Community Engagement Framework and Model 2013-17

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Date of Last Review: 24 June 2017
Date of Next Review: 24 June 2017
Responsible Officer: Manager, Social Development

1.   INTRODUCTION

a.   Quality Community Plan and City Plan

In June 2013, soon after the election of a new Council, Wyndham City adopted its Community Engagement Framework and Community Engagement Model.

This Community Engagement Framework and Model 2013-2017 is consistent with the community's long-term vision to promote 'a sense of community' in Wyndham as outlined in some of the Guiding Principles in its Quality Community Plan, including:

- That the foundations for building community strength of neighbourhoods will be available for all of Wyndham
- That each resident has a right to equitable access to services and resources, but also has a responsibility to contribute to the community
- That diversity enriches the sense of community, rather than detracting from it, and
- That the community will achieve many of its goals through members' contribution of time and skills.

Both are also consistent with and support the following Theme and Objectives in Council's 2013-2017 City Plan, including:

1.2 Community engagement and building

- To actively engage with the community to capture diverse perspectives and opportunities to improve the quality of Council decisions on policies, services and programs.
- To strengthen the capacity of citizens and community groups to participate in community life by providing opportunities for individuals to acquire knowledge, confidence, skills and experience.

b.   Governing Wyndham Framework

This Framework and Model and all implementation actions also form a key component of Council's Governing Wyndham Framework.

The development of this Community Engagement Framework and Model for Wyndham reinforces the importance Council places on community engagement and consultation in making informed decisions that impact on the communities of Wyndham. Both will be reviewed as required.

As well as implementing policies, practices and activities consistent with this Framework and Model more broadly, Wyndham City Council will fulfil its statutory and legal obligations to the community. This will ensure that we manage the municipality in a financially sustainable manner to meet the current needs of our community and those of future generations.

2. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – WHAT IS IT?

a. Introduction

Community engagement is a two way process, by which:

- The aspirations, concerns, needs and values of citizens and communities are incorporated at all levels and in all sectors in policy development, planning, decision making, service delivery and assessment, and
- Governments and other businesses and civil society organisations involve citizens, clients, and other stakeholders in these processes. [1]

In implementing this Framework and Model, Council aims to:

- Increase opportunities for community members, organisations and service providers to participate in planning and policy development, service delivery improvements, and advocacy, in accordance with community priorities
- Implement community consultation and engagement to inform Council's decision making.
- Engage with communities and individuals who are currently 'disengaged' through deliberative engagement strategies, and
- Develop a sustainable model of community engagement that builds local capacity and leadership.

Community Engagement is fundamentally about involving the community, through a continuum of engagement practices, to participate in decision making processes. Council engages with its community on a wide range of projects, such as:

- Service planning & delivery;
- Formal community consultation processes;
- Council Meetings; and
- Land use and planning applications.

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[1] United Nations. (2005). "The Brisbane Declaration on Community Engagement." from
http://www.iap2.org.au/sitebuilder/resources/knowledge/asset/files/37/unbrisbanedeclarationcommunityengagement.pdf.

b.   Overview of Community Engagement Approaches

A deliberative approach, often called deliberative or participative democracy, is characterised by representation and inclusion, deliberation and influence (Carson & Hartz-Karp 2005[2]).

It is often described as an approach to actively and meaningfully engage the 'disinterested', that is people who would not normally participate in engagement or consultation events, thereby strengthening and broadening engagement.

An excellent example of a local government taking a deliberative approach to citizen engagement is the City of Geraldton-Greenough in Western Australia. The Geraldton 2029 and beyond[3] project utilises innovative technologies in civic deliberation and social media to engage with citizens and, through focussed recruitment strategies and random sampling, a truly representative range of local citizens have been participating in a series of deliberations on the future of Geraldton. Through these deliberations they have opportunities to engage with scientific data and differing viewpoints, and work with the decision making process to ensure their deliberations are influential.

Some of the key features of this project involved the setting up of broad alliances, including with the local media, and using the following range of deliberative processes to get local citizens involved in the project, world café, deliberative poll/survey, online deliberation, social media, scenario planning and citizen choice work and 21st century town hall meeting.[4]

c.   Best Value

Best Value Victoria is a policy that aims to enhance councils' capacities to deliver better services to the community. This is to be achieved by councils applying the six Best Value Principles to all their services and the way in which they govern. The application of the principles of quality and cost standards, accessibility, responsiveness, continuous improvement, community consultation and reporting, will ensure that Council services meet the needs of the community.

In order to meet the needs of the Wyndham community, and to give effect to the community consultation principles within Best Value mentioned above, Council needs to determine how and when to consult.

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[2]Carson, L & Hartz-Karp, J 2005, 'Adapting and Combining Deliberative Designs: Jures, Polls, and Forums', in J Gastil & P Levine (eds), The Deliberative Democracy Handbook: Strategies for Effective Engagement in the Twenty-First Century, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, pp. 120-38.

[3] www.vitalizing-democracy.org

[4] http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Methods/21st+Century+Town+Meeting.

The Best Value legislation states that Councils:

- Must take into account community expectations and values when establishing quality and cost standards, and
- Develop a program of regular consultation with its community in relation to the services it provides.

Over time, it is proposed that the Community Engagement Framework include a section on Council's approach to consultation in relation to meeting Best Value standards, and therefore will outline a standard approach to guide the organisation in undertaking consultation activities.

3. WHY DOES WYNDHAM NEED A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK?

a. Consistency, knowledge, opportunity and participation

All areas of Council consult with the community in relation to day-to-day issues, and to plan for the longer term. Through working within a common Framework, it is anticipated that:

- There will be a consistent approach across Council departments as to how Council engages with the community
- There will be increased coordination across Council departments, to prevent duplication in consultation processes and to ensure that information from the community is shared across the organisation
- There will be increased knowledge about services, facilities, activities and events in the community, and within the organisation
- Community members, organisations and service providers will have increased opportunities to be actively involved in planning and policy development, service delivery improvements and advocacy, in line with community priorities
- Council will make more informed decisions
- Communities and individuals who are currently 'disengaged' or do not participate in public decision-making processes will feel more welcome to participate, through processes that actively seek to engage all members of the community, and
- Local capacity and leadership will increase.

b. Building community capacity

Wyndham's Community Engagement Framework and Community Engagement Model are focused on increasing community capacity to engage in consultation processes and community decision-making.

The Model recognises that there is variation in skills and capacity across the community. Some people feel comfortable in expressing their views and engaging with Council; others are unfamiliar

with local governance arrangements and lack confidence in participating in consultations and decision-making.

Council is committed to working with communities and individuals to increase participation, and to empower individuals and communities to make meaningful and constructive contributions to their local communities and Council decision-making.

In building community capacity, it is important to view community engagement as multi-dimensional and including:

- Council-generated engagement - examples include legislated consultation, e.g., planning permits, advocacy issues, deliberative engagement in relation to particular concerns
- Expert advice - outside experts provide information and/or advice to communities in relation to particular issues
- Community-driven ideas - communities themselves identify and generate consultation with council and others, and
- Intra-community engagement - engagement generated between diverse communities in the municipality.

Community engagement therefore generates:

- The development of community leadership – developing the skills of individuals
- The development and strengthening of partnerships between Council and community, and between communities
- The development of social capital – building connections within communities, and
- The development of community tolerance – bridging connections between different communities.

4.   COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODEL

a.   Introduction

Wyndham's Community Engagement Model depicted on the next page is a 'four directional approach' that develops critical people and networks – builds connections within communities (social capital), and bridges capital between communities.

This model utilizes the IAP2[5] Spectrum of Public participation as a central concept. The IAP2 model commits Council to be clear about the purpose of the engagement, the process of decision making and what the community can expect from participating.

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[5] [5] The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has developed the Public Participation Spectrum to demonstrate the possible types of engagement with stakeholders and communities. The spectrum includes a **promise to the public** which is a commitment to be clear about the purpose of the engagement and what the community can expect. http://www.iap2.org.au/about
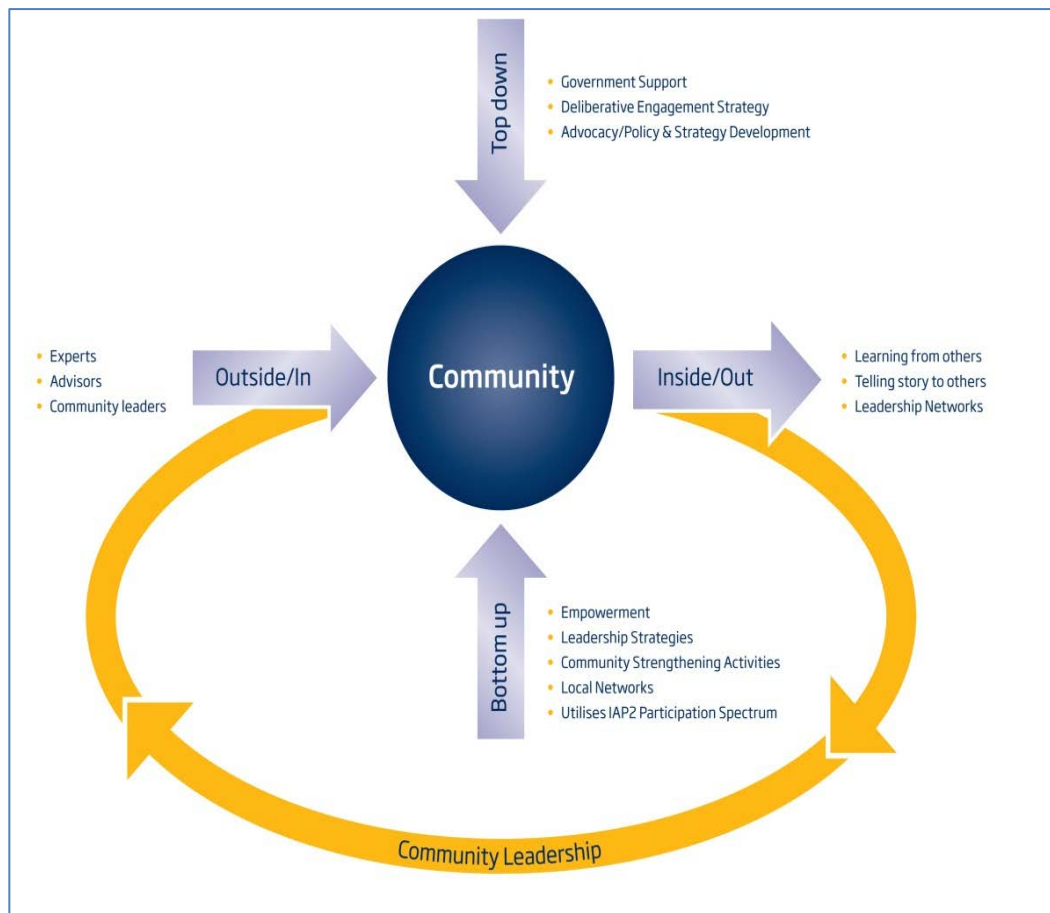
The above Model of participation recognises that, at different times, communities need different levels of information, support and participation, and this is best delivered through diverse approaches to working with the community. This means, at times, that 'outside experts' may be invited to talk to communities and at other times local leaders are identified as having a crucial role.

It is also considered necessary for Council to develop a comprehensive approach to identifying and training local community leaders to build ongoing capacity in communities. Sometimes Council leads, facilitates and brokers solutions, and sometimes community drives and initiates.

The Model is holistic, allowing for a combination of strategies and techniques. For example, deliberative polling, household surveys, Blogs, and listening posts might all be utilised to explore broad community sentiment about a key issue. This combination of methods and multiple data sources (triangulation) assists to increase the validity of results. That is, themes may emerge from a variety of sources, giving increased credibility and confidence in the findings.

The Model is also underpinned by a commitment to a process of deliberative engagement. Deliberative strategies ensure representative community engagement. 'Representativeness'

enables Council to engage the 'disinterested citizens' (Hartz-karp[6]). So through processes like 'stratified random sampling', a representative group of citizens comes together to deliberate on an issue.

b.   Principles of Community Engagement
The following principles will underpin community engagement in Wyndham.

Purposeful engagement
- All engagement and consultation processes will have a purpose. This will be clear to the community.

Availability and affordability
- Consultation will be tailored to the specific needs and requirements of local communities of interests. This includes conducting consultations in each of the neighbourhoods / local areas defined by Council regularly, and
- No one will be financially disadvantaged by participating in consultation with Council.

Accessibility and equity
- Wherever possible, all communication will be in simple, easy-to-understand English and community languages. If technical terms are required to be used, simple explanations will be provided
- Communication will take account of people with disabilities, using available technology to assist, and
- All communications, whether face-to-face, on the telephone or in writing, will be carried out with respect for human rights.

Transparency and independence
- Council is committed to implementing processes which are inclusive, representative and transparent to allow participants to freely contribute their opinions
- Participants will be made aware of the extent of, and limitations to, their input, and
- Outcomes of the process will be made publicly available except for those instances when confidentiality has been requested.

Valuing and respecting diversity
- Council is committed to ensuring that all people in the community are able to participate in consultation processes, being respectful of gender, age, culture, and religious differences, and

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[6] Hartz-Karp, J 2007, 'Climate Change The whole community approach', *New Matilda*.

- Where face-to-face consultations occur, safe and inviting places will be chosen, taking particular care when targeting 'hard-to-reach' groups (see below) in the community.

Timely engagement

- Council is committed to engaging communities early in decision-making processes, to facilitate genuine influence. Importantly, Council is committed to allowing stakeholders to have sufficient time to consider all issues and submit their views.

Build community capacity

- Council is committed to building the skills and knowledge of the community to move to the ultimate goal of empowering local communities to address and solve their own issues.

Valuing community contributions

- The contribution of community members and community groups is valued and respected, and
- Engagement is two-way – Council respects and is keen to learn from the community. To achieve this, Council is committed to creating engagement processes where all parties can learn, take on new ideas and have the opportunity to really listen to each other.

Partnering

- Council is committed to developing genuine collaboration with the community and other stakeholders. To facilitate this, Council will build relationships over time through ongoing dialogue and engagement, and by providing opportunities for community members to develop their leadership skills and understanding of community governance.

Feedback and continuous improvement

- Council undertakes to keep the community informed of the outcomes of the engagement processes.
- Council's decision-making processes will be evaluated after final decisions have been made, and will seek participants' views as to how the processes could be improved in the future.

c.   'Hard to reach groups'

Ten (10) population groups have been identified that experience potential disadvantage and social exclusion and, as a result, require particular attention to ensure their participation in engagement processes. Community engagement templates and approaches will be developed for each of these population groups to support meaningful engagement of what can commonly be called 'hard to reach groups.' These groups include:

- Young People
- Children
- Women
- Older People

- Indigenous People
- People with a Disability
- Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex communities (GLBTI)
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse(CALD) and newly emerging communities
- Sole Parent Families, and
- Unemployed People.

d.   Neighbourhood or Local Area Community Engagement Plans

Council will develop Draft Neighbourhood or Local Area Engagement Plans. These plans would articulate how Council will work in each Neighbourhood / Local Area. The Plan documents the proposed engagement commitment and approach required for that Neighbourhood / Local Area over the coming 12 months.

As this Model is not prescriptive, it enables Neighbourhoods / Local Areas to have an Engagement Plan developed that best reflects the needs of that community. This will be informed by the development of comprehensive neighbourhood profiles, community and service mapping and ongoing evaluation.

Each Neighbourhood / Local Area will be resourced by a Community Development / Engagement Officer.

Whilst the community will continue to be engaged in 'one off' consultations the underlying purpose is to build the ongoing capacity of an interested, informed and empowered community. It is proposed that each Neighbourhood / Local Area Plan could include some of the following key actions:

- Two local Neighbourhood Forums per annum, with participation of Councillors and Senior Officers
- A Local Leadership Training Program
- Neighbourhood Open Day
- Two deliberative engagement events or activities per annum, such as a survey or community deliberation / direct polling / community forums / panels
- An Interactive Website and social networking tools
- Local engagement activities, such as additional listening posts, community meetings to address specific or emerging local issues, and
- Where appropriate, support for development of local networks/resident/ neighbourhood/actions groups.