



Community Participation Policy

1. PURPOSE STATEMENT

The Community Participation Policy will:

- Define a clear participation procedure that involves relevant people in order to determine the impact of the decisions, projects and operations on the Port Macquarie-Hastings community.
- Assist Council in identifying the impact of its decisions, projects and operations on the Community.
- Assist Council to work openly and transparently with the community.
- Provide a mechanism of evaluation and improvement for community participation.

2. INTRODUCTION

The concept of Community Participation broadly captures public processes in which the community and other interested parties are involved in contributing to Council's proposals or policy changes. Participation has the potential to go beyond merely making information available or gathering opinions and attitudes. True participation entails a more active exchange of information and viewpoints between Council and the community.

Port Macquarie Hastings Council acknowledges that community participation is an important strategy in delivering more effective services and undertaking responsive planning and development. Effective participation underpins the Council's Values, Mission and Vision.

The accepted standard participation model is the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum (developed by the International Association for Public Participation) that describes five (5) levels of community engagement or participation (Appendix A). These are:

- Inform
- Consult
- Involve
- Collaborate
- Empower

This model describes the level of participation as the level of public impact of a proposed decision, project or operation increases. It also identifies the type of mechanisms that local governments may use to ensure that an effective participation strategy is prepared and implemented.

Council has adapted the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum to define a series of core values and principles for decisions, projects and operations undertaken by all Divisions of Council. These values and principles are the basis of the procedure attached to this policy.



3. BACKGROUND

The Community Participation Framework

The Community Participation Policy is part of a Participation Framework. The purpose of the Participation Framework is to promote effective participation in Council's decision-making internally and with the community. The Participation Framework includes the following elements:

Community Participation Policy stating Council's commitment and principles for effective community participation: ↩

Community Participation Procedures to provide Council staff with guidelines for effective community participation

Community Participation Toolkit to provide specific information and advice on 'how to' conduct inclusive, participatory processes and link to Council policies and delegations of authority for compliance

Legislative and Policy Background

The Local Government Act, 1993 states, in part:

"A Council has the following Charter:

- To provide directly or on behalf of other levels of Government, after due participation, adequate, equitable and appropriate services and facilities for the community and to ensure that those services and facilities are managed efficiently and effectively;

- To facilitate the involvement of Councillors, members of the public, users of facilities and services and Council staff in the development, improvement and co-ordination of Local Government. "

The Participation Framework is consistent with Council's vision and mission:

Consultation & Communication: We will consult and communicate with our community and actively listen to and respond to their input

Openness & Accountability: We will be transparent, accessible and fair

Community Advocacy: We will respect the interests of the community and be an advocate for the area in dealing with governments and industry

The Local Government Act, the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act and other relevant legislation prescribe statutory participation requirements for specific Council activities such as Development Assessment and Management Plans. The Participation Framework does not replace these existing statutory requirements. However, these statutory timeframes are considered the minimum that is required for those specific activities that may be enhanced by using the framework.

Most of Council's decisions, projects and operations fall outside prescribed requirements however have impacts on the community. Therefore the framework captures those activities and ensures that the community is involved in all decisions that affect them.



4. POLICY STATEMENT

Port Macquarie-Hastings Council undertakes to encourage and facilitate clearly defined community participation in Council's decision-making processes, with the aim of involving people appropriately and working openly and transparently with our community. The aim is consistent with Council's corporate values of best value service, advocacy, customer service, accountability, participation and communication and sustainability.

Council supports community participation as a means for Council to make better decisions by giving due consideration to the impact on, interest and concerns of all stakeholders.

Council is committed to making community participation integral to its normal policy making practices and operations.

Council will seek community input on issues that impact on and / or interest the community as individuals, groups or organisations, at the earliest possible stage.

PMHC acknowledges that community participation is an important strategy in delivering more effective services and undertaking responsive planning and development.

5. PARTICIPATORY VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

(Adapted from IAP2 Core Values)

In preparing or implementing any community participation plan, Port Macquarie-Hastings Council will apply the following values and principles (adapted from the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum):

Participatory Values

Participation involves gathering information, preparing alternatives, including different values, different views and alternative solutions, in order that the decision made by Council is informed and well considered.

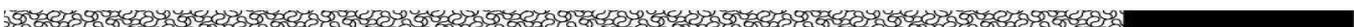
The public should be consulted and engaged in decisions about actions that impact on their lives.

Community participation includes a commitment that the community's contribution will be considered in the decision making process.

Community participation recognises and communicates the needs and interests of all participants.

Community participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.

Community participation provides participants with information they need to participate in a meaningful way and communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.



Principles

PMHC will actively seek the feedback the community can give on the quality and effectiveness of services, proposed developments, community issues and participation processes.

PMHC acknowledges the valuable role the community can play in working with the Council to set priorities, so that they accord with community needs.

PMHC approaches community participation from an impartial perspective, free from bias toward any stakeholder involved in the processes.

Participation processes will be designed to enable individuals and groups with special needs and interests to actively participate.

Participation processes will commence in the concept development stage on all issues deemed to be of level 1 and 2 impact.

A public participation plan will be prepared prior to the commencement of each participatory process.

The extent, purpose and process for each participation activity will be clearly documented in the Participation Plan.

Participation processes will include the definition of and gathering information about the issue, an assessment of the likely impact, identification of stakeholders, the establishment of decision criteria and the development of alternatives.

Sufficient timeframes and resources will be allocated to participation processes.

Timely and meaningful feedback about the results of the participation process will be provided to those who participated.

Participation processes will be evaluated by seeking feedback from the stakeholders involved.

Staff and other personnel involved in implementing participation processes will be appropriately trained to undertake their assigned tasks.

The rationale for any decisions made will be clearly stated.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Port Macquarie-Hastings Council acknowledges Warringah Council and International Association for Public Participation for the information supplied in the Policy, Procedures and Toolkit

Adopted: ORD 28/05/07





Appendix A

Table 2 Spectrum (Developed by the International Association for Public Participation and adapted for use by Port Macquarie-Hastings Council)

Increasing Level of Public Impact		Definition	Promise to the Public	Examples of Methods
	Empower	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public	We will implement what you decide	Citizen juries Ballots Delegated decisions
	Collaborate	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	Advisory Committees Consensus-building Participatory decision making
	Involve	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	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 input influenced the decision	Workshops Public meetings
	Consult	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	Public comment Focus groups Surveys
	Inform	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions	We will keep you informed	Fact sheets Web sites Open Houses

