Policy G15 – Community Engagement

1. Policy Intention

To ensure that Shire of Murray (Shire) community engagement is meaningful, consistent across the entire organisation and undertaken in accordance with industry best practice.

This Policy outlines minimum standards and requirements to ensure that:

(a) Community members and other stakeholders are influential and involved in decision-making that affects their lives and/or business operations;

(b) Community engagement is inclusive; and

(c) Community members and other stakeholders feel their input has been considered and appropriately reflected in the decisions made and actions taken.

The Shire is committed to establishing a co-working relationship whereby the community, other stakeholders and the Shire collaborate to build resilient communities and places. The Shire is committed to achieving transparency and accountability in our engagement endeavours in order to improve community trust especially in the perception that the Shire - its Council Members and staff, always act in the best interest of the community.

2. Policy Scope

The policy applies to Shire Council Members, staff and all consultants and contractors acting on the Shire's behalf.

3. Policy Definitions

Community engagement	Any undertaking by the Shire, its contractors and consultants, to work across organisations, stakeholders and communities to shape decisions or actions in relation to a problem, opportunity or outcome. (Adapted definition of the International Association for Public Participation).
Community	An individual or business, group, association, committee representative or otherwise, residing, working or operating in the Shire of Murray local government district.
Stakeholder	An individual, business, group, association, committee, not-for-profit organisation, government entity or otherwise, with an interest, concern or association with, or that may be affected by a decision, action, project or service within the Shire of Murray local government district or wider Peel region. Community is a sub-set of "Stakeholder".

4. Policy Statement

This Policy is separated into the following categories:

(a) Introduction;

(b) When the Shire of Murray Will Engage;

(c) Who the Shire of Murray Will Engage and Level of Influence; and

(d) Roles of Council Members, Staff and Stakeholders.

4.1 Introduction

The Shire is committed to ensuring:

- community engagement is a strategic consideration that guides Shire decision-making;
- community engagement is undertaken in accordance with the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) standards and framework;
- community engagement is built into work practices and remains an integral part of operations;
- staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge to undertake engagement in line with best practice and work to ensure continual improvement;
- consultants and contractors undertaking community engagement on the Shire's behalf are adequately qualified and experienced; and
- appropriate funds and capacity are availed for community engagement and that a Community Engagement Plan is prepared for each engagement undertaking.

The Shire, its consultants or contractors, will ensure:

- community engagement is a cornerstone of all Shire undertakings and commences as early in the life of the undertaking as practicable;
- all stakeholders with an interest, association or concern in the topic of engagement are fairly and equally informed about and provided with an opportunity to influence the matters that affect/are of importance to them;
- the purpose and aim of the engagement are well communicated;
- the Shire's role and that of other participants in the engagement process is explained;
- the limitations or parameters within which the decision is being made and the level of influence that the stakeholder has in the decision-making process, are communicated;
- stakeholders are provided with sufficient information to enable them to provide informed input;
- communication materials are easy to understand, written in plain English i.e. using simpler and more direct language;
- due consideration is given to commercially sensitive or personal information, and that the provision of information complies with privacy legislation and record keeping requirements;
- community engagement is inclusive, accessible and it is easy for stakeholders to provide comment;
- sufficient time is allowed for stakeholder responses;
- all comments received are duly considered by decision-makers and appropriately reflected in decisions made or actions taken;

- all respondents are informed of the outcome of the engagement and how their input affected the decisions made or actions taken;
- decision-makers are receptive and responsive to alternative or opposing views and ideas;
- all reasonable attempts are made to resolve conflicts and reach acceptable solutions; and
- sufficient time is allowed to debate and investigate unanticipated and consequential issues.

All community engagement will be communicated on the Shire website, in addition to other communication channels appropriate to the requirements of the undertaking.

4.2 When the Shire of Murray Will Engage

The Shire will engage with stakeholders when new plans, strategies, projects and/or services are initiated or existing plans, strategies, projects and/or services are revised, where appropriate and especially where the decision being made or action being taken impacts stakeholders.

The Shire will also engage when required under legislative requirements, in particular the *Local Government Act 1995* (the Act) as it pertains to participation, consultation and engagement.

This commitment affects relationship building, community development, planning and building obligations, capacity building, community action, project management, behaviour change, research and furthering the achievements of partnerships.

There are instances where community engagement may not occur. These include but are not limited to:

- a final decision having already been made by Council or another agency – however every effort will be made to engage prior to decision-making;
- Council not having the jurisdiction to influence a decision being made by another agency/organisation/party etc.;
- insufficient time due to legislative or legal constraints;
- Ministerial exemptions; and
- health, safety and wellbeing concerns in which the Shire may need to respond quickly i.e. emergency situations.

The Shire will endeavor to avoid conducting any community engagement after the last Ordinary Council Meeting of the year (December) until at least mid-January the following year, recognising that in some instances this may be unavoidable such as where required by legislation. In these circumstances and where appropriate, the Shire will endeavor to extend the response period.

4.3 Who the Shire of Murray Will Engage and Level of Influence

This will be determined through the development of a Project Plan prepared for each engagement undertaking. This will also depend on the nature, sensitivity and complexity of the engagement topic as well as community impact or interest.

4.4 Roles of Council Members, Staff and Stakeholders

Council Members:

- have the responsibility to encourage active community member participation in community engagement activities;
- listen to, understand and consider stakeholder input, allowing the input to influence the decisions made or actions taken; and
- be advocates of the community based on sound engagement outcomes.

Chief Executive Officer*:*

- drive Shire officers to embrace best practice community engagement as a core element of Shire culture; and
- ensure Council adequately resources the commitment to best practice community engagement.

Executive Leadership Team:

- lead directorates to adopt best practice community engagement by ensuring:
  - the Shire's commitment to meaningful community engagement remains at the forefront of all officers' frame of reference;
  - Officers adopt and adhere to the IAP2 Core Values and Code of Ethics; and
  - Officers adopt and maintain a positive attitude toward meaningful community engagement.
- be supportive and encourage sufficient allocation of resources to community engagement processes.

Shire Officers:

- adopt and adhere to the IAP2 Core Values and Code of Ethics;
- must appropriately allocate funds and capacity to undertake effective community engagement including the development of Community Engagement Plans for each undertaking;
- apply the IAP2 Quality Assurance Standard to all engagement processes;
- ensure that engagement processes result in outcomes influencing decision or action;
- empower (see IAP2 spectrum) stakeholders wherever possible in engagement processes, so as not to disempower community energy or activation;

- provide feedback to participants; and
- commit to continually improve the Shire's community engagement efforts.

Stakeholders:

- ensure contact details are kept up to date with the Shire;
- participate actively, openly and positively in engagement processes; and
- collaborate with the Shire to ensure continual improvement of engagement practices.

Policy Detail		
Responsible Directorate	Office of the CEO	
Responsible Department	Communications and Marketing	
Responsible Officer	Manager Communications	
Next Policy Review / Schedule	2027 (3-yearly)	
Council Adoption	**Date / Resolution**	25 June 2020 (OCM20/111)
Amendment Record	**Date / Resolution**	23 June 2022 (OCM22/070)
		19 December 2024 (OCM24/159)