

George Town Council

Community Consultation Framework

Introduction

Council recognises that our community is not a single entity, it is diverse and multicultural and enriched by a rich historical past.

Our municipality is home to a variety of organisations, individuals, community groups and economic communities and it is important to Council that everyone has the opportunity to be heard.

The Community Consultation Framework establishes principles and practices to ensure community views are reflected in the decisions of Council. The framework aligns with Council's strategic goal to:

“Ensure Council listens to and understands community needs and continues to make responsible decisions on behalf of the community.”

The framework also provides a vehicle to assist Council in meeting its mission to achieve the community's vision of a vibrant, **engaged** and diverse municipality through;

- i. the provision of quality affordable services
- ii. the usage of available assets and resources
- iii. application of sound governance principles and prudent financial management and a focus on sustainability in all that we do.

Our objectives for a Community Engagement Framework

1. Our community's voice is heard, accounted and respected
2. Have a coordinated and consistent approach to community engagement
3. Gain a greater understanding of decisions that affect our community
4. The Council is committed to engagement with stakeholders in the community
5. Provide for an all-inclusive process

Why and when do Council seek consultation?

The purpose of consultation

Consultation is the process by which Council gathers information to make decisions that may impact on the community. Council is committed to meaningful consultation and recognises the important role that it plays in democratic governance and civic life.

Good democratic governance occurs when a government governs for and on behalf of an informed and engaged community. An engaged community feels part of the overall governance and activities of their community. Community members who are informed, connected, participate in services and activities relevant to them, feel they have a role to play.

For effective consultation to occur, communities need to be informed and engaged. This occurs when there is equal access to information, good ongoing information flow, consultation and participation between a Council and its community.

Consultation is a process of informed, two-way communication between Council and the community on a matter prior to a decision being made:

- It recognises that Council has the mandate to be the decision-maker.
- In most cases, consultation impacts on a decision through influence, rather than power.
- Depending on the matter, Council may in some instances choose an empowering model of decision-making and place the decision in the hands of the Community.

When Council will engage in consultation

Council will use consultation, and this framework, to guide the following:

- Development of strategies that guide future decision-making and service delivery. For example, the development of the 10-year Council Plan, or the development of the Mount George Mountain Bike Trail.
- How Council allocates resources to services and projects through its annual budget process.
- New or revised policies and local laws that set expectations or rules that govern the use and enjoyment of public space.
- Changes to service delivery, including discontinuing or altering a service, and identifying new opportunities or areas for improvement.
- Infrastructure projects, including construction, alteration or closure of buildings and facilities. For example the Regent Square Redevelopment.
- Specific decisions that are guided by legislation, such as the Local Government Act and the Planning & Environment Act.
- Any other projects that significantly impact on the environment, character, economy or liveability of, or particular localities in the municipality.

When Council may not engage in consultation

This framework applies only to matters requiring a decision by Council. When a decision has been made, it is more appropriate for the Council to inform/advise on its implementation.

Furthermore, this framework does not apply to routine works or day-to-day activities such as tree maintenance, road and footpath works. When undertaking these activities, Council will inform people living at affected properties it believes are negatively impacted or inconvenienced.

There may also be occasions when Council does not consult on a matter due to circumstances beyond its control, such as statutory requirements, and funding or policy requirements of other levels of government.

Who will Council consult with

Those stakeholders who are expected to be significantly affected, but who do or do not have the resources or capability to participate in the consultation process.

George Town Council aims for effective consultation that incorporates and seeks the views of our diverse community. In some cases it will require additional initiatives and budget to ensure that people from minority or disempowered groups are heard. These include (but not limited to) our indigenous community, people with disabilities, limited reading & writing skills and mobility challenges.

Principles supporting Council's consultation framework

Planned

Every consultation is appropriately planned, including purpose, scope, stakeholders, risk, and level of participation, method of consultation, activities, resources and timeframes. Consultations will be planned and developed on the principle of obtaining community input before Council makes a decision on a matter.

In every communication, there is a clear statement about what the consultation is about, the role of Council and the community in the consultation, and how participants' input will be used.

The method of consultation that is chosen is appropriate for the level of public impact Council may do some development work on a matter or proposal, prior to the commencement of the consultation. This work will generally be described as the scoping work or study. This scoping work will be the factual information that Council puts into the public arena for consultation.

Council may develop a preliminary preference for a particular position. When this occurs, Council will indicate what that preliminary position is. This will assist the community to understand where the Council stands at the start of the consultation.

Inclusive

The consultation must give equal opportunity to, and encourage the involvement of, all people and groups who are affected by or interested in a decision.

The consultation is designed to ensure that views are captured from a representative cross-section of the community, using appropriate methods that will reach a range of demographic (e.g. age, gender, locality and income) and stakeholder groups.

There is a balance of consultation methods and channels, including both one-way and two-way communication, and print, electronic and face-to-face. Two way and face-to-face methods are the best ways to engage the community in a conversation with Council.

The type of consultation or contact that is made is sensitive to each stakeholder group's particular needs.

All participants are treated with respect, courtesy and honesty throughout the consultation process.

Affected groups and interested parties can select their own representative to work with Council.

There is a commitment from Council that it will respect the diverse range of interests and views which may exist around a particular matter and make genuine attempts to resolve conflicts, while recognising that it has the ultimate decision-making role.

Timely

The consultation will take place early enough in the decision-making process to ensure that its outcomes are able to be considered prior to the decisions being made or determining a direction on a matter.

The timeframe for the consultation process will be clearly communicated, including when decision-making is to take place.

The timing of any consultation activities is appropriate to the stakeholder group/s, such as parents/families with childcare commitments or working professionals and commuters.

Council will endeavor to time its consultations appropriately throughout the year to ensure there are no more than 3–4 concurrent consultations where possible

If the progress of a matter that Council is or has consulted on is delayed or extended due to unforeseen circumstances or if the matter is part of the development of a broader issue that may not be completely resolved for some time, the Council will provide appropriate updates to those who have participated in the consultation process.

Informed

Information relating to the consultation is presented in an easily understood format and can be accessed easily by everyone involved before key decisions are made.

Participants are informed enough to be able to contribute in a meaningful way. They are given all the information required to be able to weigh up various factors and considerations that will impact a decision.

All information on matters that Council is consulting upon will be available unless it is of a commercially sensitive or personal nature.

Council recognises that at times the volume and format of documentation it wishes to put on public display may be costly and logistically difficult. In such instances Council will endeavour to facilitate access via individual viewing, loaning of the material and or other

appropriate methods. Additionally, Council will endeavor to make documentation available via its website in an accessible format and printer friendly.

All those who had input into the process will be informed of the final decision (using appropriate communications methods available to Council).

In communicating about the final decision Council will provide a summary of the feedback received and a clear rationale for the decision. For matters of high community interest and public impact, Council may choose to publicly release a detailed summary of feedback received throughout the consultation (resource and privacy-permitting).

Levels of public participation

Council will determine the level of participation for each consultation activity based on the:

- a. Timeframes
- b. Available resources
- c. Expected level of public impact
- d. Level of community interest in the matter

1. Inform: low level of public impact

Provides information to the community with balanced and objective information to assist them in their understanding of a problem, alternatives, opportunities and possible solutions. Most appropriate when the activity is routine in nature, and affects a small number of people in a limited way.

2. Consult: low to medium level of public impact

Obtains feedback from the community on analysis, alternatives and decisions. Usually involves developing a preliminary or preferred position before releasing it for community discussion. More appropriate for projects which affect larger numbers of people but in a limited way. Methods may include community information sessions, surveys and email or written submissions.

3. Involve: medium level of public impact

Works directly with the community to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered throughout a process. This may involve the community in various stages of the project in seeking specific answers to matters as opposed to broad general feedback sessions. Methods may include focus groups, workshops, advisory committees and online consultations.

4. Collaborate: medium to high level of public impact

Partners with the community in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. Community collaboration may be fostered through steering committees, negotiation tables, online consultations, policy roundtables, citizen panels, search conferences and formal and informal partnerships.

5. Empower: high level of public impact

May use similar methods for lower levels of participation, but instead of Council making the final decision, decision-making is placed in the hands of the community.

Resource and timeframe-permitting, for medium to high public impact matters Council will aim to use a two-stage consultation process before making a decision:

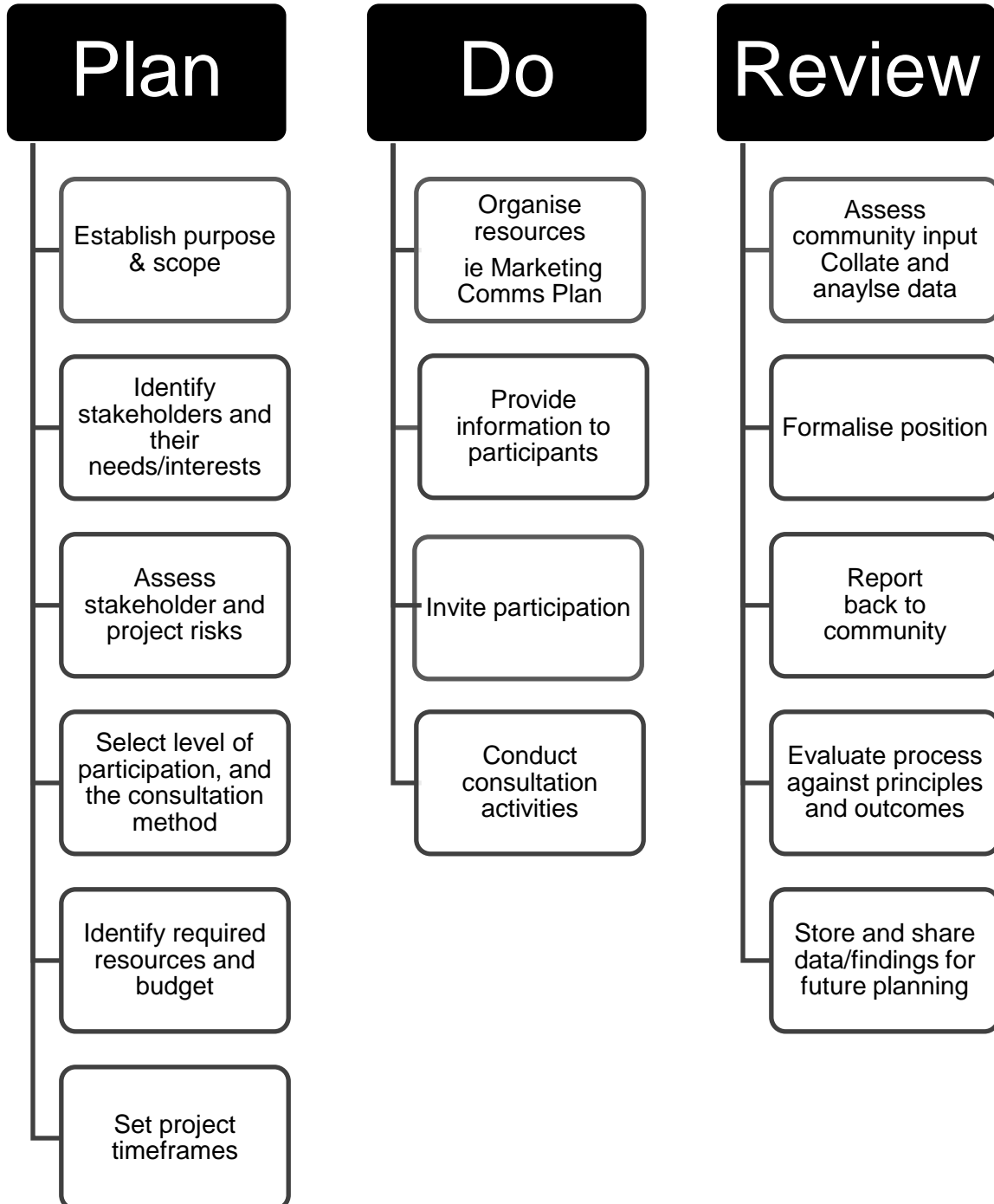
1. Pre-position forming engagement (to seek input before forming a preferred position)
2. Post-position forming engagement (to test the preferred position before making a final decision).

The expected level of impact and public participation required will be determined in consultation with Councillors, the relevant officer and General Manager, and the Marketing & Engagement Business Partner.

Consultation process

The following process are steps based on best practice stakeholder engagement. They provide a guide for Council staff in planning, implementing and reviewing community consultation activities, ensuring a consistent and robust approach to engagement activities.

See Appendix A for detailed checklists under each phase.



Consultation Categories

There are five common subject categories that have been identified. Each would result in varied levels of public consultation and participation.

Category	Matter	Examples
One	Matters that change the current arrangements/uses on a single site	Any significant redevelopment of a community facility
Two	Matters impacting on an area, neighbourhood or township	Traffic management proposals/solutions, streetscape proposals
Three	Service planning matters which have impacts across the municipality	Changes to the garbage collection service
Four	Major plans which have impacts across the municipality	Development of strategies relating to residential/industrial land use, open space planning or economic development (Regent Square Redevelopment)
Five	Major projects or issues which impacts the entire municipality	Development of The George Mount Mountain Bike Trail

Consultation methods

The following matrix should be followed after determining the level of participation required for the matter or project. For an explanation of each method below.

See Appendix A

Other methods: the methods below do not provide a comprehensive list, as there are many ways to inform, consult, involve, collaborate with and empower communities. Council staff are encouraged to explore other methods that support the chosen level of participation.

Statutory requirements: the following matrix should be used to identify additional consultation opportunities to those set out by legislation, particularly projects that will have a medium to high level of public interest and/or impact. For example, Council's annual budget process, changes to local laws, and controversial planning applications.

Open or closed consultation? For medium to high public interest/impact matters, a two-stage (open) consultation process should be made before making a decision: **pre-position forming engagement** (to seek input before forming a preferred position), followed by **post-position forming engagement** (to test the preferred position before making a final decision).

Following planned consultation activities, Council will:

- **Analyse** the feedback received
- **Consider** the feedback in the context of the other data, advice, strategies and/or legislation that is relevant to this matter;
- **Review** the proposal in the context of concerns or suggestions expressed. There is a commitment from the Council that it will respect the diverse range of interests and views which may exist around a particular matter and make genuine attempts to resolve conflicts, while recognising that it has the ultimate decision-making role.
- **Report** to Council for a decision (if required)
- **Communicate** the decision to all stakeholders involved in the consultation and the broader community through the appropriate channels.
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Evaluation

Council will regularly evaluate its consultations to assess their effectiveness against the project goals and the principles and guidelines contained this document.

Records of the successfulness of the framework will be kept as a reference for future consultations, and a register of best practice examples will be shared within the organisation.

Sharing of Data

Council gathers valuable feedback through its consultation process—both specific to the matters under consideration and also on related matters. Council is committed to improving its capacity to capture, collate and analyse this data, and will continue to improve our systems and processes for aggregating and sharing this data across the organisation. This will help to build a database of knowledge about our communities' views, needs and aspirations and how they evolve and develop over time.

Privacy

Local government decision making and consultative processes will affect both public and private interests. In many instances, Council will seek written submissions and input to proposals. These public processes imply a certain amount of public disclosure of information and therefore a degree of privacy loss.

Appendix A:

Consultation checklists

Planning

- Purpose and scope:** what is the goal of the consultation process? What information does Council from to gather from the community to make a decision? Has a budget been allocated?
- Stakeholders:** Identify all internal and external stakeholders who may be affected by or have an interest in the decision. Consider factors such as age, gender, occupation, location and note the differing interests and information needs/habits of each. See Council's stakeholder analysis template **Appendix C**
- Category:** identify the category of the matter, project or policy. **See page 8.**
- Participation:** what level of community participation is appropriate for this particular project? See **page 5.**

This will depend on stakeholder interests and expectations, the complexity of the matter and the timing and available resources.
- Activities/Promotion:** using the matrix on **page 10**, identify the communication and consultation activities.
 - Select activities according to the required category and level of participation identified above
 - Cross-check the chosen activities with stakeholder groups above to ensure they are inclusive of all.
 - Ensure both one-way and two-way communication methods have been chosen.
 - Ensure there is a mix of print, electronic and face-to-face channels.
- Timing:** are you timing information and consultation activities appropriately to allow people to have meaningful input?
 - Determine a time of year for the consultation that balances stakeholder and project requirements. Check Council's consultation calendar to ensure there are no more than 3–4 concurrent consultation activities affecting the same stakeholder group at your proposed time.
 - Make sure your chosen time is early enough in the decision-making process to provide a genuine opportunity for community input.
 - Ensure that the timing of the chosen activities fit well into the overall project timing.
 - Ensure that any communications activities informing people of meetings, workshops or the release of any documents gives people sufficient time to plan their involvement or consider their response.
 - Determine the timeframe for decision-making to occur.
- Key messages:** what are the main points you want to get across to stakeholders about this issue? Develop 3-4 broad, succinct statements that you want people to hear, understand and remember.
- Accessibility:** ensure that the chosen activities above are accessible to all identified stakeholders, regardless of background or circumstance (language, age, access to technology, mobility). If any of the stakeholder groups identified above are difficult to access, consider how you can make your consultation activities more accessible to them.
- Budget and resources:** what financial and other resources are required to undertake the proposed activities? Are they adequate? Is additional cost involved in making certain documentation publicly available and if so, should there be an associated fee on request?

- Risks:** assess any project or stakeholder-related risks, such as completing all activities in the timeframe required, or not receiving adequate information from the community to be able to make an informed decision?

Consider what the risks are to Council, including the level and actions that can be taken to mitigate that risk. An example would be that a decision is made by Council that some members of the Community do not understand why that decision has been. This may erode public confidence so to mitigate this risk the outcomes, decision process and factors regarding the decision need to be communicated.

Complete the consultation planning template - Appendix B using the above for reference complete the template, seek input from the Marketing & Engagement Business Partner before approval from your Manager and/or General Manager.

Do

When developing communications and information resources, ensure that you address:

- Why** is this consultation being undertaken?
- Who** is being consulted?
- What** type of input is Council asking for:
 - views on a proposed preliminary position or draft (closed consultation)?; or
 - broad ideas and input about an issue (open consultation)?
- How** can people be informed and have their say?
 - What information/resources/issues do people need to consider to be able to have meaningful input?
 - How will the consultation improve the final outcome—how will people’s input be used?
 - How will people be informed of the decision?
- When** will the consultation period start and finish, and when is a decision expected to be made?
- Accessibility:** is the piece of communication clear and easy to understand?
 - Content should be presented in Plain English
 - Documents should be readable, particularly for those with vision impairment, and follow Council’s writing and visual communication guidelines.
 - Captions and transcripts need to be provided for video/audio content
- Privacy:** specify how submissions will be treated with respect to Council’s privacy policy, e.g. whether their names and addresses will be included in public documents such as Council reports.

When conducting consultation activities:

- Ensure the timing and location of any consultation activities is suitable to your stakeholder groups:
 - parents/families** may need access to child minding to attend
 - commuters** may only be able to attend out of hours
 - shift workers** may not be able to attend out of hours
 - young people** may only be able to attend out of school hours
 - Internet/computer access:** due to variability in internet and computer access throughout the municipality, all online consultation and communication methods must be supplemented by face-to-face and written methods and all documents must be made available in hard copy in Council service centre.
 - people with a disability:** all venues and information/content provided at consultation sessions need to be accessible to those with a disability. This includes people in

wheelchairs, with sight or hearing impairments, or any other physical or mental disabilities which may impact a person's ability to participate in consultation activities.

- Advise affected groups and interested parties that they can select their own representative to work with Council if they are unable to participate/attend.
- Prepare and provide relevant information to consultation participants such as fact sheets, studies, maps and other documents. At a minimum, a 1–2 page summary should be developed including:
 - o Purpose
 - o Background
 - o Consultation process/activities
 - o Key dates including closing dates for submissions
 - o Contact information for public comments (phone, email and web).
- Provide an opportunity for participants to share their phone, email and postal contact details with Council so that they can be updated in the project and notified of the outcome.
- If collecting private information during consultation activities, indicate how this information will be used and stored, in accordance with Council's privacy policy.

Review

- Regularly review your consultation plan as the project progresses.
- Collate online and offline results, and formal/informal feedback received, into a centralised database that can be accessed across the organisation.
- Identify any biases in the data collected based on the participants. Was a representative sample collected? Consider factors such as age, location, gender. If there is a strong bias towards a particular group, or absence of other voices, consider how this could be counteracted, e.g. through further, targeted consultation with hard-to-reach groups.
- In assessing community feedback, carefully consider the diverse range of interests and views around the issue and make genuine attempts to resolve conflicts and balance competing interests.
- Inform all those who had input of the final decision, using appropriate communications methods available to Council. (This is where collecting phone, email and postal contact details during consultation activities can be useful).
- In communicating the final decision, provide a summary of the feedback received and a clear rationale for the decision.
- For issues of high community interest and public impact, consider releasing a detailed summary of feedback received throughout the consultation (resource and privacy-permitting).
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the consultation after the decision has been made against the principles on page 8. In particular, consider the following:
 - o Were all relevant stakeholders identified or did some new interest groups emerge during the process?
 - o Was a representative sample of community views collected or were some groups/voices absent from the consultation process?
 - o Were the chosen activities effective in capturing a range of views?
 - o Was the timing of the consultation and related activities appropriate?
 - o Were the resources developed to inform people of the issues comprehensive, clear and easy to understand?
 - o Was any feedback on the consultation process provided by participants?

Consider sending a feedback survey to participants covering some or all of these questions, to assist with your evaluation.

Appendix B

Community Engagement Planning Template

Reference the Community Engagement Framework to complete this plan and liaise with the Marketing & Business Engagement Partner for advice.

Project Name

Project Details

Research, previous engagements or facts worth reviewing.

Background Information

Purpose and Scope

Determine what the consultation is about, the role of Council and the Community in the consultation process.

Risk Assessment

Consideration to any risks to Council, what is the level of risk, and possible actions to mitigate.

Potential Risk	Level of Risk	Risk Mitigation

Level of Community Involvement

Consider what level of community participation and consultation activities required for your matter for consultation. Your engagement may incorporate more than one level of involvement. *e.g. Inform, Consult and Involve*

Engagement Objectives

What are the outcomes you are seeking from the engagement? What do you hope to achieve?

Stakeholder analysis

Which stakeholder groups do you need to engage?

Person or Group	Interest / Connection	Benefit of Involvement	Level of Interest	Level of Influence	Level of Impact

Engagement Methods

Consider your community engagement goal/s and detail the activities you have selected will provide the information you require and fit with your available resources. These will be included in your Engagement Plan. Contact the *Marketing & Business Engagement Partner* for advice.

Engagement Timeline

Outline details of your engagement methods in more detail. Include timing, the activity, stakeholder/s, location, required resources and evaluation method.

Time & Date	Activity / Method	Responsible	Stakeholder	Location / Channel	Resources	Evaluation

Promotion

The promotion of an engagement will be determined in consultation with the *Marketing & Business Engagement Partner*. This will include communication channels such as online or print media messaging, and how the engagement will be advertised. Include the communication and promotion activities in the Engagement Plan.

		Promotional Message	Promotional Activity

Key Messages

List the key messages for the project.

FAQs

List any pre-emptive questions that may be asked as part of this project.

Support and Resources Required

Task	Who	When	Supplier	Notes	Progress

Financial resources

Budgeting:

Item	Cost	Balance
Total		

External Facilitators

List details of any external facilitators engaged.

Support from other departments

Department	Support provided

External Support

Organisation	Support provided

Approvals

Prepared by:	
Endorsed by M&EBP:	
Approved by GM:	

Appendix C

Stakeholder Analysis Template

Person or Group	Interest/Connection <i>(What the expectations or concerns are of the stakeholder)</i>	Benefit of Involvement <i>(What benefits that stakeholder can bring to the project)</i>	Level Of Interest <i>(What level of interest they have in the final outcomes)</i>	Level Of Influence <i>(What level of influence the stakeholder has on the final outcomes)</i>	Level Of Impact <i>(The level of impact the project outcome will have on the stakeholder)</i>
eg					