NORFOLK ISLAND Regional Council

Community Engagement Strategy

2025



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1. About this Strategy

Positioning statement

Community engagement is essential to help the function of local government, allowing residents, businesses and communities to be active participants in shaping their future. Local government has an important role in facilitating opportunities for community members to be involved in local decision-making in which they are stakeholders and which may impact them.

This Community Engagement Strategy (strategy) outlines how Norfolk Island Regional Council (NIRC/ Council) intends to engage with the community on matters of high interest and relevance. This can include the development of plans, policies, programs, resourcing allocations and service delivery. This strategy is intended to be relevant to the ultimate format of local government on Norfolk Island.

About Norfolk Island Regional Council – context for engagement practice

Norfolk Island Regional Council commenced on 1 July 2016. In early 2021, Council's elected Councillors were suspended, and then formally dismissed in December of that year, with Administrators appointed to the governing body role. This arrangement is likely to continue until a new Norfolk Island Assembly commences, which is forecast for 2026.

The absence of a democratically elected governing body makes engagement particularly important to ensure decision-making is in the best interests of the local community.

The legislative framework Council currently works within requires that local Council's:

1. Work with their communities to identify long-term priorities and consider strategies for achieving community goals.
2. Understand the range of services that the local community needs and wants and sets service standards in consultation with the community.
3. Have meaningful conversations with their local communities about the cost of meeting community expectations and allocate resources within the council's means.
4. Report to the community on progress made toward the achievement of community goals.
5. Carry out their functions in a way that provides the best possible value for residents and ratepayers.
6. Plan strategically for the provision of effective and efficient services to meet the diverse needs of the local community.
7. Work cooperatively with other levels of government and relevant organisations to achieve desired outcomes for the local community.
8. Make evidence-based adaptations to meet changing needs and circumstances.
9. Actively engage with their local communities.

This strategy seeks to provide Council and its community with a single shared point of reference for how Council will engage with the Norfolk Island community to meet these expectations and responsibilities.

1.1. Council's Vision, Mission and Values

Council shares Norfolk Island's **VISION** to be "the best small island in the world".

Our **MISSION** is that Council will provide local civic leadership and governance through good decision-making, accountability and transparency. Council will protect and enhance the Island's unique culture, heritage, traditions and environment for the Norfolk Island people. Council will promote a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, look after our community assets and foster a prosperous economy.

Norfolk Island Regional Council embraces the following **VALUES**:

I Integrity

C Communication

A Accountability

R Respect

E Excellence

These Vision, Mission and Values provide the foundation for all of Council's work, and they shape the way Council engages with its local community and other key stakeholders.

Establishing a balanced approach

Engagement is a challenging practice area for all public and private sector entities, as the term has various definitions. Engagement also has different meaning depending on various audiences, and stakeholder expectations vary depending on the topic.

With reference to Table 6 (section 2), the community appears interested in many Council service areas. Therefore, Council will continue to maintain opportunity to comment on identified areas of public interest.

In this strategy, Council defines engagement, and when and how to engage.

In practice, Council will also consider the frequency of engagement within a small community to try to achieve a balance across the following factors:

- Being open to community involvement.
- Not creating fatigue from over-consulting (high frequency and overlapping engagement, depleting community resources). (*Submitters to consultation on this strategy say they are "consulted out" with too many concurrent topics issued for community consultation/ engagement*).
- Being realistic about the extent of Council resources available to engage, acknowledging resource constraints.
- Seeking to involve a wide range of stakeholders.

- Maintaining a focus on service delivery.

Within this strategy, there is a deliberate and ongoing reference to community resources and Council resources. This recognises the limitations on the community (work and family commitments, absence of full-time, paid advocates) and limited Council resources. Council will seek to be efficient with internal processes and mindful of the resource demands of the community.

During the delivery of this strategy, when engagement is elected to be undertaken, Council will assess whether this balance is being achieved to assist good governance for Norfolk Island.

Council recognises that good promotion of opportunities is the first principle, and individuals and organisations can decide whether engagement opportunities are of interest to them.

Council must seek to stagger community engagement to ensure stakeholders are not overwhelmed. During Public Exhibition for this strategy, submitters identified other important documents that were also on Public Exhibition or being consulted upon at the same time.

During consultation to form this strategy, some people agreed with the idea of registering to be on a database for alerts for new engagement opportunities. However, this was not a dominant need, and the database would need constant updates. At this time, based on feedback, Council will widely promote opportunities for involvement rather than registering stakeholders on a database.

Feedback formats

Participants within the consultation to inform this strategy strongly indicated their preference to provide feedback in the following ways:

- Email and correspondence
- Complete an online survey.

Council will therefore maintain these opportunities as the primary ways to efficiently provide feedback. Council will also accept other formats, such as discussions.

Council's role to make informed decisions

Council is mindful of the spectrum of engagement, from forms of co-decision-making with the community, through to informing the community about planning and options and seeking feedback.

Council will tend to select engagement formats which are appropriate for each circumstance and will tend to retain decision-making following community feedback.

When documents are placed on Public Exhibition, this has statutory/ legal requirements, and therefore these requirements are defined (such as days to comment, and how to comment). When a document is placed on Public Exhibition, this will be well promoted, easy to access with key prompt areas for stakeholder feedback.

Whichever format is decided, Council will strive to inform the community of the opportunity to provide feedback, make it easy to provide feedback, and explain how feedback informed ultimate decisions.

To maintain service delivery focus and avoiding the loss of time and resources, Council will tend to not engage on matters which are administrative, there are legislative obligations or urgent action is needed on a public benefit basis.

Council will report back on feedback received, how this was considered during decision making, and the ultimate decision.

Council should also note, according to contributors to the strategy, community desire to see updates on implementation and whether decisions are achieving the desired outcomes.

2. How this strategy was developed

This strategy updates the *2018 Community Engagement Strategy* to help ensure Council meets contemporary expectations of the local community. This review is part of Council's ongoing process of reviewing and updating key corporate and community plans and strategies.

During June 2025, Council invited residents and other Norfolk Island stakeholders to share their thoughts about how Council should best engage with the local community. Feedback was sought via the below engagement methods:

- Online survey
- Drop-in sessions
- Some targeted focus group discussions.

Community members were also invited to contribute their ideas about Council's community engagement in writing. Information promoting these feedback opportunities was circulated through Council's social media channels, directly to key stakeholder groups, and via media releases and radio promotions.

We heard from around 50 individuals, including people who responded to the survey, who visited the drop-in sessions, who contributed to the school leaders' focus group discussion, or who wrote directly to Council.

We also received submissions during the Public Exhibition phase.

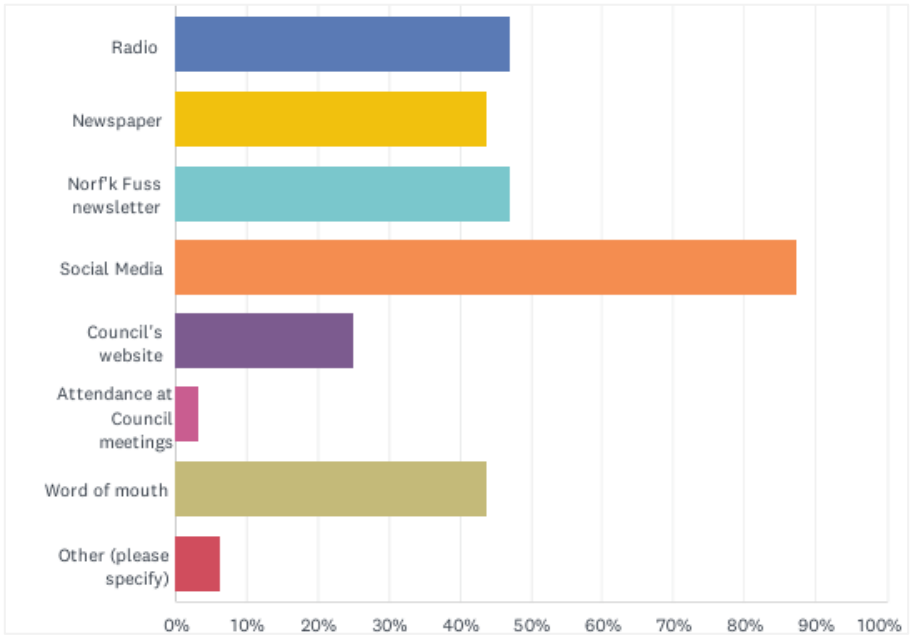
Respondents profile:

- aged between 41 and 75 years (71%)
- majority female (59%)
- lived in a rural area of the Island (66%)
- have lived on Norfolk Island for more than 25 years (53%)
- are employed (97%).

2.1. What you told us

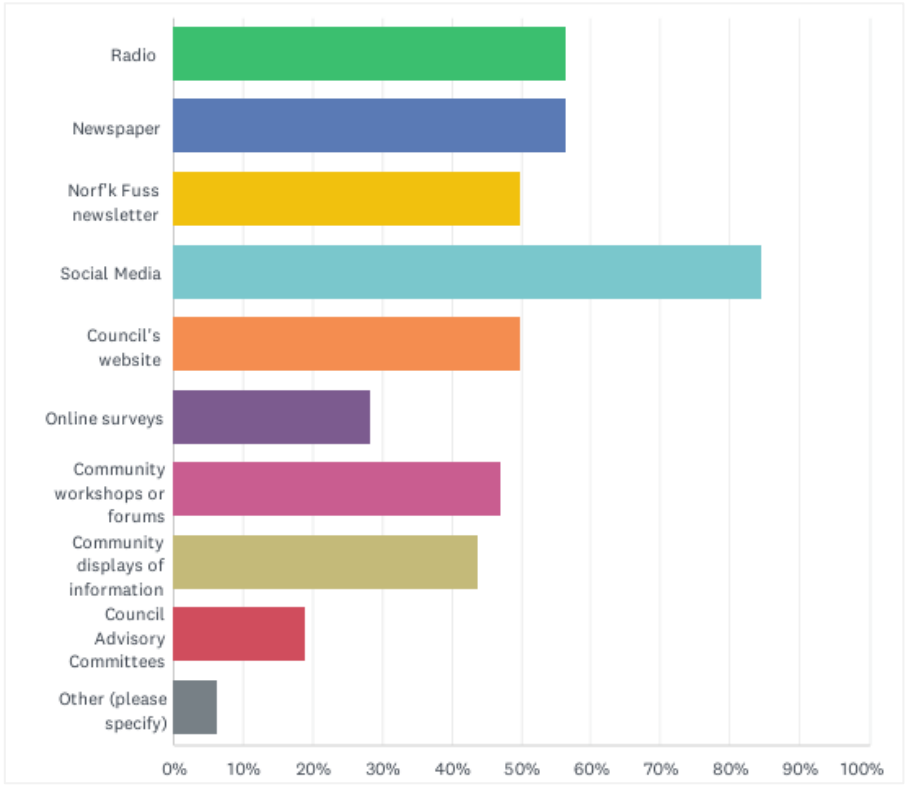
Where do you usually hear about what Council is doing?

Table 1



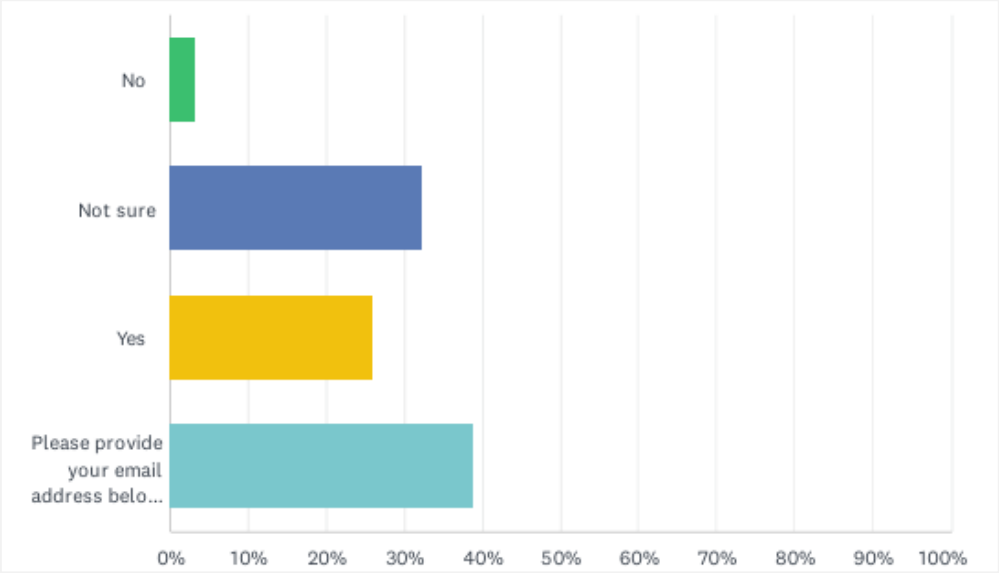
What methods would you prefer Council used to engage the community and invite feedback?

Table 2



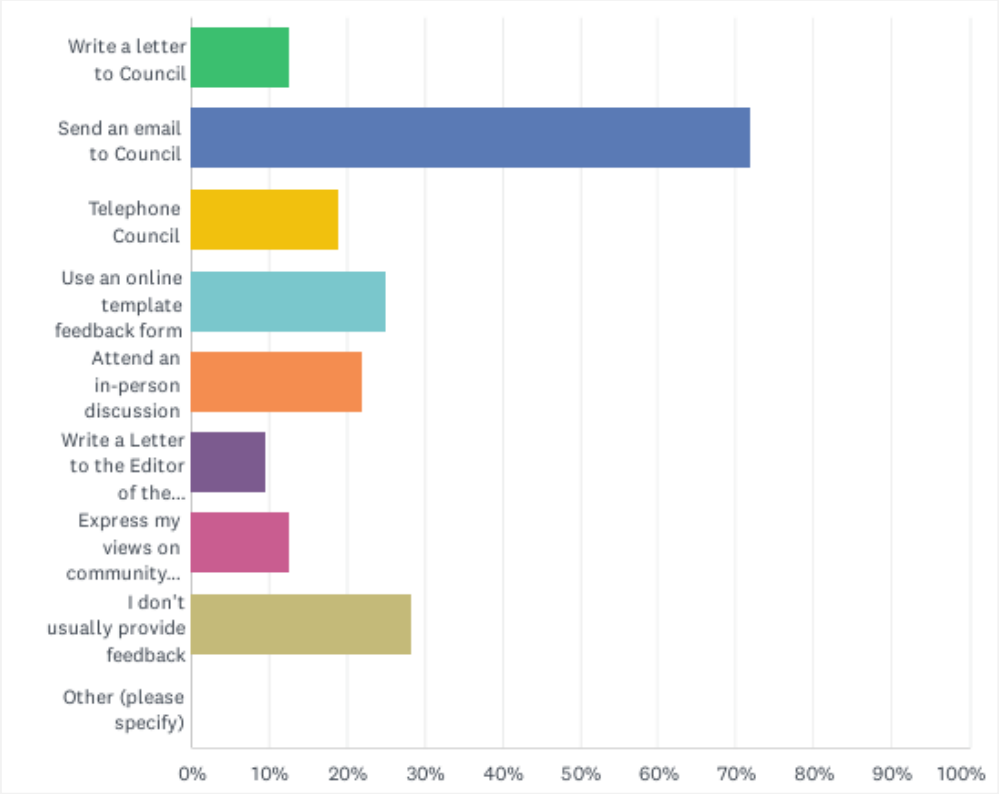
Would you be likely to register for a 'Have Your Say' forum established by Council?

Table 3



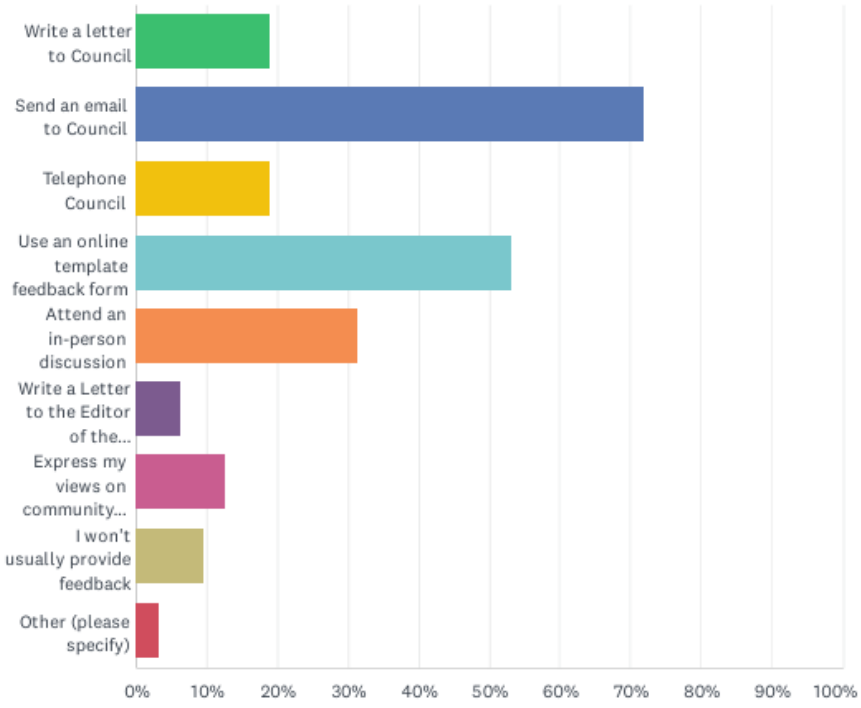
What is your current preferred method of providing feedback to Council?

Table 4



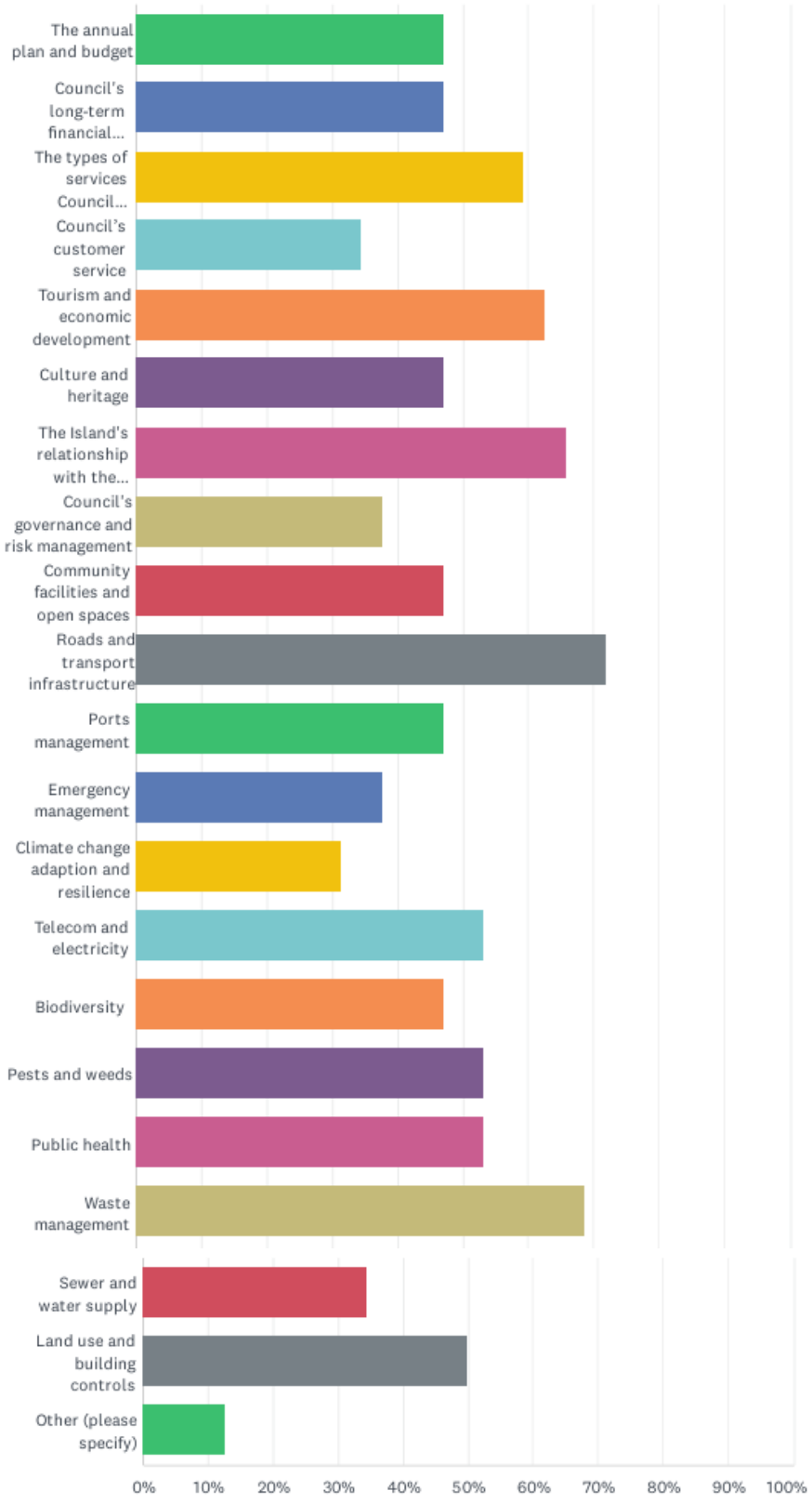
In future, how would you prefer to provide feedback to Council?

Table 5



What Council and community matters are you most interested in having your say about?

Table 6



Anything else?

Specific feedback related to the development of this Community Engagement Strategy included:

1. Council acknowledgement of receipt of feedback is important.
2. Advising the community about revisions made in response to feedback is an important part of the decision-making process.
3. Transparency through an open approach to Council communication will be beneficial.
4. Consistent, regular information posts and newsletters, and community forums, help to build trust over time.
5. When there are complex matters affecting the community, an opportunity to come together as a community and ask questions is important. Direct person-to-person engagement is an effective way to build relationships and trust.
6. Providing sufficient time for busy community members to provide their feedback is important.
7. Important to hold engagement sessions at times that people are available (fitting in around work, family and other commitments).
8. Good to issue radio, newspaper and social media posts when consultation periods are soon to close, to remind the community to have their input.
9. Make hard copies of exhibition documents available for people to take away and consider in their own time.
10. Consider using public noticeboards (such as at the supermarket) where people will see information displays.

This community input has helped to better understand the way Norfolk Islanders find out about Council services and projects and are kept up to date with Council services, processes and decisions.

By understanding the way in which individuals and organisations on the Island receive or seek information relevant to them helps Council to better share that information.

As in all communities, there are some individuals with strong views who sometimes dominate community discussions, leaving others to feel unheard. This can leave some people further alienated from engagement processes and feeling disempowered from influencing government decision-making. Council intends that, by using a variety of methods to engage the community, all individuals who wish to participate will find a safe and effective way to do so.

The desire for frequent, clear, upfront communication keeping people informed of project plans, progress and outcomes is important, as is considering the community's lived experience of being on the Island and inviting their solutions as part of a planning process. Some contributors explain that the community has significant capability in stakeholder engagement which can be leveraged.

Feedback format – reflection on feedback received

Council notes stakeholder preference to correspond via letter and email and complete an online survey. This is likely because this is efficient and feedback can be provided at times which best suit the stakeholder.

In the case of online surveys, requirements include:

- An introduction and explanation
- The need to be short, to maintain participant interest.
- Not all response fields are obligatory to force responses, and participants cannot continue because they don't want to respond to a question.
- The fields and questions should be open and neutral (that is, not guiding a response that Council wants to hear).

Council also notes the community preference for community meetings on complex or technical subjects. Stakeholders also value a short executive summary style fact sheet about the subject.

3. Community engagement – definition for context and relevance for Norfolk Island

3.1. What is it?

Community engagement provides opportunities for the Norfolk Island community to participate in and influence Council's decision-making, direction, priority setting, service delivery, resource allocation and other key activities.

Engagement brings local knowledge, ideas and feedback to Council processes, to ensure Council's decisions and actions improve community wellbeing and long-term sustainability. Feedback drawn from engagement supports Council to better understand community priorities and goals, which informs Council's advocacy on behalf of Norfolk Island to other levels of government.

Community engagement provides a basis for understanding Council decisions, sharing perspectives, improving outcomes and building trust between Council, the community and other Norfolk Island stakeholders.

Effective community engagement encourages open dialogue, ensures Council understands community needs and expectations, identifies critical expectations and opportunities early, and fosters local problem-solving.

Community engagement is a process where local communities are enabled access to information and provided opportunities to provide feedback to Council, using methods which provide participation access to everyone.

Community engagement activities will look different depending on the matter under consideration. The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) describes an engagement spectrum to demonstrate how these activities vary:

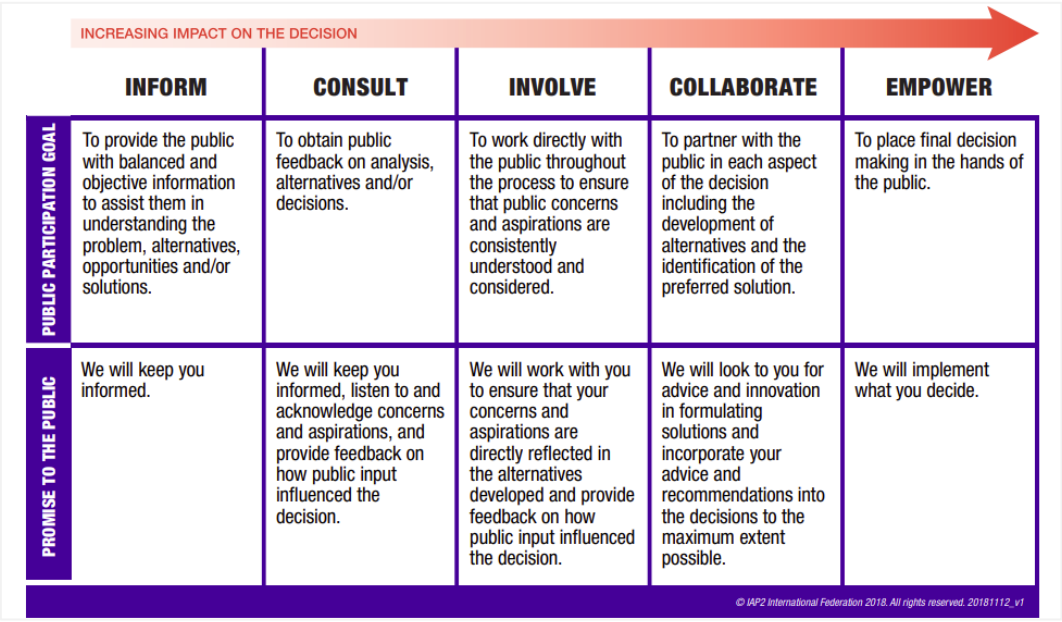


Figure 1

Norfolk Island Regional Council's community engagement activities will most frequently sit on the **Inform/Consult/Involve** part of the spectrum. Legislative restrictions mean Council is unable to delegate decision-making to the community.

3.2. Norfolk Island's community

Our local community is made up of a rich tapestry of individuals, groups and organisations, businesses, government agencies and more. When we talk about engaging our community, we are referring to all of these community stakeholders (in no particular order). Some individuals might wear several 'hats', bringing their experience in relation to one or more of these to the matter under discussion:

- Island residents and ratepayers
- Council of Elders
- Businesses, retailers and Business Council
- Knowledge Centre
- Visions Assembly
- Tourist accommodation providers
- NI Tour operators
- Sports clubs and organisations
- Lions, Rotary, Probus, Quota, RSL and Leagues clubs
- Health & Wellbeing health services group
- NI Connect
- NI Central School
- Adult education providers and students
- Arts & Culture creatives
- Play groups and children's services
- Local media
- Environmental groups
- Health service providers
- Local farmers and primary producers
- Aged Care service providers
- Disability service providers
- Social and recreational groups and organisations.

Identification of key stakeholder groups allows Council to target and inform stakeholders about engagement opportunities which may be of most relevant or interest to them.

Some contributors to this strategy explain that the community has significant capability in stakeholder engagement which can be leveraged.

3.3. Principles for community engagement

In undertaking its community engagement activities, Council will reference the following engagement principles:

Table 7

Accessible	We will make information and our engagement channels easy to use and understand.
Authentic	We will engage our community because we are genuinely interested to hear from those affected by our plans, programs, policies and service delivery before we make decisions.
Inclusive	We will promote and support participation and contributions from our diverse community stakeholders.
Tailored	We will use tools and techniques appropriate to the engagement activity (one size won't fit all).
Targeted	When the subject matter for engagement relates to particular components of our community, we will target those people for inclusion in the engagement activity, and where possible, we will come to you.
Planned	We will plan our engagement activities to ensure we hear from the community to inform key decision points. We plan engagement to reduce multiple engagement programs at the same time.
Timely	We will provide adequate time to enable proper participation in engagement activities. This includes reducing concurrent engagement programs.
Transparent	We will include information about the outcomes of engagement activities, Council's response, and how the community's input has shaped the final decision.
Informed	We will ensure communication and community engagement include accessible information which enables the informed participation of community members. We regularly reflect on the outcomes of engagement to be better informed about the ways the Norfolk Island community wish to be engaged.
Proportionate	We will shape our community engagement activities to be proportionate to the subject under discussion.

3.4. How we will communicate and engage

In response to Council's engagement principles (described above), a variety of methods of engagement may be used, as appropriate, depending on the significance of subject and potential impact upon and relative importance to Norfolk Island stakeholders.

The matrix below summarises the methods of engagement which may be used depending on where on the engagement spectrum the activity falls:

Table 8

Type of engagement	Nature of engagement	Methods and options
Inform	One-way communication, where Council provides information to support community understanding about a Council action or decision.	✓ Social media posts ✓ Website information ✓ Advertisements, notices and announcements in local media ✓ Letters to residents, ratepayers and other stakeholders ✓ Brochures/fact sheets ✓ Information displays and signs ✓ Council reports (e.g. in Business Paper)
Consult	Two-way communication, where Council is seeking community feedback about something that is proposed (a plan, policy, service or other activity). Feedback Council receives will be considered in Council's final decision-making process.	✓ Online feedback forms and emails ✓ Focus groups ✓ Advisory Committees ✓ Community surveys ✓ Exhibition of draft documents seeking public feedback ✓ Drop-in sessions ✓ Face-to-face interviews with stakeholder groups ✓ Pop-up stalls
Involve	Community members are invited to participate in activities which identify issues and community concerns, so that an understanding of this can inform Council's decision-making process.	✓ Advisory Committees ✓ Facilitated workshops ✓ Focus groups
Collaborate	Work with community to identify issues, priorities, solutions and actions, and agree a role for community stakeholders in achieving desired outcomes. This may also include the co-design of Council's response to the matter.	✓ Advisory or reference groups ✓ Committees & panels ✓ Focus groups

In addition to these approaches by Council, community members also have the opportunity to address Council meetings about matters on that meeting's agenda for Council's consideration.

3.5. Council's engagement toolkit

The intention of this strategy is to:

- Help the Norfolk Island community understand Council's community engagement approach.
- Support Council's staff to effectively engage the community as they develop service delivery strategies and plans, policies, programs and other Council activities (this is especially important as engagement will usually be delegated within the organisation, as Council does not have an in-house community engagement specialist).

Community Engagement Strategy toolkit includes:

1. A community engagement checklist
2. A guide to the engagement process (inception, approval, implementation, outcomes)
3. A guide to engagement approach informed by level of impact
4. Community engagement plan template
5. Examples of ways to capture community input
6. Providing a summary of feedback received from community engagement activities

3.5.1. A community engagement checklist – to engage, or not engage, relative to necessity and community and Council resources

By working through the following engagement questions, Council staff can ensure appropriate stakeholder engagement is undertaken in support of the activity they are undertaking.

Beyond the first question (see below), Council will also consider whether community engagement is needed.

This checklist will be most often used, when engagement is planned, but may also help determine whether that there is insufficient return on effort for both the community and Council and the decision-making 'window' and options are narrow.

1. **Who should we engage?**
   - ☐ Who in the community is most likely to be affected by the matter we are working on?
   - ☐ If this matter relates to a community facility or service, who are, or who do we intend the end-users to be?
   - ☐ Who else within Council does work that intersects with this subject matter?
   - ☐ Does Council already have an advisory committee or other reference group that has this subject matter as part of its scope?
   - ☐ Are there other internal or external stakeholders who have undertaken similar work in the past or who are considered subject-matter experts?

2. **When should we engage?**
   - ☐ Do we already know enough from other engagement to understand community sentiment?
   - ☐ Are there other engagement programs underway, which Council need to consider and potentially avoid? Can the planned engagement be staged and staggered, to reduce overlaps and excessive demands on the community?
   - ☐ What are the questions we want stakeholder engagement to help us answer? When will we need those answers in the decision-making process?
   - ☐ How much notice will we need to give identified stakeholders to enable their participation in the process?

3. **How should we engage?**
   - ☐ How will we let relevant stakeholders know that there is an opportunity for their engagement in this process?
   - ☐ Are there relevant on-island organisations and resources which can be leveraged to promote opportunity, or aid Council in gathering feedback?
   - ☐ What methods of engagement should we use to most effectively enable our identified stakeholders to participate?
   - ☐ Are online engagement options appropriate in this case?
   - ☐ Is a targeted focus group discussion the best way to achieve our intended engagement outcomes?
   - ☐ Would a broad community survey provide the evidence we need to support our planning process?

- ☐ Is a public notice of a draft document and a period of public exhibition and advertised feedback opportunity sufficient?
- ☐ How often, and at what points during the process, should engagement activities occur? (Also considering other engagement activities and trying to avoid community fatigue)
- ☐ What information and communication resources will be required to support the engagement activities and are these within budget?

4. **How will we use engagement outcomes?**
   - ☐ How much are we able to allow the results of our engagement activities to shape the final strategy or plan?
   - ☐ Have we made clear to our community stakeholders the extent (or limit) of their engagement in the process?
   - ☐ When will we provide a summary of engagement outcomes as part of finalising the process?
   - ☐ Have the engagement activities and outcomes been properly recorded in Council's record management system?

5. **How will we keep engaged stakeholders informed of progress?**
   - ☐ Will we notify everyone we engaged with of the outcome, and how will this be achieved?
   - ☐ What will be provided to relevant community stakeholders once this process is finalised?
   - ☐ What will be published on Council's website or otherwise publicised at the conclusion of this process?

3.5.2. A guide to the engagement process (inception, approval, implementation, outcomes)

Staff across Council may identify the need for community engagement as part of a project or activity which they have responsibility for. The following process map can help staff or engaged contractors to navigate the process and ensure the most effective use of community engagement:

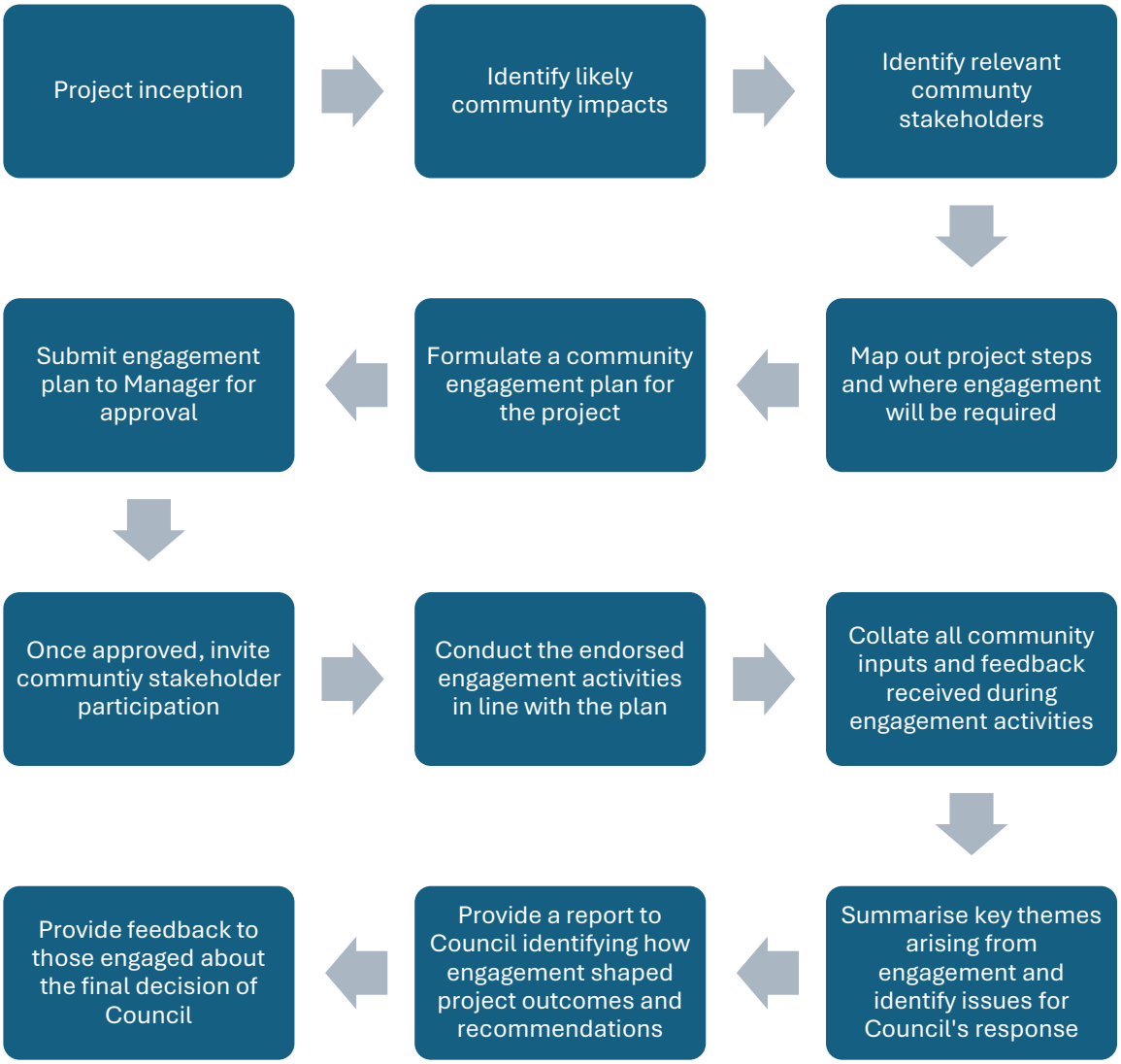


Figure 2

3.5.3. A guide to engagement approach informed by level of community impact

The level of impact that a Council decision, activity, program, policy or planning process is likely to have on the community will help guide the approach taken to engage the community in that process. This is the principle of '**proportionate**' engagement.

The table below describes the engagement approaches Council might take depending on the level of impact of the matter at hand:

Table 9

High level impact
Targeted communication and engagement activities, for example: - Website information and links to feedback channels - Media releases - Social media posts - Information displays - Public forums - Surveys - Advisory Committee engagement - Focus groups - Distribute information via community and school newsletters - Flyer mailed to all ratepayers.
Low level impact
Communication and engagement activities, for example: - Website information and links to feedback channels - Media releases - Social media posts.

3.5.4. Community engagement plan template

The following template should be prepared prior to commencing engagement, including for documents placed on Public Exhibition. This document should be no greater than two (2) pages.

Name of project:	
Lead staff member:	
Manager:	
Projected start and finish dates:	
Whether there are other engagement planned at the same time	
Description of key project milestones where community engagement will be sought	
Proposed engagement activities for each milestone (above)	
Target groups/key stakeholders for inclusion in engagement activities	
Resources required to support engagement activities	
Key messages	
How are engagement outcomes intended to be used?	
Approved: (*Manager signature*)	
Date:	

When a document is to be placed on Public Exhibition, the General Manager, will decide the extent to which this template is relevant.

3.5.5. Examples of ways to capture community input

Depending on the nature of the plan, strategy, program, project or policy that community input is being sought for, the ways that input might be captured could vary. Some examples are described below. Council will strive for inclusion and efficiency, noting limited community and Council resourcing.

Table 10

Method	Examples for when to use this method
Online survey	A survey is appropriate to focus and structure feedback. Well-publicised, an online survey allows interested community members to participate in their own time and anonymously. This can enable the less assertive voices to be heard equally. A free text field is also important, to allow all feedback to be captured, not controlled. In the case of online surveys, requirements include: • Need to be short to maintain participant interest • Not all response fields are obligatory to force responses, and participants cannot continue • The fields and questions should be open and neutral (that is, not guiding a response that Council wants to hear. **There are free online tools. A good format is MS Forms.**
Word template survey	Some participants will prefer hard copy, or editable copy instead of electronic platforms. The format should be the same as electronic surveys. These can be made available at Council's Customer Care counter.
Phone survey – targeted stakeholders	Similar to the question methodology above, Council may elect to phone target and representative stakeholders to receive feedback. The questions would be as above and include other comments. Council officers would book a time and send questions in advance.
Community meetings	Consultation indicates that stakeholders would like the opportunity to have community meetings on matters of significant interest. This will be determined on the threshold of impact to the community, while being mindful of community and Council resources.

When Council resolves to undertake consultation, it should determine the engagement methodology, mindful of community and Council resources, referencing the above list.

3.5.6. Providing a summary of feedback received from community engagement activities

Provide a **concise report** for Council and the public is a mandatory requirement.

Table 11

Report element	Prompts
1. What was the subject for the community engagement?	Was it a policy, a strategy, a plan, a program?
2. How long was the engagement period?	Include start and finish dates (with total number of days/weeks/months that the engagement program was delivered).
3. Communication and promotion formats	Include the various ways the engagement was promoted and opportunity to provide feedback.
4. How many people participated in the engagement activities?	If a variety of methods was used, include sub-categories of participation numbers, for example: - X number completed a survey - Y number sent in a written submission - Z number attended a focus group.
5. What information was received from the community about the matter under discussion	This may include, for example, information about: a) Feedback about specific elements, including consequences and benefits b) Relative proportion of participants who are in favour of, against or apathetic about the proposal c) The amount the community is prepared to pay for a proposed service or program (if relevant) d) An indication of prioritisation or preference if there are various options e) Other feedback relevant to Council, but not specific to the engagement topic.
6. Recommended Council response	Following consideration of feedback received (as above) the General Manager (GM) may provide a recommendation to Council decision-makers or leave decisions and direction to the decision makers.
7. Reporting back	Following Council determination, the GM will instruct delegated personnel to prepare statements about the decision reached and how and when this will be implemented. Depending on the decision reached the GM needs to delegate the preparation of a short report about the feedback received, and how this assisted and informed the decision reached. This public report should be sent to people who participated and made public through social media, etc. Following implementation, Council should provide an update on implementation progress, including outcome achieved and KPIs where relevant.

3.6. Resources and further information

Further information about community engagement practice and the source of information referred to in this Strategy can be found in the resources below:

Resource/ Information	Source
ABS Region Summary: Norfolk Island	https://dbr.abs.gov.au/region.html?lyr=sa3&rgn=90104
2021 Census: Norfolk Island	https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/90104
International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)	https://www.iap2.org/mpage/Home https://engagementinstitute.org.au/
Council's strategies and plans	https://www.nirc.gov.au/Your-council/Council-documents
Council documents for public exhibition	https://www.nirc.gov.au/Your-council/Council-documents/Documents-for-public-exhibition
Council's generic feedback form	https://www.nirc.gov.au/Feedback-Form
Council's social media channels: ✓ Facebook/ Meta ✓ Instagram ✓ LinkedIn ✓ YouTube	https://www.facebook.com/NIRC2899/ https://www.instagram.com/norfolkislandregionalcouncil/ https://www.linkedin.com/company/norfolk-island-regional-council/ https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcB_GOAFVvtOogfua9xFooA
Legislation applying to Norfolk Island that includes provisions for community engagement or consultation	Local Government Act: https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1993-030 Heritage Act: https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2015Q00152/latest/text Planning Act: https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2015Q00200/latest/text