

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

STRATEGY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY	3
1 Why do we need a Community Engagement Strategy?.....	3
1.1 Legislation.....	4
1.2 Purpose of Strategy	4
1.3 Background	4
1.4 Benefits	5
1.5 Challenges.....	5
2 How will we implement the Community Engagement Strategy?.....	6
2.1 Objectives.....	6
2.2 Principles of Engagement	7
2.3 Levels of Community Engagement.....	8
2.3.1 Inform.....	8
2.3.2 Consult	8
2.3.3 Involve	8
2.3.4 Collaborate	8
2.3.5 Empower.....	8
2.4 When to consult	9
2.5 Factors affecting Engagement.....	10
2.5.1 Access	10
2.5.2 Resources	10
2.5.3 Timeframe.....	10
2.6 Appendices.....	15
Appendix 1 Strategic Planning and Performance Reporting Flowchart.....	11
Appendix 2 Project Management Engagement (Draft)	12
Appendix 3 Summary.....	12

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

1 Why do we need a Community Engagement Strategy?

This Strategy outlines Council's commitment to community engagement and provides a methodology to guide and support both the practice and standards of engagement undertaken by Councillors, Council staff and consultants.

Each engagement process varies according to its level of impact. For example, the engagement process for a footpath being constructed in a local street is quite different to that of an overhead power line going through the same street. While a phone call or letterbox drop may be satisfactory for the footpath, it's unlikely that this approach would satisfy residents with regard to the power line. Add a number of other potential issues that may impact on this same street and the coordination of issues across Council become more complex.

The level of community engagement should always be appropriate to the nature, complexity and impact of the issue, plan or strategy.

This strategy recommends a flexible approach that does not prescribe exactly how the community should be engaged, but rather identifies the different levels of impact and the types of engagement that could be chosen.

This strategy is based on five levels of community engagement:

- Inform
- Consult
- Involve
- Collaborate
- Empower

These levels of engagement form a spectrum of community involvement.

Under Queensland law, local governments are required to undertake public engagement on issues and actions that will impact residents' quality of life. In response to both legislative and community expectations, Council has reviewed its approach to external engagement within the community and internal engagement within Council. The local government boundary changes in March 2008, with Logan City growing in size four times, makes it imperative for Council to consult with the new wider community so that residents have a chance to shape their future.

Council acknowledges that models put forward by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) and the IAP2 (International Association of Public Participation) have been referred to in the development of this strategy.

1.1 Legislation

Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1993 states that one of the objects of the Act is to provide;
“for community participation in the local government system”.

Council's Corporate Plan 2009-2013 supports the Local Government Act's intention with respect to community engagement, stating that "strong and supportive communities are built through active engagement and partnerships". Council's goal is to "ensure the community is informed and educated about matters that impact on their lives and have opportunities to contribute".

Council's 'Young City Strategy 2006-2010' also emphasizes the need to engage young people "... continue to empower youth by exploring new ways to communicate and consult with young people".

1.2 Purpose of Strategy

Council services continue to expand and now permeates most aspects of community life. As a consequence, Council plays an increasingly important role in managing and planning for local communities, both current and future.

The methods used by Council to consult the community in projects can often lead to very successful outcomes. However, inappropriate or ad hoc engagement with the community can often lead to adverse outcomes or negative perceptions of Council.

A review of community engagement practices used in Queensland, throughout Australia and overseas shows there is no "generic, one size fits all" approach to engagement. Circumstances for each issue may be unique. Therefore, a spectrum of community engagement models (with associated tools, methods and techniques) may be used.

The purpose of this Strategy therefore is to set the framework for Council's community engagement.

The Strategy consists of two parts:

- **Part 1: “Why do we need a Community Engagement Strategy?”** includes background research on community engagement approaches and methods.
- **Part 2: “How will we implement the Strategy?”** aligns community engagement principles to overall project management objectives to enhance the planning and decision-making processes of Council (See Appendices 1 and 2).

1.3 Background

In the past, Council has formally gauged the community's views on issues affecting the city by:

- Website survey post-amalgamation September 2008.
- AC Nielsen survey --An Exploration of Resident and Business Perceptions 2006
- Market Facts Community Satisfaction Surveys 1995 to 2002.
- The People, Places and Jobs project 1997

1.4 Benefits of Engagement

The benefits of effective community engagement are numerous, both for Council and the community. They include:

- Increased community awareness about Council's services, planning and program delivery
- Increased awareness across Council of community views and the issues that should be considered as part of the decision-making process
- Increased awareness of the needs, priorities and diversity of the local community, which in turn ensures that Council's service provision and planning functions are aligned appropriately
- Increased level of community ownership and acceptance of decisions impacting the local area
- Council and the community working together to address local issues
- Potential for significant time, resource and cost savings for Council.

1.5 Challenges

To improve Council's community engagement, the following feedback has been provided by staff and members of the community about some challenges affecting past engagement activities:

- The need to engage the broader community and not just the same interested community members all the time.
- The need to set aside sufficient time and resources to undertake comprehensive and effective community engagement
- The need to consider a variety of engagement tools and not just certain methods, such as public meetings, which are not always productive
- The need to involve participants early enough in the process to overcome concerns that their input is of a token nature
- The need to give participants feedback afterwards
- Ability to manage community expectations that may have been raised during the engagement process
- The need for more co-ordination within and between Council Branches
- The need for more co-ordination and management of information
- Better opportunities for involvement in Council's decision-making processes
- When organizing community engagement, for equity reasons, take into consideration:
 - Time of day they are held
 - Physical access to venues
 - Availability and presentation of material in languages other than English and for the sight and hearing impaired
 - Culturally appropriate or relevant processes and methods

See the Appendices, plus the Community Engagement Action Plan 2008/09 and the IAP2 workbooks for the framework and tips on addressing these challenges. Council has set up a Community Engagement Program in 2008/09 to address these challenges and provide a more coordinated approach to community engagement.

2 How will we implement the Community Engagement Strategy?

This Strategy aims to be a resource for Council to ensure that its engagement processes are appropriate, accessible, well-planned and integrated, and adequately resourced.

2.1 Objectives

This Strategy strives to:

- Keep the Logan community well-informed about issues, strategies or plans that may affect them.
- Allow residents an opportunity through community consultation to enhance Council's decision-making and strategy development.
- Seek the views of a wide cross-section of the community by selecting engagement methods which are flexible, inclusive and appropriate to those people being consulted.
- Provide residents with the opportunity to share each other's opinions and to recommend appropriate solutions to community issues.
- Provide participants with adequate feedback after the completion of the engagement process
- Assist Council in meeting its legislative requirements regarding community engagement in all areas of its service delivery.
- Provide staff with the support and training to conduct effective community engagement processes
- Improve Council's internal systems and procedures to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive approach to engagement

2.2 Principles of Engagement

The following IAP2 principles will underpin Logan City Council's approach to community engagement.

- Integrity – when there is openness and honesty about the scope and purpose of engagement.
- Inclusion – when there is an opportunity for a diverse range of values and perspectives to be freely and fairly expressed and heard.
- Deliberation – when there is sufficient and credible information for dialogue, choice and decisions, and when there is space to weigh options, develop common understanding and to appreciate respective roles and responsibilities.
- Influence – when people have input in designing how they participate, when policies and services reflect their involvement and when their impact is apparent.

Council is also committed to the international model for guiding consultation practices, as provided by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), as follows:

1. Commitment is valuable at all levels – from politicians, managers and public officials
2. Citizens have rights to information
3. Clarity in making decisions
4. Time must be available for consultation and participation to be effective
5. Objectivity. Information provided should be objective, complete and accessible
6. Resources. Adequate financial, human and technical resources are needed
7. Co-ordination of initiatives to inform, request feedback from and consult citizens
8. Accountability for the use of citizens' inputs received through consultation
9. Evaluation of performance in providing information, conducting consultation
10. Active citizenship. Take concrete actions to facilitate access to information.

2.3 Levels of Community Engagement

The level of engagement will depend on the particular circumstances of the issue.

2.3.1 Inform

Information processes are ‘one-way’ methods of engagement, often used to explain "why" a decision has been made or the processes used for making a decision. Used in isolation, they do not provide the community with the opportunity to express their views. Common methods for providing information are media releases, fact sheets, newsletters, websites and notification letters.

2.3.2 Consult

Consulting involves the exchange of information between Council and the community. These processes are ‘two-way’ methods of engagement, allowing community members the opportunity to express their opinions on a particular issue or proposal. Common methods for consulting include surveys, focus groups, staffed public displays and meetings.

2.3.3 Involve

This type of engagement requires Council to actively seek the involvement of the affected community as part of the planning and decision-making process. Community members have the opportunity to be involved in discussion and debate and to influence Council’s decision-making. Common methods of involving the community include advisory committees, community workshops and site meetings.

2.3.4 Collaborate

Engagement at a collaborative level provides the community with a high level of involvement in Council’s decision-making. This type of community engagement encourages community members to be involved in identifying solutions to local issues.

Collaboration encourages community involvement up front and is focused on finding the best possible result for the community as a whole. Common collaboration methods include community reference groups, community design teams, forums and community panels.

2.3.5 Empower

This places the final decision-making in the hands of the public. Common methods include citizen juries, ballots and delegated decisions.

2.4 When to engage?

Council **must** consult when:

- It is required by legislation
- An issue may have potential impacts on the health, safety or well-being of any community member

Council **should** consult when:

- Any proposed changes will impact on current users or customers of a Council service or facility
- Any proposed changes which will affect the rights or entitlements of community members, including minority groups
- There is potential impact on surrounding neighbours
- It wants to identify community issues, needs and priorities
- It wants to monitor customer satisfaction with Council's services facilities
- There is a level of controversy or sensitivity about a particular issue
- There is conflict among community members about an issue

2.5 Factors affecting Engagement

A number of factors impact the effectiveness of community engagement, such as access, resources and timeframe.

2.5.1 Access

Community members should have equal opportunity to participate in Council's engagement processes. Therefore, access is a critical issue to consider when planning community engagement. In this instance, access refers to any barriers that may impede a person's ability to participate. Specific areas to consider include:

- Selecting a venue and engagement technique appropriate to the people involved in the community engagement (eg Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, people with disabilities, older and young people)
- Ensuring venues are accessible to wheelchairs and have appropriate facilities eg disabled toilets
- Ensuring community education and information is easily understood.
- Making Council's written material available in languages other than English where appropriate
- Providing relevant background material in a form that is appropriate for people with a sight or hearing impairment
- Promoting the engagement in a manner that reaches a wide cross-section of the community (eg newspapers, community centres, community directories, schools, ethnic media, religious organisations, local radio)

2.5.2 Resources

Another key component of community engagement is adequate resourcing. Effective community engagement requires sufficient resourcing in terms of finance, staff time and materials. Consider how many people you aim to involve in the engagement process and determine the appropriate range and types of engagement.

2.5.3 Timeframe

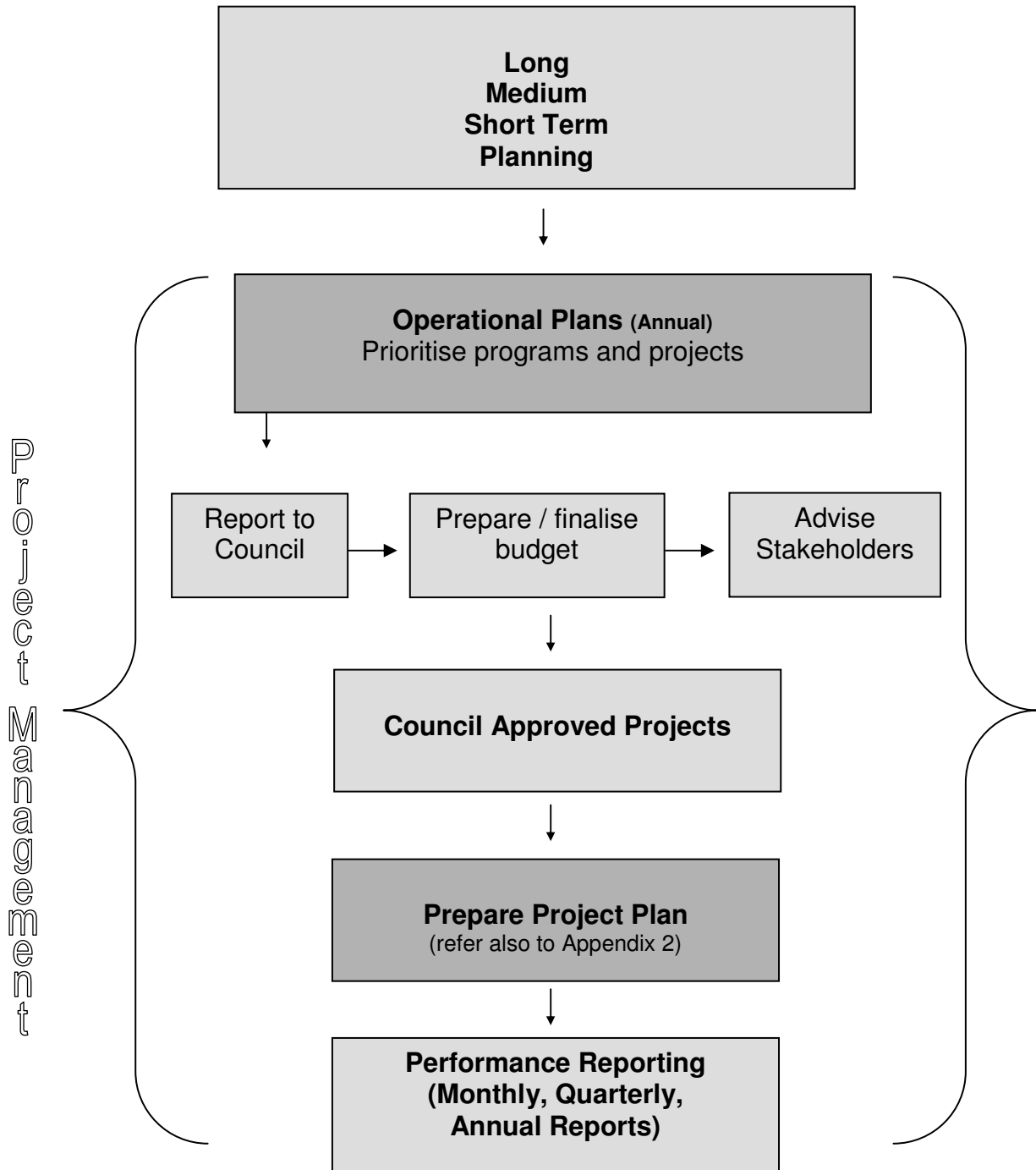
Sufficient timeframes are critical to give participants time to provide feedback or attend consultation displays/meetings and to incorporate feedback into Council's processes. Time constraints should not compromise Council's engagement with the community.

Ideally, community engagement processes should be undertaken early in the decision-making process. This ensures that Council is aware of all issues and community opinions up front.

_Appendices

Appendix 1 Strategic Planning and Performance Reporting Flowchart

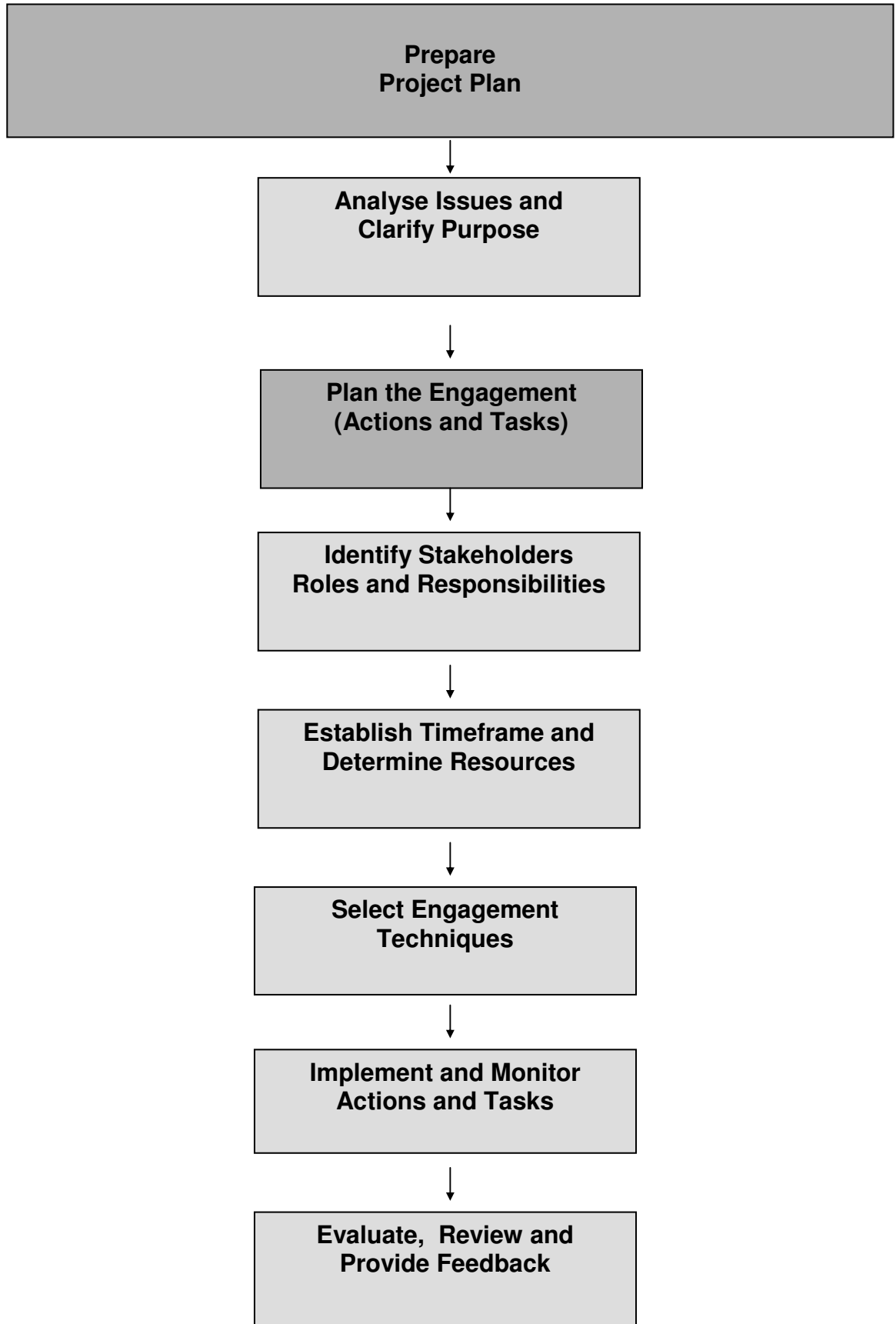
Figure 1 **Strategic Planning and Performance Reporting Flowchart**



Appendix 2 Project Management Engagement

Figure 2.

Project Management Engagement



Appendix 3 Summary

This summary provides a snapshot of step-by-step examples of the Community Engagement process.

This overview provides staff with a guide on when and how they should consult with the community for different situations.

It is recognised that there is diversity in the activities and projects across Council, and the type of Engagement undertaken should vary accordingly. Staff need to determine the potential impact of an issue or situation, and therefore the appropriate level of community input.

Council has proposed a coordinated approach that enables the community, Councillors and project managers to prioritise the significance of each issue and respond at a relevant level.

This aids in the distribution and efficient use of resources and ensure that the Logan community is appropriately consulted on relevant issues and proposals.

Council is establishing a coordinated and comprehensive system for communicating and enhancing relations with the community.

Project-Managed Engagement

The main stages of engagement in project management are based on the following main questions:

1. **What** is the purpose of the project? What will be achieved?
2. **Why** consult on this project? What are the issues?
3. **Who** are the main stakeholders? What is expected of the stakeholders and what are their expectations?
4. **When** will it happen? Establish the timeframes for stakeholder (Council and community) involvement.
5. **How** will it happen? Select the appropriate engagement techniques and implement the process.
6. **Where** does the information go? Monitor the communications and feedback and **evaluate**.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ACTION PLAN FOR 2008/09



Community Engagement Program Action Plan 2008/09

1. Framework

- Establish a community engagement program central to the organisation from which all branches can draw support when undertaking any form of community engagement. This will be based in the Community Engagement and Marketing Branch. (November 2008)
- Establish a steering committee of staff to help coordinate community engagement throughout Council, share ideas and spread awareness. (November 2008)
- Formally adopt Council's Community Engagement Policy and Strategy, and add to Council's website/intranet. (SLPT December 2008, community consultation January 2008, adopted by Council February 2009)
- Hire two more staff for the Community Engagement Program as per approved Transition Action Plan for Community Engagement Branch.

2. Seek consistency through Council

- Provide IAP2 training to internal Council community engagement champions to sponsor the integration of the strategy into Council's work practices, starting February 2009.
- Host a three-hour community engagement workshop in February 2009 for Councillors, SLPT and interested Managers to provide decision-makers with an overview of community engagement.
- Community Engagement Program to provide advice and support to Council branches/project teams on the use and the development of communications and/or engagement documents for individual projects, with the overall aim of improving coordination of community engagement throughout Council.
- Develop intranet to establish and maintain a community engagement tracking tool as an interactive resource, support and data repository site.
- Develop and implement community engagement guidelines to help determine the community engagement needs for each project.
- Community Engagement Program to oversee internal and external surveys throughout Council, and to purchase relevant survey software.

3. Better service for the community

- After undertaking any community consultation, post the results on Council's website.

4. Training/Staff Development

- Create an ongoing training, mentoring and support program for interested staff
- Promote other training opportunities and community engagement networks to Council staff
- Include 'experience in undertaking community engagement processes' as a requirement in job descriptions, where appropriate.
- Add "community engagement examples" in Manager's Operational Plan reporting requirements.

- Highlight community engagement principles in Council's Induction Program.
- Acknowledge and reward staff who undertake effective and innovative Engagement processes through current Council mechanisms such as Working Together and Staff Innovation Awards.
- Record and promote examples of good practice projects including details of engagement methods and 'lessons learnt'

5. Systems Development

- Establish a corporate Community Engagement tracking tool on the intranet for ease for all Council staff to enter or extract community feedback used, subject to this policy. This will include a schedule of proposed Engagement projects and timeframes, with information available both internally and externally.
- Establish a Government and community key stakeholder database for use throughout Council.
- Provide a link to the Queensland Government's "Consult Queensland" website outlining key state government community engagement activities effecting Logan City and engagement training and development support. http://www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au/share_your_knowledge/training/
- Maintain and further develop the 'Have Your Say' website link, including on-line survey and feedback opportunities for public comments.
- Develop an evaluation mechanism to assess the strategy's outcomes and monitor the feedback 'loop' to the community participants.
- Develop and promote linkages that integrate community feedback and engagement outcomes with Council's corporate planning processes. Community engagement outcomes can help inform Council's planning, performance monitoring and resource allocation.

6. Protocol Development

- Establish community engagement protocols (on-line) to provide staff with guidance and suggestions on how to facilitate an equitable, accessible and representative engagement. In particular, develop a summary of effective and appropriate methods for encouraging participation from target groups who may have special needs or interests, such as:
 - Aboriginal people
 - Young people
 - Older people
 - People from a culturally and linguistically diverse background
 - People with a disability.

7. Learn from others

- Become a corporate member of IAP2 (November 2008)
- Participate in regional forums of local governments practicing community engagement.