- Our community will see us as a trusted service provider who is listening to their needs, available and willing to take feedback.

Action	Details	2018	2019	2020	2021
Develop and implement Customer Service Charter and Standards	A Customer Service Charter and Standards will outline Council's commitment to our community in customer service. Budget \$1000		✓		
Develop a consultation brand	A consultation brand will provide a consistent look and feel across all promotional and communication material that invites our community to participate in Council's engagement activities. Budget \$1000	✓			



2 Open and Transparent Engagement

- We will provide access to information so that the community has the opportunity to contribute to and/or understand the decision-making process.
- We value community feedback and will ensure that information is timely and relevant to facilitate sharing ideas and understanding community and stakeholder needs.
- We will show the community how their input has been considered in the outcomes.

Action	Details	2018	2019	2020	2021
Establish an online smart system to capture data and knowledge about our community to meet community expectations and address need.	<p>We are a small Council, we need smart systems to support us.</p> <p>Implement an innovative one-stop engagement system integrated with Council's website to provide a range of online engagement tools allowing community and stakeholders to provide feedback and contribute online to Council's decision making processes.</p> <p>This online system will capture, collate and aggregate community information, improve feedback opportunities, allow targeted communications and register our residents for focus groups and other opportunities. This system will increase the transparency of our engagement processes by providing information on the final outcome of each project or decision.</p> <p>Budget \$15 000 + GST per annum</p>	✓	✓		
Improve Council's website	<p>Review and upgrade Council's website to incorporate interactive functionality and improve flexibility.</p> <p>Budget - Review \$20 000</p>		✓	✓	
Improve Council's social media activity	<p>Train staff to contribute to real time social media activity to provide our community with 'on the spot' Council updates in the field</p>	✓			
Develop key messages to guide Council's community information	<p>Develop key messages to improve the accessibility of Council's information and communications to our community. Knowing where things fit in and what connects to what assists residents to contribute and provide valuable input.</p>	✓			
Include community engagement plans in Council reports	<p>Summarise community engagement plans in Council reports</p>			✓	✓
Utilise the opportunity of the Annual Report to provide meaningful reporting to our community	<p>Use the Annual Report opportunity to demonstrate strong accountability and public value for our community with trend data and robust reporting.</p>		✓	✓	✓



3 Bolster Staff Capability

- We will have the right training, processes and resources in place to greatly enhance Council's ability to engage effectively.
- We will develop a coordinated approach to internal communication and promote a culture that is proactive.

Action	Details	2018	2019	2020	2021
Train staff to use the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) framework to engage with our community.	Key staff to complete IAP2 Community Engagement Essentials training Budget \$7700 + GST (up to 25 participants)	✓			
Provide Ongoing Staff Training	Ongoing training provided to staff to increase knowledge of our engagement process and to build internal capacity to deliver robust engagement activities across Council.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Develop Engagement Champions	Executive and other identified staff to complete the IAP2 Community Engagement Certificate to guide and mentor staff responsible for projects and activities. Budget \$3300 + GST (per champion)			✓	✓
Develop and implement a Staff Guide	A Staff Guide – How to develop an Engagement Plan will provide guidance and direction to staff in designing, managing and evaluating successful engagement activities. Budget \$500	✓	✓		
Develop and implement a Community Engagement Toolkit	A Community Engagement Toolkit provides step-by-step practical advice for staff on how to select and use the most appropriate tools in a Litchfield Council engagement. Budget \$1,000		✓	✓	



4 Corporate Governance

- We will use a combination of representative and participatory democracy in the development and review of key strategic plans.
- Our community engagement will be guided by the standards developed by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2).

Action	Details	2018	2019	2020	2021
Use IAP2 Framework to guide Council's engagement processes	<p>Although Council is ultimately responsible for making final decisions, open and responsible governance is based on a belief that those impacted by a decision have important contributions to make in the decision-making process.</p> <p>The IAP2 framework will guide Council in being clear and transparent about the level of engagement and influence available for different decisions.</p>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Utilise Community Reference Groups to guide the development of key strategic plans	The development of key strategic plans will be supported by the establishment of Community Reference Groups to ensure the inclusion of community perspective.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Use focus groups to improve decision making	Identify opportunities for focus groups to provide valuable community input.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Promote integrated planning	Develop an internal engagement calendar to assist in planning engagement activities to avoid duplication of engagement activities and identify areas where combining community engagements can be carried out to reduce 'community consultation fatigue'.		✓	✓	✓

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