



## COMMUNITY SERVICES

**PROGRAM** COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND LIBRARY SERVICES

**POLICY TITLE** COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

**SUB-TITLE**

**ADOPTED** FOLIO - Date in words

**AMENDED** 05.12.2011

**REVOKES**

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### 1. Definition:

For the purposes of this policy, community engagement can be defined as “any process that involves the public in decision-making, and that uses public input to make better decisions”.

Community engagement refers to a broad range of practices characterised by two-way communication between council and the community affected by the issue.

### 2. Intent:

The engagement of the community is an essential component in responsible governance and an important key to the development of a vibrant local democracy.

Mackay Regional Council is committed to strengthening and engaging the Mackay community in democratic governance. Community engagement is seen by council as being imperative in the building of an involved community. This Community Engagement Policy is a formal expression of council's commitment to engaging the Mackay community through the use of appropriate, effective and inclusive practices.

Genuine and effective community engagement has benefits for Council and citizens. Engagement allows Council to tap wider sources of information, perspectives and potential solutions. This in turn results in assistance and guidance in terms of decision-making and consequently better outcomes for the community.

Community engagement does not replace the decision-making functions of Council. Rather these processes are designed to ensure that Council has access to a broad range of information about community needs, opinions and options prior to decisions being made. It also increases the likelihood that Council decisions are understood and supported by the community.

Mackay Regional Council understands community engagement to contain the following basic elements as identified by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2):

- Information: To provide key stakeholders and members of the community with objective and balanced information on policies, plans and strategies
- Consultation: To obtain feedback from the community and key stakeholders to enable a broader understanding by Councillors and Council staff of the local needs, concerns and priorities prior to decision-making.
- Participation: To enhance community ownership of decisions and resultant outcomes and commitment to the decisions made, through involvement in discussion of issues and options.

These elements form the basis of the IAP2 spectrum which underpins Mackay regional Council's Community Engagement Guidelines. Each level along the spectrum represents an increased degree of community engagement in the decision making process. The Community Engagement Spectrum provides a model for determining the level of engagement that is most appropriate for the purpose.

### **3. Objectives**

1. To provide a framework that encourages a relationship with all facets of council's operations . It should be read in conjunction with the Community Engagement Guidelines
2. To encourage community engagement practices that draw on the skills and wisdom of citizens in order to add value to decision-making processes. It should be emphasised however that the ultimate responsibility for decision-making rests with council.
3. To ensure that community engagement is clearly linked to the goals and objectives of the Corporate and Community Plans.
4. To ensure that Council activities within the community are inclusive of all members of that community.
5. To foster collaboration and cooperation between Council and the community, including businesses and other spheres of government, in the planning and implementation of programs and services for the Mackay area
6. To increase the community's understanding of Council through improved relationships and communication

### **4. Policy Principles**

1. That Council will provide genuine opportunities for informed community engagement in decision-making in a framework of local democracy

2. That community engagement forms an integral part of the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, programs and services
3. That Council will adopt open, accountable processes through which individuals and groups can exchange views and influence policy or decision-making.
4. That there is transparency and accountability in the process which is open, two-way and ongoing
5. That Councillors and staff play complementary roles in engaging with the community. Council will decide the high level strategic issues on which it will engage the community – based on advice from the Working Group. These issues will be linked to an identified Corporate or Community Plan priority, or a significant emerging issue.
6. That opportunities will be provided to encourage increased access by Aboriginal people, Torres Strait and South Sea Islanders and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to discussions about council initiatives which are likely to impact upon them
7. That the day to day operations and administration of the Council shall reflect the philosophical objectives of this policy
8. That **all** Community Engagement activities will be presented to the Community Engagement Working Group via the Convenor and approved prior to Community Engagement activities being undertaken. Council values the contribution of the Working Group and supports its role in the engagement process
9. That reports presented to council for adoption detail the proposed engagement strategy to be undertaken within the context of the report.

These policy principles provide consistency, cohesion , and facilitate the alignment of our performance reporting requirements under the new Queensland Local Government Act (2009). Each principle seeks to clarify the purpose of why council engages with the community and provide a guide for that engagement to occur.

This policy confirms the commitment of Mackay Regional Council to ensuring that community engagement forms an integral component of informed decision-making and as such aims to ensure that as many people as possible who are affected by decisions of Council have the opportunity to be consulted about their needs and concerns prior to decisions being made.

The Community Engagement Policy addresses the principle outlined in Council's Corporate Plan 2009-2014

“to provide genuine opportunities for informed community involvement in decision-making in a framework of local democracy”

Council will establish a Community Engagement Register to record its engagement activities. This will assist in developing a system that mitigates the risk of duplication and over consultation, records activities undertaken and methodologies and allows the community to see at any time what consultation is being planned or is actually occurring. Establishment of this register will assist council in meeting its reporting obligations to State Government.

Council will formally review this policy after two years of operation.

## **5. ATTACHMENTS**

1. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDELINES

## **6. AUTHORISATION**

Adopted by Council on (FOLIO )