



Community Engagement Strategy

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City of
LAUNCESTON



What is Community Engagement?

Community Engagement can be defined as any process that involves the public in decision-making and that uses community input to make better, more informed decisions. It includes:

- giving, seeking and sharing information
- responding to community-initiated issues
- continuously seeking different communication methods for those community members affected by Council decisions prior to making those decisions.

Engagement does not replace the final decision making power of the Council, the CEO or staff but enhances their capacity to make decisions that are well-informed, acceptable and sustainable.

Engagement should not be confused with communication. Communication is a one-way process in which information is conveyed from one party to another. 'Engagement' implies a two-way process in which information is conveyed and the recipient is invited to provide feedback/comment. The feedback is then used to inform a decision or help shape a strategy.

The City of Launceston's approach to community engagement is based on the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Engagement and its core values.



Introduction

The City of Launceston has a strong commitment to community and stakeholder engagement. This commitment is reflected in our Strategic Plan and our Community Engagement Framework.

Strategic Priority #1

- We connect with our community and our region through meaningful engagement, co-operation and representation.
- Our interactions with our community are authentic, timely, accurate and open. We want to build strong and productive relationships with our community and regional partners.

10 year goal

To seek out and champion positive engagement and collaboration to capitalise on the major opportunities and address the future challenges facing our community and region.

Focus areas

- To develop and consistently utilise contemporary and effective community engagement processes.
- To lead the implementation of the Greater Launceston Plan (GLP) via collaborative and constructive relationships with our regional partners.
- To advocate and collaborate to enhance regionally significant services and infrastructure for the benefit of our communities.

Community Engagement is also linked - either directly or indirectly - to the remaining six strategic priorities. For example:

Strategic Priority #3

We are a progressive leader that is accountable to our governance obligations and responsive to our community.

Strategic Priority #5

We Serve and Care for our community by providing equitable and efficient services that reflects the needs and aspirations of our community.

The City of Launceston's Community Engagement Framework commits Council to engaging on "anything that may impact on our residents/ratepayers in a way that affects their lifestyle/amenity".

It also lists Council's five **Engagement Principles**:

1. Inclusive participation
2. Open and transparent disclosure
3. To engage early and on an on-going basis with clarity of purpose
4. Design and implementation of good quality engagement processes, tools and methods
5. Consideration of engagement outcomes and provision of feedback

The IAP2 Spectrum of Engagement

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.

IAP2's Core Values for Community Engagement

1. The public should have a say in decisions about actions that could affect their lives.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence on the decision.
3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

Our Community Profile

- 71,906 population
- 48.8% male
- 51.2% female
- Median age 39
- 2,877 identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- 11,314 people (or 15.73% of the population) were born overseas
- 7,584 people speak a language other than English at home
- 5,028 people (or 7.2 per cent of the population) need help in their day-to-day lives due to a disability
- 9,613 are aged 70 or over
- The City's largest age group is 25-34 year olds with 10,853 people
- 32,466 people are employed - 55% of them full-time and 39% of them part-time.

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 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 look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

Background

The City of Launceston has a number of people across the organisation directly or indirectly responsible for engaging with our community. These people work across all four networks (Organisational Services, Community & Place, Creative Arts and Cultural Services and Infrastructure & Assets). Council's Engagement Facilitator and Engagement Advisor both form part of the Innovation and Performance team within Organisational Services.

Council's approach to community engagement has traditionally been towards the left of the IAP2 Spectrum of Engagement (Inform) and has been reactive rather than proactive. There has never been an overarching strategy linking Council's community engagement activities to its strategic priorities or any regular communication between those people involved in the engagement space. In mid-2018 Council engaged Capire Consulting Group Pty Ltd to develop and help execute an 18-month community and stakeholder engagement program maximising community and stakeholder engagement participation in more than 40 city-shaping and regionally significant initiatives. Capire's 'Project Compass' working document underpinned Council's successful Tomorrow Together engagement initiative, which saw discussion around the six key themes listed below. In October 2022 the Tomorrow Together program was recognised by IAP2, winning the planning category for Australasia - www.yourvoicemyourlaunceston.com.au/community-engagement-framework1

1. A resilient City
2. A well-designed City
3. A unique and prosperous City
4. A mobile and accessible City
5. A social, inclusive and fair City
6. A focused and sustainable Council

A number of 'insights' listed in the Capire strategy are still relevant. City of Launceston employees staff would like to see:

- A new approach to community engagement
- An on-going dialogue with the community
- More meaningful engagement
- More consistency in the way we engage with the community
- A concerted effort to extend the reach of our engagement activities



Community Expectations

One in five people (20 per cent) of people responding to a community satisfaction survey conducted by the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) in 2019 nominated the best thing about their local council as the council being 'responsive, proactive, engaged, accessible and consultative'. This figure was slightly higher (24.4 per cent) in the state's North/North East.

At the same time, 10.8 per cent of respondents also nominated 'responsive, proactive, engaged, accessible, consultative' as the most important thing councils could do to improve their overall performance. This figure was slightly higher (13.8 per cent) in the state's North/North East.

Aims

The Community Engagement Strategy aims to:

- Ensure residents are given every opportunity to help shape the City of Launceston's strategic direction.
- Encourage innovation and continuous improvement in the engagement space.

Focus Areas

The City of Launceston will continue to engage with the community on proposed maintenance works, capital works, plans, strategies, services, policy changes and anything else that may impact on the lifestyle or amenity of Launceston residents. The City's Community Engagement Framework outlines how we will do this and the tools we will use.

At the same time it will focus on three key areas moving forward.

1. Building internal capacity
2. Continuous improvement
3. Closing the loop



Action 1.

Building Internal Capacity

The City of Launceston needs to harness the enthusiasm of staff to engage with the community by providing the necessary skills and resources to ensure they can do so consistently and effectively.

This includes:

- Staff who undertake community engagement activities on a regular basis (and for whom community engagement is a key activity/task)
- Staff who engage with the community occasionally in relation to specific projects or issues
- Staff who are keen to assist with community engagement activities as 'Engagement Champions'.

By upskilling staff we can:

- Help create a culture that supports community engagement and sees it as a core activity
- Encourage a shift in mindset so the community is viewed as a resource

Action Number	Action	Desired Outcome/s
Action 1	Develop toolkit of community engagement resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure consistency in the way community engagement activities are delivered across the organisation • Provide staff with the confidence to plan and deliver effective community engagement activities
Action 2	Establish community engagement virtual team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a more coordinated approach to community engagement activities across the organisation • Identify opportunities for cross-network collaboration • Develop a set of key messages to be used across all engagement activities • Minimise the risk of community engagement fatigue • Build understanding of Council's Community Engagement Strategy and Community Engagement Framework • Share 'lessons learned'
Action 3	Re-launch the Engagement Champions initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boost number of people willing to assist with community engagement activities • Provide training and support for staff with little or no experience in community engagement • Build on the organisation's commitment to community engagement
Action 4	Continued training and development of engagement staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue training and development opportunities through International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) and other training organisations
Action 5	Develop and maintain a stakeholder register and/or feedback register	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a greater understanding of stakeholders in the Launceston municipality and their respective interests

Action 2.

Continuous Improvement

The City of Launceston needs to maintain its exiting level of community engagement while at the same time:

1. Building on the success of past community engagement initiatives, particularly Tomorrow Together
2. Investigating new and innovative ways of engaging with the community
3. Broadening the range of projects, issues etc on which it engages

Tomorrow Together

Tomorrow Together has been an effective platform for engaging with the community on a range of high level issues. It has an established and recognised branding and has attracted excellent levels of participation across all themes.

This platform will be extended to meet the identified need for an 'on-going' conversation with the community on 'high-level' themes. Internal engagement will help determine:

- Whether Council should continue exploring the same themes or look at new ones;
- Whether the same level of engagement is necessary or for that matter sustainable given current resourcing.

Innovation

- Council has an excellent digital engagement platform
- (YourVoice Your Launceston) and uses a range of other tools and techniques to engage with the community.

Digital engagement has become the 'new normal' as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and Council may see a downturn, in the short-term at least, in the number of people wanting to participate in face to face engagement activities.

Council needs to look at other innovative ways of engaging with the community with a focus on digital technology while considering some of the issues identified in the 'Considerations' section below.

There may also be an opportunity, given the need for all councils to develop community engagement strategies in the future, for the City of Launceston to work more closely with neighbouring councils and to share their engagement experiences and learnings as part of the continuous improvement process.

Broader perspective

There are a number of new people at Council thanks to the 2019 Organisational Alignment Project (OAP) wanting to engage with the community. Unfortunately Council's only

'generalist' community engagement officer (Organisational Services) has been fully committed to Tomorrow Together and has had little capacity to look at new engagement initiatives.

A community engagement 'State of Play' prepared in June 2020 identified a number of new engagement opportunities for Council relating to specific plans and projects that would not fall under Tomorrow Together or the community engagement activities undertaken by teams in Community & Place, Infrastructure & Assets, or Creative Arts & Cultural Services.

Action Number	Action	Desired Outcome/s
Action 6	Develop a program for the continued roll-out of Tomorrow Together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-going 'high level' conversation with the community
Action 7	Investigate more innovative ways of engaging with the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council trials new engagement tools/techniques as part of the Accelerated Capital Works Program with potential application across the organisation
Action 8	Explore opportunity for informal network of local government community engagement practitioners in the Greater Launceston/North Eastern Tasmania area and work more close with community engagement staff from larger councils in the state's south	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity to share learnings with other councils and explore new tools/techniques
Action 9	Renewed push for people to sign up to Council's digital engagement platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant increase in the number of people receiving information on Council's engagement activities
Action 10	Develop a 'whole of council' engagement calendar and prioritise 'stand-alone' engagement initiatives against strategic priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement resources put to best possible use Whole of organisation approach to engagement planning will reduce risk of duplication and engagement fatigue
Action 11	Work with elected councillors and council staff to develop a better understanding of what success looks like in the community engagement space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help guide the development of future engagement strategies.

Action 3.

Closing the Loop

As the City of Launceston matures in the community engagement space, it is important Council demonstrates how community feedback/input has influenced its decisions or its strategic direction. This process has commenced with Tomorrow Together but needs to be expanded across all engagement activities.

To make this possible, Council needs to:

1. Make it clear from the outset (i.e. from the commencement of any engagement process) what is negotiable/up for discussion and what is non-negotiable/not up for discussion
2. Ensure there is a process by which community input feeds into the decision-making process
3. Report back to the community showing how its input has been used or how it will be used moving forward.

'Closing the loop' will now be considered as part of the engagement planning process with a number of prompts in Council's new engagement template.

Action Number	Action	Desired Outcome/s
Action 12	Develop a tool for reporting engagement outcomes to the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community has greater confidence in the authenticity of Council's engagement processes



Legislative Context

Under the current Local Government Act 1993:

20. Functions and Powers

(2) In performing its functions, a council is to consult, involve and be accountable to the community.

66. Strategic Plan

(3) In preparing a proposed strategic plan, a council is to consult with the community in its municipal area and any authorities and bodies it considers appropriate.

The State Government released reforms for the

Local Government Legislative Framework Review

on April 22, 2020 after two years of extensive consultation with the local government sector, stakeholders and the community. One of the

key reforms relates to community engagement:

#17 - All councils will develop and adopt a community engagement strategy

Councils will develop a Community Engagement Strategy after each election, in collaboration with their communities. The Community Engagement Strategy will inform how councils will engage, involve, consult and inform their communities on plans, projects and policies. Councils

will be required to follow their Community Engagement Strategy when engaging communities on their Strategic Plan, in determining their service delivery priorities and when setting their budget (including rating decisions).

Progress of these reforms through Parliament has been delayed because of COVID-19 but they will be in place before the next Tasmanian local government elections in September and October 2022.

Associated Documents

- The City of Launceston's Community Engagement Framework seeks to promote greater community involvement in the activities and decision making processes of Council.

The document can be viewed online at:

<https://yourvoicemyourlaunceston.com.au/community-engagement-framework1>

Considerations

There are a number of things Council needs to consider when it engages with the community, particularly with the increased focus on digital engagement.

- There are a significant number of households in the Launceston municipality, particularly in the Northern Suburbs, without Internet access. In 2016 there were 5033 households in Launceston without Internet access (compared to 19,982 with Internet access). The percentage of homes in Launceston without Internet access at 18.5 per cent was almost as high as it was for regional Tasmania at 20.4 per cent.
- While digital engagement presents a range of new opportunities for Council, it needs to be remembered that Tasmania has an ageing population and that Launceston has the highest number of people over the age of 65 out of all the local government areas in Tasmania. People over the age of 65 are recognised as having one of the poorest digital literacy skills in Tasmania and there is a need to ensure information is accessible by means other than computer. Seniors are also less likely to have Internet access at home.
- The Launceston municipality is home to a significant number of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and engagement activities need to be designed accordingly.



tomorrow together.

An engaged Launceston community. A bright future.

yourvoiceyourlaunceston.com.au