

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY & FRAMEWORK

2024-2025

Richmond
Valley
Council

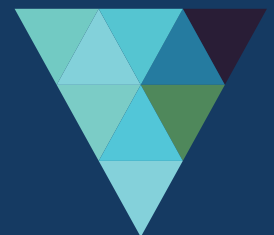


TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE IMPORTANCE & PURPOSE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	3
Goals and Aspirations	4
Objectives	5
Specific Community Engagement Objectives	5
Statement of Principles	6
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK	7
When We Engage	7
Who is Responsible for Engagement	7
What We Engage On	8
Councillor Involvement	10
Richmond Valley Community Engagement Strategy Team	10
How We Engage	11
PROTOCOLS	11
Issues Analysis, Mitigation and Management	12
Tools and Activities	13
WHO WE ENGAGE WITH	14
Key Stakeholders	14
Stakeholder Database	15
APPENDIX A	16
Community Engagement Tools	16
Tools in use	16

THE IMPORTANCE & PURPOSE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Richmond Valley Council believes in open and accountable governance. We are passionate about the future of the region; harmonising the needs of the community, stakeholders and policy directions from State and Commonwealth governments is key to achieving balanced decision making in delivering the community's vision of growing a sustainable relaxed lifestyle in a beautiful environment with a thriving economy.

In 2022 Council adopted its Community Strategic Plan Engagement Strategy. This strategy describes how Richmond Valley Council will engage with the community and acknowledges the desire of Council to share information and experiences to develop a shared vision for the future of our community. This Community Engagement Strategy and Framework aims to strengthen that commitment by providing a best-practice approach in all community engagement activities. Our engagement process recognises diversity within the community and incorporates a variety of tools and techniques to reach our wide range of community members and stakeholders.

Further in support of this the Richmond Valley Council implemented the Richmond Valley Council Community Participation Plan 2020 (the CPP) prepared under Section 2.23 of the NSW *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (the Act). Section 1.1 of the CPP states: "a Community Participation Plan (CPP) sets out when and how Council will engage its community across the range of town planning functions it performs under the Act. A CPP must meet the minimum requirements for community participation set out in Schedule 1 to the Act, including any additional requirements provided in the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000 (the Reg)".

This CPP identifies:

- The mandatory community engagement requirements of the Act, including variations to those requirements (where permitted);
- How community engagement will be undertaken;
- The minimum period for community engagement; and
- How the community can make submissions.

Community engagement does not replace the final decision-making power of Council, but provides valuable opportunities for the community to be involved in designing key directions for the future and supporting well-informed, sustainable decisions.

GOALS & ASPIRATIONS

Council wants to engage with the community, to understand it's needs and priorities and involve local people in designing the future of the Richmond Valley. This Strategy reflects and supports our commitment to:



Inform the community about Council activities and services.



Meet our statutory responsibilities for public consultation.



Promote community interest in Council activities and services



Provide opportunities for the community to be involved in designing key directions and public places.



Define pathways for the community to provide comment and feedback.



Facilitate improved relationships between Councillors and the broad community of Richmond Valley Council.

OBJECTIVES

This strategy and supporting documents will:



Provide a framework to guide Council's engagement with the community in a meaningful and appropriate way.



Provide a consistent and flexible process for staff to guide the selection of the most appropriate method and level of engagement for projects or decisions



Support the environment of trust and confidence established with community and stakeholders to engender a long-term sustainable and productive relationship and commitment to a shared vision for Richmond Valley.



Strengthen Council initiatives which involve community and stakeholder partnerships, particularly to involve the community in the co-creation of Council's Community Strategic Plan.

SPECIFIC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES



Involve community and stakeholders in the development of Richmond Valley Council's Community Strategic Plan and supporting plans and strategies.



Provide opportunities for feedback on issues or proposals which affect the community.



Upskill Richmond Valley Council staff in community engagement techniques, tools and ideas to improve community participation.



Identify councillor participation opportunities at community events and campaigns.



Improve communication with the community using new technologies.

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

Richmond Valley Council will apply the following principles for community engagement and communications.

▶ PARTNERSHIP & RESPECT

We seek to partner with our community and key stakeholders and will engage respectfully at all times.

▶ ACCESSIBILITY

We will provide access to information which is both easily obtained and understood by people of all abilities.

▶ RIGHT TO BE INFORMED

Our stakeholders have a right to be informed about Richmond Valley Council decisions which affect them.

▶ PROPORTIONATE

We will involve the community to participate in decisions in a way which is proportionate to the significance or impact of an activity on them.

▶ TRANSPARENCY

Richmond Valley Council will make decisions in an open and transparent way and provide stakeholders with reasons for decisions, including how views have been taken into account.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The Community Engagement Framework is guided by Richmond Valley Council's Community Engagement Strategy. The Framework provides the following:

- Outlines the procedures and mechanisms required to engage effectively with the Richmond Valley community;
- Outlines the tools currently available, and those to be considered for engagement programs; and
- Details the activities required in projects to ensure the community engagement component of everything we do is planned and executed in accordance with the requirements of Council.

WHEN WE ENGAGE

Council staff should consider community engagement at any time depending on Council's program of work.

Each time there is a project to be developed, or a decision to be made there is an opportunity for a community engagement process. Early notice of emerging issues puts Council in a better position to respond in a proactive way.












In a successful engagement planning process, Council staff should consider the impact and complexity of the issue and the optimal time and tools needed for people to engage and respond. Whilst the *Local Government Act 1993* sets out minimum requirements for some specific consultations, each engagement process is considered on its individual basis and merit.

Council's approach to community engagement draws from the best practice principles of community engagement as promoted by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), which provides a guide for undertaking engagement activities based on the required outcome (attached). This approach underpins Council's engagement focus and provides a clear reference for all staff considering community engagement.








WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ENGAGEMENT

Although Community and Communications staff play a key role in engagement, community engagement is a key component in all Council projects at all levels of activity.

WHAT WE ENGAGE ON

PROJECT	LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT	TIMEFRAME
Integrated Planning & Reporting Documents	 Involve	28 days
Council Policies	 Consult	28 days, or 42 days as specified by legislative requirements or Council resolution.
Master plans to inform future works such as playgrounds, pedestrian access, coastal management	 Involve	At least 28 days
Council Strategies	 Involve	At least 28 days
Reclassification of Land	 Consult	28 days
Development Applications	 Consult	14 days; Council may extend the public exhibition period without further notification to those already advised
Project & Service Delivery	 Inform	Seven days
Emergency Notifications	 Inform	As soon as practicable - weather events impacting roads and services, water outages
Road Naming Proposals	 Consult	21 days with a further 21 days after Council and Geographical Names Board approval
Donation Requests	 Inform	28 days
Australia Day Nominations	 Inform	At least three months

WHAT WE ENGAGE ON

PROJECT	LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT	TIMEFRAME
Leases, Tenders, EOI	 Inform	14 days
Committee Representation	 Inform	28 days
Local Strategic Planning Statement	 Involve	At least 28 days
Planning Proposal to Modify Local Environment Plan (LEP)	 Consult	28 days or as specified by the gateway determination, which may find that no exhibition is required for a minor proposal
Development Control Plan	 Consult	28 days
Developer Contribution Plans	 Consult	28 Days
Voluntary Planning Agreements	 Consult	28 Days

COUNCILLOR INVOLVEMENT

Council staff will raise opportunities for Councillors to be involved throughout the year. These opportunities will be offered according to local geography and issues. Councillor involvement opportunities include but may not be limited to:

COUNCILLOR APPOINTMENTS	MOBILE LIBRARY
POP UP & WALK SHOPS	SPECIFIC PROJECT-BASED OPPORTUNITIES

RICHMOND VALLEY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY TEAM

This group will oversee the delivery of the Strategy. Participants will include the following with the involvement of the General Manager and other relevant staff as may be required:

- Chief of Staff
- Manager Community Connection
- Officer Communications and Digital Experience

HOW WE ENGAGE

In accordance with our principles as outlined in the Community Engagement Strategy, all our engagements reflect our commitments of:

- Partnership and respect
- Accessibility
- Right to be informed
- Proportionality
- Transparency

Community engagements will be undertaken at various times, however, they must all align with the Community Engagement Strategy, and be guided by an engagement plan. Appropriate support and guidance will be provided to deliver effective and appropriate community engagement activities and initiatives which align with Council's Strategy

PROTOCOLS

PROJECT REQUIREMENT	PROTOCOL
Official spokespeople for Richmond Valley Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayor and General Manager
Written Communications Protocol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All material for public distribution will be approved and signed off prior to distribution • All media releases and responses must be approved in line with established media protocol.
Communications protocol for receiving and responding to enquires such as: emails, community enquiries, complaint letters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All written responses will be approved • All calls and enquiries, along with responses, are recorded in a contact database. The database will record names, contact details, query, and response. • Enquiries received by phone to be responded to within two working days.
Media Protocol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All media engagement is managed by Manager Community Connection. The media spokesperson is the Mayor and General Manager.

ISSUES ANALYSIS, MITIGATION & MANAGEMENT

Each project will have its own unique set of issues, which could affect the delivery of a project or result in negative or incorrect information being distributed. Thus, it is imperative to identify any potential issues before a project commences.

Early identification of issues, along with the establishment of agreed responses and communications tools, will enable the staff involved to manage issues before they have the potential to become major risks. To define issues, it is important to hold a roundtable discussion or workshop with key project personnel from management through to support staff, to identify issues at all levels of a project.

Example:

KEY ISSUES	ACTION/ RESPONSE/ MITIGATION MEASURE	COMMUNICATIONS TOOL
Traffic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A traffic report has been prepared to support the development application. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter Information sheet Q&A to resource staff
Impact on local services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with the service provider to gain clear information about the causes, impacts and future benefits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letterbox drop Social media post Newsletter article Onsite staff
Construction Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early notification Identification of key stakeholders Easy access to information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Door knock 24/7 information phone line Social media post Newspaper article

TOOLS & ACTIVITIES

The community engagement tools and activities outlined below will ensure stakeholders have access to information and can provide feedback on Council projects.

A range of traditional and modern communication, methods will be used to inform residents and gain feedback on Council activities, services and products. This includes, but is not limited to, those listed below. Some of these are already in use and others will be introduced as appropriate (see Appendix A: Community Engagement Tools for detailed descriptions).

-  Pop up shops
-  Mobile Library
-  Councillor appointments
-  Community information number
-  Letterbox drops
-  Print media and newsletters - newspapers, community newsletters
-  Install wall mounted TV screens/monitors in high-visibility local buildings
-  Install community noticeboards
-  Partnerships with schools, such as student workshops and notices in school newsletters
-  Online channels - Council website, Facebook, Mailchimp, Twitter, an App, or other community engagement-specific software

WHO WE ENGAGE WITH

We prioritise community engagement as a vital aspect of our outreach, fostering strong connections within our diverse communities to collectively shape a better, shared future.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Identification of stakeholders is a key component in creating and implementing successful communications and engagements. Council must meet the needs of a variety of stakeholders; those who have an interest in Council's decision-making and those who are affected by Council's decisions.

Richmond Valley Council engages with a broad range of people who make up the Richmond Valley community. An effective plan seeks to understand their stake in a project, how they will affect or interact in a project, and the most appropriate people and methods for managing these stakeholders, as well as the best method of communicating with each stakeholder. The stakeholder groups outlined below may vary by project based on local geography, interest and issues.

STAKEHOLDER	CONSULTATION METHODS
Richmond Valley residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Newsletters, letters, and any other method below as appropriate
Residents impacted by project or issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online - via Facebook and website Letterbox drops Pop-up shops Walk shops
Aboriginal community - The traditional owners of the land in the Richmond Valley LGA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aboriginal corporations and land councils
Ageing community - People 55+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place-based groups
People with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place-based groups
Migrant community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representative groups
Youth and children/schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council staff contacts
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chambers of Commerce RDA and industry groups

STAKEHOLDER	CONSULTATION METHODS
Government (Federal, State & Agencies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional-based agencies • Local Members of Parliament • Inter-agency groups
Heritage/ Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council staff contacts
Peak Community Organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hall committees, informal contacts • Inter-agency groups
Interest/action groups specific to project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As appropriate contacts to Council
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications staff contacts

STAKEHOLDER DATABASE

A stakeholder database records details of stakeholders and community members interested or involved in each project as outlined above. A range of databases are maintained by different operating areas in Council to manage various tasks. Information in the database includes name of organisation/individual, phone number, email contact and/or mailing address as required. Relevant database information should be accessed appropriate to each project. Maintenance of contact information should be included as part of any engagement plan.

TYPES OF DATABASE	RESPONSIBILITY
Ratepayers' database	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rates team
Community engagement contacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Engagement team
ECM electronic records management customer database	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Experience team
Mailchimp communications database	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications team

APPENDIX A

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

Engagement tools and activities may include, but are not limited to, the following. Some of these are already in use and others will be introduced as appropriate.

Council is interested in engaging with residents in ways which make information provision and gathering of feedback/input more accessible for time-poor residents. Some of these are already in use and others will be introduced as appropriate.

TOOLS IN USE

TOOLS IN USE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Print media<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Advertising in newspapersb. Paper and email community newsletters and other newsletters as appropriate
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Established tools including newsletters, letterbox drops, website content, stakeholder letters
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mobile Library<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. councilors and staff travelling with the Mobile Libraryb. More targeted information displays on the Mobile Library
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Councillor appointments<p>These would be for residents to meet and discuss specific issues with councillors, for example</p><ul style="list-style-type: none">a. 15 minute face-to-face meetings scheduled during day or eveningsb. 15 minute online meetings scheduled during day or evenings via Facebook
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facebook<p>Already in use as a means of letting residents know about events and other relevant information and Council will continue to expand its reach. It is also a potential source of informal feedback and track how many users are seeing the posts.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advisory committees<p>Support Council in carrying out its functions and provide comment on specific issues</p><ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Richmond Valley Aboriginal Services Interagencyb. Richmond Valley Youth Networkc. Discover Richmond Valley Tourism Advisory Committee

Council is using and/or actively investigating the following tools for introduction to the toolkit.

TOOLS UNDER INVESTIGATION

- **Mailchimp**

This is a coordinated platform which allows Council to email residents. Council will:

- a. Ask as many residents as possible to sign up with an email address to receive newsletters, emergency response information, notification of big events
- b. Use Mailchimp to get feedback on items open for community consultation via email
- c. An App which has a comments section and survey function

- **Ideas board**

- a. An online community engagement tool where residents are able to leave comments on specific Council projects
- b. Residents can write things they like, things they don't like, an idea, a traffic problem, or any custom item desired. Council can also post projects for comment.
- c. An App which would have functionality across different areas of Council such as rates, maintenance, surveys

- **Install wall-mounted TV screens/monitors in high-visibility local buildings**

- a. These would be installed in high-traffic areas in well-patronised buildings. Potential locations are the local shopping complexes.

- **Install community noticeboards**

- a. Council could install community noticeboards in Casino and Evans Head where staff are based to be able to put information up regularly. A suggestion for Casino has been the side of the automatic toilet in Walker Street.

- **School newsletters**

- a. Parents and teachers are time-poor and students are difficult to reach. Approach schools to put notices in school newsletters.

Project specific activities could also include place-based community consultation groups: geographically-based consultation groups for community consultation on specific Council projects relevant to the particular area. These would not be a town hall or free for all, rather would invite input on a range of specific issues most relevant to the geographical area.

PROJECT SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

- **Pop-up shops**

Opportunity for councillors and staff to get spontaneous feedback from the community. These could be easily facilitated using Council resources of a marquee, fold up tables and chairs.

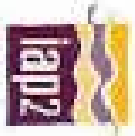
- **Walk shops**

This is an innovative approach for the community to get involved on specific Council projects. Community stakeholders either walk around taking notes with clip board or iPad and relevant Council staff or project experts accompany them to say what they want for an area or stimulate group discussions on what is envisaged for the area during the planning process.

IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum



Increasing Level of Public Impact



Public participation goal

To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

Inform

To obtain public feedback on options, alternatives and/or decisions.

Consult

To work closely with the public throughout the process to ensure the public's concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

Involve

To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision-making process including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

Collaborate

To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

Empower

Promote 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 input in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.

We will implement what you decide.

Examples techniques

- Free ideas
- Web sites
- Open houses

- Public comment
- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Public meetings

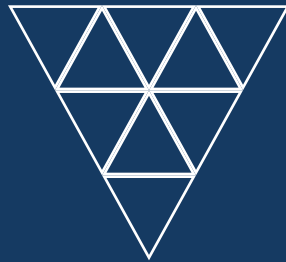
- Workshops
- Deliberative polling

- Citizen advisory committees
- Consensus-building
- Participatory decision-making

- Citizen juries
- Panels
- Deliberated decision

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