# Community Engagement Strategy 2022

**Contents**

[About this document 3](#_Toc117866420)

[Principles 5](#_Toc117866421)

[About Byron Shire 5](#_Toc117866422)

[What is community engagement? 6](#_Toc117866423)

[Community and stakeholders 6](#_Toc117866424)

[Stakeholder analysis 8](#_Toc117866425)

[Community engagement, values and principles 8](#_Toc117866426)

[Opportunities and risks 9](#_Toc117866427)

[International Association of Public Participation 9](#_Toc117866428)

[How we engage 10](#_Toc117866429)

[When we engage 13](#_Toc117866430)

[Roles 17](#_Toc117866431)

[Decision making 17](#_Toc117866432)

[Evaluating success 18](#_Toc117866433)

[Conclusion 19](#_Toc117866434)

E2023/12431

### Acknowledgment of Country

Byron Shire Council acknowledges Traditional Owners of lands in Byron Bay, the Arakwal of the Bundjalung and pays its respects to Elders past and present. Council extends that respect to the Midjungbal people to the north and the Widjabul Wia-bal people to the west and to all Aboriginal people.

### Byron Shire Council Vision

Byron Shire is a meeting place where people can come together to connect, share, grow, inspire, and create positive change.

### Mayor’s Foreword

There really is nowhere else in Australia (or the world for that matter) quite like the Byron Shire. I say that with great affection because the Byron Shire is, hands down, one of the most naturally beautiful and biodiverse parts of Australia with its stunning coastline and beach breaks, pristine rivers, and lush hinterland villages.

With a population of around 36,100, a ratepayer base of 16,000 and visitor numbers topping more than 2.4 million per year (before COVID), Byron Shire is also renowned for its strong community spirit, opinions, and activism. Our vision is to be a meeting place where people can come together to connect, share, grow, inspire, and create positive change – and we need input, ideas, and a continuing dialogue with our community to make this a reality.

The Community Engagement Strategy is our guide to creating and maintaining effective relationships with a community that wants to be part of the conversation and decision-making process. The strategy honours the community’s strong interest in Council by embedding a best-practice approach to consultation using the globally recognised International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) model; strengthened by our recent experiences with deliberative democracy.

The strategy acknowledges the importance of finding ways to reach and engage with the widest possible cross-section of the community. Our goal is to create an inclusive and accessible culture that welcomes and considers all voices and opinions – not just the loudest ones. We look forward to working with our community to achieve this.

### About this document

This Community Engagement Strategy is a part of Byron Shire’s Council’s Integrated Planning and Reporting framework, a suite of documents that guide the planning, reporting and engagement activities of the organisation to meet the immediate and future needs of our community.

Diagram

Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework for Byron Shire Council showing the Community Engagement Strategy feeds into the Community Strategic Plan (CSP).

Supporting the CSP are the Delivery Program, Operational Plan and Annual Report.

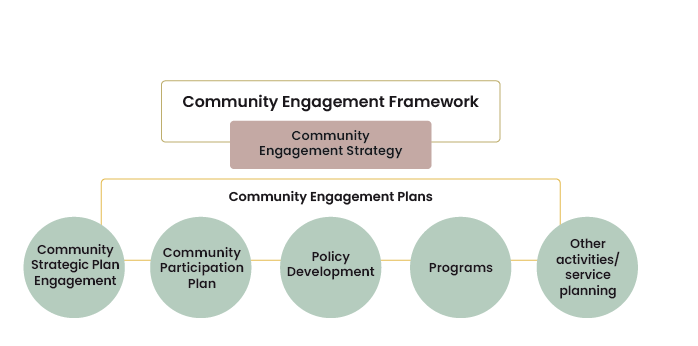
This strategy outlines our commitment to our residents and stakeholders with respect to community engagement. It explains how we conduct our community engagement activities and how people can be involved in decisions that are important to them.

The strategy outlines the legislative requirements, guiding principles, approaches and processes we use to ensure our engagement is clear, accountable, meaningful, inclusive, and accessible. It describes the role communities play in our decisions about projects, policies, strategies, programs, and services.

It is informed by the methodologies and tools developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) and based on the social justice principles of:

* Equity
* Access
* Participation
* Rights.

Sitting alongside this strategy is our Community Participation Plan (CPP), a document that details how and when Council will engage with the community specifically on planning matters including strategic planning, development assessment (including development applications) and other relevant planning matters.



### Principles

In keeping with the Council’s Community Participation Plan, which explains how we engage with our community on planning matters in the Byron Shire, there are principles and values that are common to both documents including:

* People’s right to be informed about matters that affect them
* Accessible and appropriate information in plain language that is easy to understand and accessible in a format to suit different needs
* Open and transparent consultation and engagement
* Ongoing and meaningful consultation and engagement
* Early and genuine engagement and consultation
* Inclusive and representative consultation and engagement

### About Byron Shire

* Area: 566.7km
* Population: 36,116
* Ratepayers: 16, 073
* Residents over 18: 64%
* Residents who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander: 1.9%
* Residents with disability: 4.1%
* Local jobs: 15,704
* Local businesses: 5,350
* Visitor numbers (2019 pre-COVID): 2.41 million

Note: information is from the 2021 Census and ID profile.

### What is community engagement?

Community engagement is a broad term that means different things to different people. It can be as simple as informing people about roadworks, seeking feedback that can set the direction for a Council project or process, or handing over decision-making to the community.

We are fortunate to serve a community that is interested in Council’s activities and keen to be involved in decision-making processes. Time and again residents and stakeholders have demonstrated their passion, enthusiasm, and ability to come up with imaginative and innovative ideas and solutions to a wide range of issues.

We acknowledge the value of community knowledge and that people in our Shire want community-led governance and to be involved in decision-making.

Byron Shire Council sees community engagement as the opportunities we give our residents and stakeholders to contribute to, and shape, the decisions and actions that may affect or interest them.

Community engagement is about building strong relationships with people; relationships that are built on trust, transparency, honesty, and respect.

It is about working with the people who live here, work here, visit here, and do business here; to plan for a future that reflects the colourful, vibrant and passionate Shire we are.

### Community and stakeholders

Our community includes people who live, work, access services, participate or contribute to life in the Byron Shire. This includes:

* Communities of place such as residents of Bangalow or Mullumbimby.
* Communities of interest such as arts, sport, or environmental.
* Communities of affiliation such as schools, sports clubs, business.
* Communities of culture such as the Bundjalung of Byron Bay Arakwal

Stakeholders are individuals, groups of individuals, organisations or political entities directly affected or involved with the outcome of a decision or the impact of a strategy or project.

Our stakeholders include:

* Traditional Owners of lands in the Shire, the Arakwal, Midjungbal and Widjabul Wia-bal peoples and the organisations that represent indigenous stakeholders, including:
  + Bundjalung of Byron Bay Aboriginal Corporation (Arakwal)
  + Widjabul Wia-bal representatives
  + Tweed Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council
  + Jali Local Aboriginal Land Council
  + Ngulingah Local Aboriginal Land Council
* Residents.
* Businesses owners and their staff.
* Chambers of Commerce representing:
  + Byron Bay
  + Bangalow
  + Mullumbimby
  + Brunswick Heads
  + North Ocean Shores.
* Residents’ groups including:
  + Bangalow Progress Association
  + Mullumbimby Residents Association
  + South Golden Beach Community Association
  + Brunswick Heads Progress Association
  + Byron Bay Community Association
  + CABS (Community Alliance for Byron Shire)
  + Suffolk Park Progress Association
  + New Brighton Village Association
  + Ewingsdale Progress Association
  + Skinners Shoot Residents Association
  + Belongil Residents Association
  + Brunswick Heads Foreshore Protection Group
  + Main Arm Residents Association
  + Federal Masterplan Group
  + Ocean Shores Community Association
* Rough sleepers and homelessness services including:
  + End Street Sleeping
  + Fletcher Street Cottage
* Mullumbimby and District Neighbourhood Centre
* Byron Community Centre
* Young people
  + Byron Youth Service
  + Local primary and high schools
* Sporting clubs and associations
* Northern Rivers Joint Organisation and neighbouring councils including Tweed, Lismore, Richmond Valley, Kyogle and Ballina and Rous County Council.
* Australian and NSW Government agencies and departments
* Member for Ballina
* Member for Richmond
* Local and national media

### Stakeholder analysis

Council does a stakeholder analysis early in planning for an engagement. This allows us to map out and establish the appropriate level of communication with different stakeholders relative to their influence and interest in the projects.

This helps ensure we are reaching the right people, consider sensitivities and challenges and carefully select meaningful methods of engaging.

We recognise that some sections of our community can be harder to reach. Council has targeted lines of communication with diverse groups including:

* Rough sleepers – Council employs two Public Space Liaison Officers whose job it is to check the welfare and wellbeing of rough sleepers in the Byron Shire and to work with them to link to services.
* Access Consultative Working Group – we work with people with lived experience of disability to better understand how Council can improve access to information, engagement, and community spaces.
* Aboriginal Liaison Officer – Our Aboriginal Liaison Officer has strong ties with our Indigenous community, ensuring Council consults with cultural knowledge holders and cultural practices and protocols are recognised and considered in Council projects and processes.
* End Rough Sleeping Collaboration – Council is working with the End Rough Sleeping Collaboration to end rough sleeping by 2030.
* Youth Council – We run a regular program with local high schools where staff and students work together over five to six weeks with the aim being to teach students about local government and for students to talk about issues and projects of importance to them.

### Community engagement, values and principles

The social justice principles of equity, access, participation, and rights underpin community engagement in the Byron Shire.

Engagement with our community is a part of our day-to-day operations, from road works, drainage maintenance and waste services, to planning and community facilities to the development of medium and long-term programs, strategies, and projects.

We use a wide range of engagement techniques to provide our community with information. These include:

* Website
* Direct communication with residents and stakeholders
* Social media
* Online engagement via [Your Say Byron Shire](https://www.byron.nsw.gov.au/Your-Say-Byron-Shire)
* Media releases
* Newspaper and radio advertising.

Our communication and engagement activities stretch from the simple and immediate to the complex and long-term and they are equally important.

We also know the importance of ‘closing the loop’. This means keeping people who have taken the time to engage with us, informed about the status of projects along with the outcomes, decisions, and next steps.

### Opportunities and risks

Genuine and meaningful communication and engagement means better outcomes for stakeholders, residents, ratepayers, Councillors, and staff. The benefits include:

* Empowering people to become involved in and influence decisions that affect them.
* Strengthening relationships between the community and Council because of transparency in decision-making.
* By building a better understanding of the community’s wants, needs and concerns we can deliver programs, services, and projects to suit.
* Building a mutual respect for the views of the community and Council’s need to make decisions, respond to, present, and assess the future needs of residents and stakeholders.
* Better outcomes for everyone because Council values and prioritises working with a proactive community.

We recognise that community engagement does not replace appropriate decision-making by elected representatives, and sometimes community aspirations or projects are not able to be realised because of other factors such as overarching legislation, budget, or safety.

The reality is that some decisions and actions of Council will not be supported by people but a strong, transparent, and honest relationship with our community enables us to provide the context and rationale behind those decisions.

Similarly, a robust relationship with our community means we, as an organisation, must be prepared to accept that sometimes we get it wrong and must do better.

### International Association of Public Participation

Our approach to community engagement is based on international best practice including the spectrum of engagement developed by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2).

The spectrum defines the public’s role in any community engagement program we do. The five levels of participation reflect our promise to our residents and stakeholders. They are:

* Inform – this normally means a decision has been made or an action is needed so people are provided with information.
* Consult – people can provide feedback on issues, options, ideas, and decisions.
* Involve – people’s concerns and feedback are reflected in decision-making.
* Collaborate – the community and Council partner in decision-making towards a common goal.
* Empower – the community and stakeholders have final decision-making power.

### How we engage

Byron Shire Council provides a wide range of opportunities for stakeholders and the community to engage and give feedback to inform and improve our projects and processes. Using the IAP2 principles of engagement, the following table demonstrates how we engage and consult with our community.

Council staff have strong, personal, and robust relationships with many community groups. It should be noted that engagement and consultation for many projects go beyond the level of participation prescribed by IAP2.

| Participation | Channel | In Practice |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Inform | Website and social media | Information is provided via our social media channels (Facebook and Instagram) and the Council’s website.  Council’s website, including Your Say Byron Shire, complies with national accessibility standards. |
| Media Releases | Regular distribution of media releases to all media outlets informing of projects, information. |
| Letters, advertisements, signs | * Advise of a project, issue, or matter that may be of interest * Invite the community to participate in engagement * Provide information on how people can find out more information * Advise how to make a comment or be involved   Outline the timeframe for consultation. |
| E News | Council’s E newsletter with information about projects and work is distributed every two to three weeks. |
| Consult and Involve | Online engagement Your Say Byron Shire | Council’s online engagement section, Your Say Byron Shire, allows the community to find out and provide information, opinion, and commentary about the wide range of Council projects and activities. |
| Community stakeholder groups | Regular meetings with community groups and other stakeholders provide an opportunity for valuable two-way conversations and direct feedback about a range of Council projects and activities. |
| Youth Panel and school engagement | Council has a regular program designed to seek feedback and information from school students about matters of interest to them.  Council also has relationships with high school and primary schools in the Shire. |
| Workshops, drop-in sessions | Workshops, drop-in sessions and forums with community and stakeholders provide opportunities to work through issues or to gather feedback on projects. |
| Public exhibitions | Council’s public exhibition process allows the community and stakeholders to provide feedback and input on a wide range of plans, policies, and projects. |
| Targeted surveys and intercept surveys | Staff and consultants use this method to gather information from a wide cross-section of the community. |
| Stalls and parklets | This provides an opportunity for staff to engage directly with community members to provide information, answer questions or gather information about projects and issues. |
| Community Roundtable | The Community Roundtable consists of representatives from community groups who meet with Council’s Executive team and staff four times a year to discuss broad issues across the Shire. |
| Collaborate and empower | Advisory Committees | These committees are made up of community members, stakeholders, and Councillors. There are 14 Advisory Committees:   * Arts and Creative Industries * Arakwal Memorandum of Understanding * Audit, Risk, and Improvement * Biodiversity * Climate Change and Resource Recovery * Coast and ICOLL * Floodplain Management * Heritage * Housing and Affordability * Infrastructure * Local Traffic * Moving Byron * Business and Industry * Water and Sewer. |
| Community and stakeholder reference groups, committees, and Boards of management | Groups of community members and stakeholders that meet with staff and/or Councillors to discuss projects, policies, hall management and relevant plans:   * Byron Bay Town Centre Masterplan Guidance Group * Place Planning Collective * Community working groups * Federal Masterplan Group * Bangalow A&I Hall section 355 Board of Management * Bangalow Parks (Bangalow Showground) section 355 Management Committee * Brunswick Heads section 355 Management Committee * Durrumbul Community Centre section 355 Management Committee * Marvell Hall section 355 Management Committee * South Golden Beach section 355 Management Committee * Suffolk Park Community Hall. |
|  | Deliberative processes and citizen juries | Council uses deliberative processes and citizen juries to help resolve complex problems. Recent examples include:   * Sustainable tourism * Infrastructure prioritisation * How to improve decision-making. |

### When we engage

Community engagement methods will vary depending on who is being consulted, the level of public participation and the timeframes and resources required. A mix of engagement methods is required to cater for different stakeholder needs, preferences and the level of participation Council is seeking to achieve.

Following is a guide to when we engage for a core range of our projects and legal requirements. Because of the breadth of projects and issues in the Byron Shire, some are not listed.

Note: most of the Council engagement falls in the ‘Inform’, ‘Consult’ and ‘Involve’ spheres of the IAP2 spectrum.

| When | Level | How we may engage | Why | What for | Exhibition |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Council’s long-term plans including:  Community Strategic Plan  Delivery Program  Community Engagement Strategy | Involve | Website information  Social media  Media releases  E news  Advertising  Your Say Byron Shire  Workshops  Drop-in sessions  Online meeting. | Gauge community feedback on Council’s long-term plans.  In addition to statutory requirements ensure stakeholders are informed and are given the opportunity to provide feedback. | Acknowledge community feedback so it can be considered by Council in its decision-making process. | Minimum 28 days |
| Council plans and strategies | Consult | Website information  Social media  Media release  E news  Advertising  Your Say Byron Shire  Workshops  Drop-in session  Letters to impacted residents and businesses  Pop up stalls  Online workshop. | Gauge community feedback on Council plans and strategies.  In addition to statutory requirements ensure stakeholders are informed and are given the opportunity to provide feedback. | Acknowledge community feedback so it can be considered by Council in its decision-making process. | Minimum 28 days |
| Annual Operational Plan and budget | Involve | Website information  Social media  Media release  E news  Advertising  Your Say Byron Shire  Workshops  Drop-in sessions  Letters to impacted residents and businesses  Pop up stalls  Online workshop. | Gauge community feedback on Council plans and strategies.  In addition to statutory requirements ensure stakeholders are informed and are given the opportunity to provide feedback. | Acknowledge community feedback so it can be considered by Council in its decision-making process. | Minimum 28 days |
| Council’s key policies | Consult | Website information  Social media  Media release  E news  Advertising  Your Say Byron Shire  Pop up stalls | Gauge community feedback on Council plans and strategies.  In addition to statutory requirements ensure stakeholders are informed and are given the opportunity to provide feedback. | Acknowledge community feedback so it can be considered by Council in its decision-making process. | Minimum 28 days |
| Maintenance, capital works, general initiatives, and proposals | Inform | Letters  Door knocking  Signage  Website information  Social media  Media release  E news  Advertising. | To alert the community and provide information about upcoming work. | To provide information to the community and stakeholders to let them know of work and factor in potential disruption or impacts. | Minimum five to seven days in advance of assigned work |
| General initiatives and proposals | Involve | Website information  Social media  Media release  E news  Advertising  Your Say Byron Shire  Workshops  Drop-in session  Letters to impacted residents and businesses  Pop up stalls  Online workshop. | Gauge community feedback on general initiatives and proposals not identified in this table. | Acknowledge community feedback and ensure it is considered in the final reports or plans. | Minimum 21 days |

### Roles

#### Councillors

A Councillor’s role in community engagement is to participate as an elected member, listen to the views of the community, and consider these views when making decisions at Council.

Community engagement provides valuable opportunities for Councillors to hear and understand the voice of the community and ensure that this voice is accurately represented when Council meets and makes decisions that impact the future of the community.

#### Council staff

A Council staff member’s role in community engagement is to organise and facilitate the discussion, record, provide feedback, evaluate the engagement, and consider the community’s views when making recommendations to Council.

### Decision making

#### Feedback

When specific community engagement activities are undertaken, feedback is collated, and information included to inform the direction of projects, plans and strategies.

Depending on the project, the [Your Say Byron Shire](https://www.byron.nsw.gov.au/Your-Say-Byron-Shire) platform provides updates of the consultation and the next steps, if relevant.

Formal reports to Council reference how we engaged with the community.

#### How we use community feedback including petitions and forms

When Council actively seeks community input and feedback this information is collated and reviewed with staff considering things such as key themes, suggestions, and ideas. Where relevant and possible this is reflected in the final documents, strategies, and proposals.

Depending on the project and issue, Council often receives petitions and form letters as part of the feedback and submission process. Petitions and form letters are each treated as one submission.

### Evaluating success

Community engagement is not a one size fits all concept. It is nuanced and is influenced by many factors, some of which are out of Council’s control. What has worked well for one project might not work for another.

Success is difficult to measure. For some projects it might be receiving a considerable number of submissions which highlight community concerns.

Other projects might receive a small amount of feedback which does not mean the issue is any less important, but it might be that people are happy with the direction and outcomes of the project.

We factor in evaluation into every engagement plan. Depending on the project’s overall engagement objectives, some may only require a tracking of activities such as number of media release or social media posts. Others may require a mix of methods using qualitative (for example strengthening relationships) and quantitative (for example number of survey responses) methods.

Broadly, Council undertakes a Community Satisfaction survey every two years to monitor community sentiment across the Shire in relation to council services including communication and engagement.

Staff from the Media and Communications team meet regularly with Councillors on the Communications Panel to discuss and evaluate the success, or otherwise, of projects. Monthly reports on the activities of the Media and Communications team are also provided to the General Manager and the Executive team.

Council invests in ongoing training for staff in the IAP2 framework as well as other professional development opportunities to learn about best practice and new and emerging engagement techniques.

The most important thing is for the community to have confidence that engagement and consultation is at the core of our business; that people know that opportunities to feed into process and projects are, and will always be, available.

It is about being consistent, educating people on where to find information and how to contribute.

### Conclusion

Recognising that communication is a two-way process, our commitment to our community is to do our best to give every opportunity to people to provide feedback and information to Council on a wide range of projects, plans and issues.

Meaningful communication and genuine engagement mean better outcomes for communities, residents, ratepayers, stakeholders, Councillors, and staff.