



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

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1. OBJECTIVE

This Policy provides guidance for George Town Council employees, Councillors, and third-party consultants when conducting external engagement on behalf of the Council. It outlines key tasks and stages of the community engagement process and offers recommended approaches to encourage meaningful community participation in decision-making.

The Policy ensures that engagement activities are inclusive, accessible, and respectful of community input. Feedback received from the community is acknowledged, valued, and considered in the decision-making process.

It also establishes the expectation that Councillors and Council Officers maintain a clear understanding of, and commitment to, engaging with the community on decisions that impact their lives.

George Town Council is committed to carefully considering feedback received through community engagement processes and ensuring it informs decision-making wherever appropriate. However, Council may not always make decisions that align with every viewpoint or suggestion provided by the community. This does not mean that feedback has been ignored or dismissed. This approach is consistent with the functions and powers provisions of Councils contained in the Local Government Act 1993.

This Policy does not apply to projects or decisions where consultation is governed by statutory or prescribed requirements, such as those under the *Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993*.

Our objectives are to:

1. Our community's voice is heard, accounted for, and respected.
2. Ensure our Councillors and Council employees have a clear understanding of and a commitment to engage with the community.
3. Have a coordinated and consistent approach to community engagement.
4. Gain a greater understanding of decisions that affect our community.
5. Keeping the community informed.
6. Provide for an all-inclusive process.

2. TYPE OF POLICY

As per Section 8 of Policy GTC-12, this policy is categorised as a Council Policy.

This categorisation is consistent with the definitions as stated in Policy GTC-12 which are as follows:

Council - Policies pertaining to the Governance of the Council and the activities of its elected members, including the establishment of Committees, and the government of the municipality including resident and ratepayer compliance policies and by-laws.

3. SCOPE

This Policy establishes tasks and stages to ensure community views are reflected in the decisions of Council and for George Town Council employees, Councillors and the community to understand what is required and the level of participation in the decision-making process.

The policy does not extend to consultation of planning applications or other planning functions undertaken in accordance with the *Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993*. The *Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993* provides clear statutory directions and timeframes regarding what developments are advertised, how and for how long. In some instances, compliant development will not include any consultation.

The policy does not extend to consultation undertaken by private individuals, the State Government, the Commonwealth or any other party, regarding development proposals or any other private matter.

4. Definitions

Include any definitions relating to the content throughout the policy

5. LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN

This Policy relates to the following components of the Community Strategic Plan 2020-2030:

Future Direction Three: Community Pride.

Everyone in our community is valued and included.

- A diverse communications program of what's happening in the community is available through a range of mediums.

Future Direction Four: Leadership and accountable governance.

A culture of engagement, communication and participation.

- Community views are heard through skilled, trusted and inclusive community engagement processes.
- Young people are included and involved in decision-making.
- A diverse communication program utilises community networks, connectors and influencers.

Positive mindsets across communities.

- Communities are open to new ideas and have the courage to try new things.

Collaborative working relationship with neighbouring Councils and regional organisations.

- George Town is active in regional development and works collaboratively on beneficial regional initiatives.

Fair and open planning and regulatory processes.

- There is community knowledge and understanding of planning and regulatory responsibilities and processes.

6. RELATED LEGISLATION

Legislation

- Local Government Act 1993
- Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993

Related Council Policies and Documents

- GTC-C-02 Information Disclosure Policy
- GTC-O-08 Managing Unreasonable Conduct by Customers Policy
- GTC-17 Diversity Equitable Access Inclusion Policy
- GTC-13 Public Question Time Policy
- GTC-15 Risk Policy

7. RISK CONSIDERATIONS

This policy aligns with the objectives and strategies of the George Town Council and GTC-15 Risk Management Policy.

Sharing of Data: Council gathers valuable feedback through its consultation process both specific to the matters under consideration and also on un-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 and Confidentiality: Council is committed to protecting the privacy of individuals/businesses who participate in community engagement activities. While Council may provide a summary of feedback received, where appropriate and relevant, it may not share copies or specific details of individual submissions (unless permission is granted from individuals).

In some cases, feedback may be presented in an aggregated summary. This means individual responses are grouped and analysed to identify common themes, trends, or areas of concern, without disclosing personal details or identifiable information. Personal information will not be disclosed. Information deemed not relevant to the engagement topic will not be addressed as part of the community engagement process.

This approach recognises the diversity of views within the community and ensures a level of confidentiality that encourages open and honest participation. By maintaining privacy, Council aims to create a safe environment where individuals feel comfortable sharing their perspectives without concern for public exposure or personal repercussions.

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

8. POLICY

8.1 Introduction

Council recognises that our community is not a single entity, it is diverse and multicultural and is 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 Engagement Framework establishes tasks and stages to confirm community views are considered in the decisions of Council.

8.2 What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement is the process of actively involving individuals, groups, organisations, and key stakeholders in decisions that affect their lives and communities. It is a core principle of good governance and plays a vital role in the planning and decision-making processes of Local Government.

Through engagement, George Town Council seeks to build trust, strengthen relationships, ensure transparency and ensure that community voices are heard, respected, and considered. Engagement mechanisms may include website entries, social media posts, surveys, workshops, public meetings, emails, online forums, special committees of Council and other inclusive methods designed to gather input from a broad cross-section of the community.

However, while community engagement is a valuable tool for informing Council decisions, it does not transfer decision-making authority to the community (*with the exception of Council elections and other government requirements*). The final responsibility for decisions remains with the elected Council, in accordance with legislative requirements and governance responsibilities.

George Town Council's Community Engagement Framework is guided by the **International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum**, which outlines varying levels of engagement from informing to empowering, depending on the nature and scope of the decision being made.

While this framework provides a strong foundation, Council recognises that in small communities, engagement is most effective when built on trust, history, and relationships. In particular, creative and cultural projects often benefit from a more collaborative and participatory approach, where engagement is not just about responding to proposals, but about co-creating ideas and solutions.

In addition to traditional methods, Council may collaborate with artists, cultural practitioners, targeted community segments (eg youth) and community groups to incorporate additional tools and techniques such as storytelling, mapping, and public art into engagement activities.

IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

See table below:

Table: 8.2.1

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Public Participation Goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. Collaboration can also occur with specific organisations.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and where appropriate and practical incorporate your advice and recommendation into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

			input influenced the decision.		
Public Role	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Lead
Project Examples	Events Activities Council Services Road Closures Capital works and (programmed works ie road re-sealing) maintenance Educational content	Policy Reviews Strategies Park naming	Annual Budget Strategies	Major Projects Partnerships Committees	Council Elections, Elector Polls
Tools & Technique Examples	Website Social Media Flyers/Posters	Meetings Surveys	Community Meetings	Committees	TEC Voting

8.3 Why we engage:

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

An engaged community feels part of the overall governance and activities of its 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.

The Council seeks to take account of the views, needs, issues and aspirations expressed by the community and to balance these with other influences such as budgetary and legislative constraints to make informed decisions.

To determine if Community Engagement is required, Council will consider the following questions:

1. Will there be a change or impact in the service delivery, accessibility, and convenience to the community?
2. Is there an opportunity for stakeholder groups to influence the project or outcome?
3. What do we want from the stakeholders?
 - a. Listen
 - b. Contribute
 - c. Participate
 - d. Partner
 - e. Lead

8.4 When will it apply?

The Community Engagement Policy applies to any project, development, or service delivery that may impact residents, ratepayers, and stakeholders in ways that affect their lifestyle, amenity, or wellbeing.

The timing and depth of engagement will depend on the nature and complexity of the project. Engagement may occur at various stages of the project, for example:

- Before work/development begins, to gather initial input and understand community needs or concerns.
- During planning/development, to seek feedback on proposals, draft policies, or concept designs.
- Following initial consultation, to refine and test revised plans or strategies based on community input.

In general, engagement periods will be open for 28 days, unless otherwise specified by legislative or regulatory requirements or the General Manager's discretion.

Where necessary Council **will** engage:

- In the development of strategies that guide the future decision-making and service delivery.
- On how Council allocates resources to services and projects through its Annual budget process.
- New or revised policies.
- On projects or issues of broad community interest.
- When an outcome has the potential to have a considerable impact on the community or a stakeholder group.
- When there is a strategic opportunity to involve the community in decisions relating to the nature, scope, design or delivery of a project or initiative.
- When an outcome involves a change in services, delivery or infrastructure provided by Council.

- When Council has a statutory, legislative or regulatory requirement to do so.
- Any other projects that significantly impact on the environment, character, economy or liveability of or particular localities within the municipality.

Council **may not** engage:

- When timeframes and direction have been provided by other levels of government.
- When an immediate response is required, such as in an emergency situation.
- When a decision must be made because of legal or safety requirements.
- When the activity is considered “business as usual”/day-to-day activities such as tree maintenance, road and footpath works. When undertaking these activities, Council will inform people living in the affected areas who it believes will be impacted.
- When stakeholder input would not influence the decision (for example, where input is in direct conflict with Council’s Policies or procedures).
- When it is the opinion of Council or an appointed employee/expert that an issue has had excessive engagement and will result in an adverse effect on Council reputation, processes, or project outcomes.

8.5 What we will engage in

The scope and method of community engagement will vary depending on the nature, complexity, and impact of the issue, activity or project. The level of engagement, ranging from simply informing to actively collaborating, will be determined by the type of input Council seeks and the degree to which community feedback can influence outcomes.

George Town Council may engage with the community and stakeholders on a wide range of matters, including but not limited to:

- Policy development and review
- Strategic planning and priority setting
- Naming of public facilities
- Changes to community amenities or services
- Road closures and traffic management
- Emergency response and recovery planning
- Annual budget planning and financial priorities
- Projects with significant impact on the natural environment or heritage
- Projects that require First Nations involvement
- Creative and cultural projects
- Issues affecting public health, safety, or wellbeing
- Matters likely to generate high levels of community interest, controversy, or conflict

While not every situation will require deep or lengthy engagement, Council recognises that its decisions and actions have broad implications across the community. In some cases, it may be appropriate to simply inform the public in a timely and transparent manner. In others, especially where decisions are complex or long-term, Council will seek meaningful input from stakeholders to guide planning, evaluate service delivery, and build trust.

More sophisticated engagement approaches will be used for complex initiatives such as strategic plans or major infrastructure projects where long-term dialogue, capacity building, and strong stakeholder relationships are essential.

The decision to initiate engagement, and the appropriate level of engagement, will be determined by Council Officers and Directors, or may be directed by legislative or regulatory requirements.

8.6 Council will consult with

George Town Council recognises that the term community encompasses all individuals/businesses who live, work, invest in, or visit the municipality. This includes residents, ratepayers, local businesses, community groups, service providers, educational institutions, and visitors. It also extends to key stakeholders such as non-profit organisations, industry representatives, and other levels of government.

Council is committed to engaging with a diverse range of voices and perspectives. Engagement opportunities will be designed to be inclusive and accessible to all community members, regardless of age, gender, cultural background, education levels, language skills and disability/access needs.

Efforts will be made to reach underrepresented and vulnerable groups to ensure their views are heard and considered. Engagement methods may be tailored to suit different audiences, using a variety of formats and channels to maximise participation and reduce barriers.

Council will also consult with qualified professionals and subject matter experts when making decisions, particularly in areas requiring technical, environmental, legal, or engineering expertise. In some instances, expert advice may take precedence over community sentiment, especially where safety, compliance, or long-term sustainability is concerned. While community input remains a vital part of the engagement process, Council has a responsibility to balance public feedback with evidence-based recommendations to ensure informed, responsible, and legally sound outcomes.

By consulting broadly and inclusively, Council aims to ensure that engagement activities reflect the diversity of the George Town community and contribute to informed, transparent, and equitable decision-making.

8.7 How will we consult

Council commits to engaging in an open and transparent manner, clearly communicating any constraints or limitations that may affect the engagement process as well as clarifying how much the community may influence the decision at hand.

When determining the level of engagement, consideration will be given to a range of factors including the project complexity, level of community interest, political sensitivity, legislative requirements as well as time and budgetary constraints.

Council acknowledges that not all community members access information in the same way. Some community members may not use social media, regularly check the Council website, or be able to attend community information sessions due to personal, geographic, or accessibility reasons. To ensure broad awareness of consultation opportunities, Council will make every effort to use a variety of communication platforms including digital, print, in-person, and direct outreach tailored to the nature of the engagement and the audience involved.

Alongside targeted engagement efforts, Council will also maintain ongoing relationships with community stakeholders through participating in networking opportunities, community groups, advisory committees and community group meetings where possible.

To ensure best practice the Policy is based on the IAP2 (see table 8.2.1) values designs and methods for community engagement planning. The procedure document relating to this Policy provides direction on engagement planning and guidance on when and how staff should engage with the community.

The community has said that they want timely and transparent communication from Council. To ensure the Council meets this need, we will ensure:

- To use clear easy to understand plain English in all communications.
- Easy access to documentation and employees.
- Provide timely information on what is happening and why.
- Provide feedback on how information and suggestions have been used.
- Does not rely on a single method of contact; rather use a variety of methods and techniques to let people know what is happening.
- Provide a range of opportunities for the community to share their ideas and provide feedback on Council's projects and strategies.

However, it is important to recognise that it may not be possible to notify every individual in every circumstance. Council's aim is to maximise reach and accessibility while balancing practical limitations. Community members are encouraged to stay informed with the Council website, serving as the primary source of official updates and information.

The community is welcome to engage with Council at any time online at the George Town Council website, Council offices, subscribe to the newsletter or at any engagement activities. Community members are also encouraged to engage directly with Councillors or attend a Council Meeting (please refer to our Public Question Time Policy GTC-13).

8.8 Post-Engagement

Once the community engagement period has concluded and all feedback has been received, Council will undertake the following steps:

- Collate and analyse all community input.
- Report findings to the relevant project officer or team.
- Review and consider the feedback in the context of the project.
- Make adjustments, where appropriate, based on the feedback received.

- Present the feedback at a Council workshop and meeting in order for a decision to be made.
- Communicate outcomes and decisions back to the Council employees, community and stakeholders.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the engagement process to inform future initiatives.

Community contributions are reviewed, assessed, and weighed alongside other factors such as legislative obligations, strategic priorities, financial constraints, expert advice and broader community needs. Council values the input of its community and uses it to guide, shape, and improve outcomes, even when final decisions may differ from public opinion.

8.9 Our Process

PLAN	ACTION	REPORT/REVIEW
Establish Purpose and Scope	Communication Checklist	Collate and Analyse Data
Identify Stakeholders	Identify Resources	Report Back
Select the level of Engagement	Conduct Engagement	Evaluate Process
Select Tools and Techniques		
Establish Timeline		

9. IMPLEMENTATION & REVIEW OF POLICY

Implementation of this Policy rests with Council. This Policy will be reviewed in 2029 or in accordance with legislative requirements.

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Shane Power
GENERAL MANAGER

DATED 28 / 05 / 26