

4.1 Community Engagement Policy

Objective

Actively engaging with local communities is a requirement for Councils under the *Local Government Act 1995* to ensure greater community participation in the decisions and affairs of local governments. Further sound community engagement policy objectives assist the Shire Council Member, Executive and Staff to facilitate effective communication between the community and the council. Therefore, this Policy's objectives are to:

- ensure communication and community engagement is proactively planned around each major project and issue that arises;
- improve communication and brand consistency;
- increase the timeliness and effectiveness of communication and engagement internally and externally;
- align communication and community engagement activity with the use of stakeholder analysis tools; and
- ensure consultation and communication planning to meet stakeholder needs and expectations.

The policy seeks to increase levels of employee communications, community engagement practices, and public confidence in the Shire's functionality as an LGA. Further, the policy seeks to improve the Shire's ability to ensure greater community participation in the decisions and affairs of local governments, leading to improved decision-making processes with the provision and management of local resources and project implementation.

Policy Statement

The Shire of East Pilbara (SoEP) is dedicated to timely, transparent, and consistent communications, giving all parties an opportunity to be informed, learn about, engage with, and participate in Council decisions regarding matters that concern or impact our community into the future.

Sound governance of the Shire's community engagement systems and engagement methods will ensure timely, meaningful, and appropriate communication and engagement opportunities to have a 'Your Say' on the future of East Pilbara. This Policy represents a stated commitment to ensuring engagement opportunities are provided to East Pilbara stakeholders to participate, at the appropriate level of participation, in the development and, at times, review of SoEP projects, planning and services. The Policy ensures both the Shire and stakeholder's comments and concerns are acknowledged and considered by both parties, and clearly illuminates where stakeholder impacts on decisions are situated. The Policy also stipulates a commitment by the SoEP to make available feedback on the results of the engagement inputs and their impact on decisions made by Council.

The Shire, in implementing this Community Engagement Policy and its guiding principles, will be guided by relevant best practice principles and industry standards in community engagement including an alignment to the core values of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2).

Guiding Principles

The SoEP's approach to community engagement is founded in the integrity and in the priority of its

relationship with the community. The Shire’s community engagement practices will be based on the following principles, where engagement is:

Place-based	Considering the unique characteristics, circumstances and needs of the different towns and communities that make up the SoEP.
Culturally appropriate	Ensuring that all cultures are respected, safe and understood, with sensitivity towards past experiences, cultural norms, and practices, as well as a willingness to inquire and learn.
Fair & Accessible	Commitments to opportunities and techniques are used to encourage input and addresses barriers to participation and recognise that ‘one size does not fit all’. A variety of communication and engagement strategies will be used to increase participation potential and provide participants flexibility in how they choose to participate.
Transparent	Community engagement activities are open and clear. Council will carefully consider and accurately represent the community’s role and scope for influence in the decision-making process and reflect how community input has influenced decisions or outcomes. Following consultation events, participants will have access to community participation reports, which the SOEP will post online.
Collaborative	Working in partnership and collaboration across the business units, public, private and community sectors, to assist in delivering better community engagement outcomes and to share skills and knowledge to facilitate ongoing learning and improvement.
Well-Planned	The planning of community engagement activities is proactive, tailored and coordinated to ensure timely and effective outcomes are achieved.

Definitions

Council means the elected representatives, Council Members that form the governing body of the Shire of East Pilbara Council.

SoEP means the Shire of East Pilbara which is the organisation that is responsible for the administration of Council affairs and operations and the implementation of Council policies, procedures and strategies.

Community refers to “the public” including ratepayers, residents and visitors. All people who live, work, study, recreate, conduct business or use the services, facilities and public places in the SoEP.

IAP2 means International Association for Public Participation.

Public participation is a term used by the International Association for Public Participation’s (IAP2) meaning the involvement of those affected (interested in or impacted by) by a decision in the decision-making process.

Community Engagement means the range of activities that the SoEP utilises to encourage the participation of stakeholders in decision-making processes. These processes include the following five levels of community participation:

- Inform
- Consult
- Involve
- Collaborate, and
- Empower.

Stakeholder is an individual, group, organisation, business and/or government entity that has an interest or concern, or who may be affected by the project or service in question within the SoEP geographical area (or surrounding locations).

A stakeholder can either be internal within the organisation, i.e. a particular Business Unit or Directorate, or external, i.e. an individual, group, organisation, business or government entity operating outside of the organisation, but still has an interest or an association with the SoEP and/or the SoEP's geographical area.

Statutory means a legal requirement the SoEP must adhere to.

Digital Engagement Platform is the central 'Your Say' digital engagement platform for all engagement projects offering a range of tools and resources to keep stakeholders informed and different methods of engagement.

Sorry Business is an important time of mourning that involves responsibilities and obligations to attend funerals and participate in other cultural events, activities or ceremonies with the community. This is part of a community and cultural tradition that is highly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Lore time is a specific period of time in which the Traditional Owners across the East Pilbara region engage in cultural events, activities or ceremonies.

Policy Statement

IAP2 Spectrum and Community Engagement

This Policy has been developed in consultation with internal business and is supportive of both the Local Government Act and International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) '*Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement*'.

The Shire of East Pilbara is dedicated to timely, transparent, and consistent communication, giving all relevant parties the chance to learn about, engage with, and participate in Council decisions regarding matters that concern or impact them.

In addition to outlining the Shire's goals to provide timely, meaningful, and appropriate communication and engagement opportunities, this policy addresses the essential components of both engagement and communication. It also makes it apparent when and how stakeholders have participated to the decision-making process.


The Shire uses the iap2 Spectrum (as shown below) to assist and guide in the communication and engagement process. The model identifies five levels where communication and interactive opportunities are selected, depending on project purpose, audience and the expected influence of each.

The Shire commits to:

- open and transparent communication. Anything that isn't commercially sensitive should be communicated in a complete, clear, and timely manner. Important events should also be communicated in a carefully thought-out manner.
- breaking both good and negative news fast, even when it's unclear how the choice or message will affect everything.
- acknowledging that everyone impacted by a choice has a right to participate in its making
- identifying and facilitating the participation of individuals who may be impacted; letting participants select and define how they participate or receive information.
- Giving participants the information, they require to engage meaningfully; explaining to them how their participation influenced the decision; and fostering a continuing relationship between the community and the council.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

(Source: International Association of Public Participation)

INCREASING IMPACT IN THE DECISION 					
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public Participation Goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solution.	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	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
SoEP's Promise	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	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 work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

		will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	input influenced the decision.		
Role of Community	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Lead

Scope of the policy application

This Policy applies to all Council Members, executive, employees, consultants or contractors who deliver services or undertake projects that impact the community. The SoEP will engage with a variety of community members and stakeholders using a number of different methods appropriate to the level of engagement and in accordance with the SoEP's Community Engagement Framework.

Timeframes for Engagement

There are, where practicable, limited times throughout the calendar year where engagement is able to take place. However, there are other times when it may not be suitable, such as

- between the last Council Meeting of the calendar year and the first Council Meeting of the New Year,
- Aboriginal lore time,
- peak public holidays, and
- school holidays.

Similarly, in-person engagement has considerations to take into account when planning engagements, which include:-

- school holidays,
- access restrictions to remote communities due to the wet season, and
- cultural considerations including Sorry Business and Lore time (November through to February).

Projects that set a direction or define a position for the SoEP, have a high level of media interest, operational and/or financial implications are recommend to complete engagement for a minimum of 28 days.

Statutory Engagement

Statutory requirements are considered to set the minimum standard for engagement. Shire of East Pilbara engagement should also be in accordance with this Policy.

Measurements of success

This Policy will be measured on the following basis.

- A coordinated schedule of community engagement activities is planned and delivered
- Information on how the community input has influenced decisions and outcomes on Shire projects has been communicated.

- Multi-modal ways to engage the community are applied and ensure equity of access in opportunities to be engaged.
- Employees have a clear understanding of roles.
- The Shire's community engagement is relevant and enables the community to have a say on community issues.

Roles and Responsibilities

Where Council's decision making is involved, the administration is responsible for:

- identifying the communication and consultation opportunities
- recommending the appropriate level of communication and engagement
- determining and implementing the communication and engagement methodologies
- reporting to Council on the outcomes of the communication and engagement process
- supporting the Shire meets compliance with statutory requirements.

Elected Members are to ensure Community Engagement principles are encompassed in the decision-making process of Council.

Engagement does not replace Council decision-making responsibility, it is designed to ensure Council has access to a range of information about stakeholder and community needs, opinions and options, prior to making decisions. The SOEP will publish reports on the results of community engagement activities, showcasing all views presented. Other information which may be taken into account in the decision making process includes technical advice, legal advice, third party expert advice and other stakeholder advice as necessary.

When a decision is mandatory, Council shall comply with statutory requirements, such as for strategic planning documents or Development Applications.

Evaluation and Review Provisions

The Community Engagement Policy will be reviewed every two (2) years.

Policy breaches

The Policy reflects the values of the organisation, the fundamental relationship between council and the community, and council's commitment to evidence-based decision-making. All instances of non-compliance with this Policy may be dealt with as a breach of the Employee Code of Conduct and managed in accordance with any relevant policies and procedures dealing with disciplinary action.

Related legislation, policies, strategies and documents

All Council Members, employees and contractors are required to fulfil the ethical and behavioural obligations as defined in legislation. Council may authorise non-compliance to this policy where there is appropriate and relevant contextual justification. Deviations to Policy objectives will be recorded and documented as part of governance protocols in accordance with Council policy and relevant legislation.

Relevant policies, strategies and documents are:

- *Local Government Act 1995*
- Shire of East Pilbara Policy Manual
- Shire of East Pilbara Strategic Community Plan 2022-2032
- Shire of East Pilbara Corporate Business Plan 2022-2026
- Shire of East Pilbara Customer Service Charter 2024
- Shire of East Pilbara Reconciliation Plan 2022-2023
- Shire of East Pilbara Access and Inclusion Plan 2020 -2025

Authorisation Details

References:	<i>Provide any Statutory, Regulatory or Policy related documents Local Government Act 1995</i>		
Authorised by:	Council		
Date:	26 April 2024	Item No.	12.1.1
Review/Amendment Date		Item No.	
Next Review	Every two years		
Responsible Directorate	Executive Services		
Responsible Officer	Manger Strategy and Partnerships		
File No.			