



# Community Engagement Policy

---

Adoption Date:	26 July 2021
Review Date	26 July 2023
Version:	2.0
Division/Department:	Communications and Engagement
Responsible Officer:	Community Engagement Coordinator
HPE CM Record Number:	21/20469

## 1 Policy Statement

Woollahra Council proactively engages the community using appropriate, effective and inclusive methods to facilitate public participation in decision-making that affects residents and the people who work in and visit Woollahra.

## 2 Application

### Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to detail Woollahra Council's commitment and approach to community engagement.

Through community engagement Council will:

- **Ensure Council decisions reflect the whole community** by incorporating the community's views, concerns and aspirations into the decision-making process.
- **Increase community confidence and trust** in Council by building or improving relationships with the community through on-going, open and meaningful two-way conversations.
- **Encourage the community** to actively participate in civic life and to take responsibility for identifying and providing solutions to their concerns.
- **Strengthen community capacity** by building the community's understanding of how local government operates, how decisions are made, and how they can participate.

### Scope

This policy outlines Council's commitment to engaging the local community when developing policies, strategies and plans for the purpose of determining its activities, other than routine administrative and operational matters.

With specific regard to planning matters, Council will engage the community in accordance with its *Community Participation Plan*.

This policy is relevant to all departments of Council.

Council will actively encourage community participation in decision-making when:

- required to comply with a statutory obligation
- a proposed change to Council activities or strategic direction may significantly affect the community in terms of lifestyle, environment, wellbeing, amenity or the economy
- developing new or updating existing policies<sup>1</sup>, strategies or plans, wherever legislated, resolved by Council or deemed appropriate due to the nature of the project
- introducing a new service, discontinuing an existing service, or substantially changing or reviewing a service that may significantly affect service provision

---

<sup>1</sup> Other than routine administrative and operational matters

- proposing to enhance the way in which public space looks, is used or is enjoyed
- planning and developing major projects and capital works, including public buildings, centres or other infrastructure
- making urban development/redevelopment proposals that may significantly alter the existing amenity or characteristics of an area
- Council needs more information or evidence to make an informed decision.

This policy does not apply to:

- notification of development applications<sup>2</sup>, applications to modify a development consent, planning proposals, development control plans, contribution plans, draft policies and any other planning matters, to which the Community Participation Plan applies
- Council project partners, sponsors, or grant recipients
- general communications between Council and the community
- Council's routine administrative and operational duties
- emergencies and situations that impact public safety.

Council may choose to not engage the community on matters that are not subject to statutory consultation requirements when it:

- is confident there is sufficient existing community data or feedback to proceed with a project or service
- already has an adopted plan, which is the result of community engagement
- is bound by existing legislation, commercial or legal constraints.

This policy derives from the amendment made to the NSW *Local Government Act 1993* by the section 402A of the *Local Government Amendment (Governance and Planning) Act 2016*, and section 8A(3) of the *Local Government Act 1993*. This policy does not replace any obligation in the amending Act or in any other relevant Act for Council to communicate, consult or engage with the community. In the event of amendments to relevant Acts that result in this policy being inconsistent with said Acts, this policy will be altered to make it consistent with the Act.

This policy is aligned to Council's Community Strategic Plan, *Woollahra 2030*.

## Overview

### What is community engagement?

Community engagement is the practice of involving the community in Council's decision-making process.

Engagement is a two-way exchange in which the community is invited to share their views, aspirations, concerns, needs and values with the purpose of shaping Council's policy development, planning, service delivery and assessments.

---

<sup>2</sup> Notification of development applications are covered by Council's Development Control Plan (DCP) and the *Local Government Act 1993*

Information sharing, community consultation and public participation are all part of the engagement process.

Community engagement plays an important role in helping to make Woollahra a place where you can live, learn, work, play and invest. Council actively seeks out and listens to the views of the community to help Council make decisions that are informed, representative and in the best interests of the whole community, noting that there will be times when decisions are made that not everyone will agree with.

### **Our approach**

Council values the community as a source of local expertise and actively seeks community feedback and input to help shape decisions that affect residents and people who visit, work or go to school in Woollahra. In line with our adoption of the NSW Government's *Child Safe Standards* (standard 2), this includes providing opportunities for children under the age of 18 to voice their opinions in decisions that affect their lives, and to have those opinions taken seriously.

Council also commits to making access to engagement opportunities easy and equitable. Wherever possible community engagement will not be held during, or will be extended to account for, school holiday periods and especially the December-January holiday period, when typically residents may be away from the local area and unable to participate. Some exceptions to this may occur as a result of government funding requirements and deadlines.

Council will also provide a minimum of 28 days for the community to participate in engagement opportunities wherever possible, with the exception of engagement resulting from Federal or State government requirements, where the engagement period is outside of Council's control.

Not all decisions require the same level of community engagement. Council uses The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)'s Public Participation Spectrum as a best practice guideline for identifying appropriate levels of community engagement according to resources and the scale and impact of the decision.

*IAP2 is the peak body for the community and stakeholder engagement sector. Its mission is to advance the practice of public participation through internationally-recognised professional development, certification, standards of practice and core values.*

Council's scalable community engagement approach aims to ensure people:

- are well informed about issues, strategies or plans that may affect them directly or indirectly
- understand how and when Council will consult them, and when Council will make decisions on their behalf (without consultation)
- are engaged in an effective, appropriate and relevant manner by Councillors, Council employees or agents of Council
- are offered genuine opportunities to participate in Council's decision-making process
- understand how their contributions affect the decision-making process and are informed of outcomes of the engagement process
- are connected, active, informed and engaged.

## Guiding principles and values

This policy is aligned with Council's values, IAP2 Australian and international best practice principles for community engagement, and the principles of social justice.

IAP2 Core Values for Public Participation:

1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision, noting that Councillors are elected by the community to represent the community in that final decision-making process.
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.

## Implementation

The implementation of this policy is supported by operational resources, including a methodology guide, which has been developed to help staff successfully deliver community engagement programs. Council staff, and agents acting on the behalf of Council, who are responsible for undertaking community engagement activities, will be provided with training on this policy and associated operational resources and they will act in accordance with Council's Code of Conduct.

How Council delivers engagement will vary with each project, depending on factors such as timing, impact, reach of issue and what level of engagement is most appropriate for the needs of the project and the community (i.e. whether Council is informing, involving, consulting, collaborating or empowering as outlined in the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum).

Staff will make informed decisions to design a tailored engagement strategy for each project. Engagement methods may include, but will not be limited to: notification letters, letterbox drops, online engagement, surveys, displays, pop-ups, onsite forums, focus groups, stakeholder meetings and co-design workshops.

## 3 Community Strategic Plan, Delivery Program and Operational Plan

This policy corresponds to the theme 'Community leadership and participation' in Council's Community Strategic Plan *Woollahra 2030*. Projects with elements of community engagement are identified in the annual Operational Plan.

## 4 Related Policies and Procedures

Related Policy or Procedure	HPECM Reference
-----------------------------	-----------------

---

Delivery Program 2018-2022 and Operational Plan 2020-2021	20/140907
Community Strategic Plan, <i>Woollahra 2030</i>	18/123729
Woollahra Municipal Council Code of Conduct	18/209692
Community Participation Plan	20/116898

This policy may also have minor administrative changes made to it that are in the spirit of this policy, as approved by the General Manager from time to time.

---

## Policy Amendments

Date	Responsible Officer	Description