Tablelands Regional Council

Communication and Engagement Strategy 2020–25

Tablelands Regional Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the Tablelands region and recognise their continuing connection to country. We pay respect to Elders past, present and future.

Contents

1.   Executive summary

This strategy defines our aspirations and serves as the guiding document for internal and external communication and engagement processes and activities. It highlights key tools to ensure clear and consistent messages, the best use of resources and the timely and effective distribution of key information. This strategy establishes expectations for how we will communicate and engage with internal and external stakeholders, in a manner appropriate to our diverse range of audiences. It shows how our many forms of communication link together to achieve our communication and community engagement outcomes.

2.   Context/strategic framework

We have outlined our clear target of being an enterprising and innovative Council in our Corporate Plan 2017–21. The plan has four key priorities — strong economies, vibrant communities, smart centres and towards Council 2050.

The Corporate Plan reflects a whole-of-organisation emphasis on communication and engagement, which underpins and supports a range of strategic goals and priorities. The Corporate Plan also identifies the need to:
- develop digital connectivity and engagement (smart centres)
- adopt and implement smart participatory civic engagement (towards Council 2050).

Communication and community engagement have a role in the implementation of the key priorities and are necessary for the activation and implementation of strategic goals.

This strategy replaces the Corporate Communication Strategy 2015–19 and informs and provides the framework for several documents including:

- Social Media Policy
- Media Policy
- Community Engagement Policy
- Community Engagement Procedure
- Corporate Style Guide
- Use of Images Policy (to be developed)

Findings from the Community Satisfaction Report 2019 also guide what and how we communicate and engage with the community.

These documents provide further details and identify specific activities, tools and tactics for achieving strategic objectives.

3.   Vision

In reflection of the Corporate Plan, this strategy provides the following vision for our communication and engagement:
- We are committed to developing relevant, consistent and compelling messages that successfully reach key target audiences and engage with, empower and educate our community.
- We are an innovative, creative, enterprising, dynamic, customer-focused, responsive and professional Council that entertains and captures the community's interest.
- We value communication and engagement as tools of understanding and commit to the sharing of information and key decisions with stakeholders.
- We will provide avenues for our community and stakeholders to have a meaningful say in Council decisions that affect or interest them.
- We want our community and workforce to be our greatest advocates.

4.   Introduction

In the context of this strategy, communication is the flow of information to the community (i.e. messages out) and engagement is the means of supporting the flow of information from the community (i.e. messages in).

Communication and engagement are central elements in the delivery of our services. Best-practice communication and engagement are key to improving and maintaining customer service and ensuring we are meeting the needs and expectations of our community. They play an essential role in strengthening the community's trust in Council, especially in times of crisis and promote authenticity, transparency and openness.

Good communication and engagement within our workplace are also a key business function. They ensure all employees share a purpose, are well informed, have access to correct information and can represent Council in a professional and consistent manner.

Communications

To communicate effectively with our community, we need to efficiently span the communication spectrum. While much of our community has embraced new communication technologies, other parts are ingrained with our traditional communication techniques.

Through communicating ongoing key messages in a positive way, we will build stronger links, trust and improve perceptions with the community.

Strategic communication is essential to ensuring the community has a consistent user experience across all platforms; that Council's brand, vision and mission are being recognised; and corporate direction and strategic outcomes are met.

Communication empowers us to:

- promote a strong corporate culture and image
- amplify our values and behaviours
- project a coherent and consistent corporate identity
- manage our reputation
- inform and educate the community about our role and responsibilities, activities and services
- promote a genuine sense of corporate citizenship and optimism about the future
- develop and maintain an appropriate and professional relationship with media and the community.

Using input from practitioners, educators and employers across eight countries, The Global Capabilities Framework for Public Relations and Communication Management identified what good public relations and communication are capable of, and how they can fulfil their potential. The framework takes a high-level view of what we can deliver:

Communication Capabilities
1. To align communication strategies with organisational purpose and values
2. To identify and address communication problems proactively
3. To conduct formative and evaluative research to underpin communication strategies and tactics
4. To communicate effectively across a full range of platforms and technologies

Organisational Capabilities
1. To facilitate relationships and build trust with internal and external stakeholders and communities
2. To build and enhance organisational reputation
3. To provide contextual intelligence

Professional Capabilities (those expected of any professional)
1. To provide valued counsel and be a trusted advisor
2. To offer organisational leadership
3. To work within an ethical framework on behalf of the organisation, in line with professional and societal expectations
4. To develop self and others, including continuing professional learning

As a Council, we are faced with the challenges of meeting ever-increasing community expectations within a finite budget. Rapidly evolving technology has changed, and continues to change, the way we communicate and engage with the community. While new technologies bring opportunities that allow instant and easy interactive communication, the technologies come with risks. Using innovative communication approaches and technologies to better serve our customers, community and stakeholders forms a solid foundation of effective engagement.

Community Engagement

Community engagement refers to information sharing, consultation, collaboration and active participation of the community. It involves any process that includes the community in problem solving or decision making and uses their input to inform a decision. Community engagement does not necessarily mean achieving a consensus, but the community's involvement in the decision-making process provides more informed decisions, fosters relationships, improves dialogue and deliberations, enhances the community's ownership of decisions and maximises positive impacts of the decision.

We have an active program of community engagement ranging from formal consultation processes to informal community feedback. Our engagement activities are based on the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum. This is supported by a set of core values, quality assurance standards, ethical guidelines and model of community engagement, which reflect contemporary standards of best practice.

	Inform	**Consult**	**Involve**	**Collaborate**	**Empower**
Goals we've set	Provide accurate and objective information in a timely manner	Seek feedback on analysis, issues, alternatives and decisions, where possible	Ensure concerns and aspirations are considered	Partner with the community during decision-making	Place final decision-making with the community
Promise we've made	We will inform you	We will ask, listen and acknowledge you	We will work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations are reflected in the decisions	We will look to you for advice and incorporate this into decisions where we can	We will implement what you decide
	More communication focussed				More engagement focussed

TRC recognises community engagement as both a process and an outcome. We are committed to learning from each engagement experience and applying the learnings to continuous improvement. TRC will engage with the community in ways that are open to all, and easily understood engagement opportunities will be designed and targeted to specific audiences as a means to hear all views and to gain a better understanding of emerging social trends that may shape the future of our region. Contemporary community engagement practices provide TRC with the ideal platform to harvest local expertise and community aspirations, moreover digital innovation brings improved methods for TRC to share information across our region.

To develop a culture of engagement across the organisation TRC will:
- provide community engagement training for Councillors and staff
- establish a network of community engagement practitioners within the organisation to share information and prepare engagement plans and strategies to guide projects, initiatives and events
- include community engagement details in reports to Council
- establish performance indicators to measure engagement outcomes
- identify new and emerging information, communication and knowledge management technologies and explore how they could be used to better engage the community.

TRC's 2017–21 Corporate Plan highlights developing digital connectivity and engagement, and embracing innovative practices and technologies as strategic goals. While digital uptake is increasing across the community, it is important to note that some sectors are less comfortable with digital technologies — a mix of traditional and digital engagement and communication strategies will maximise engagement opportunities and ensure a broader diversity of views informing TRC decisions.

Successful community engagement practice will ensure:

- the Tablelands community is well informed about the issues, strategies and plans that may affect them
- all members of the Tablelands community have the opportunity for genuine involvement in our decision making and policy development
- members of the community are given the opportunity to hear each other's views and opinions and to contribute solutions to community issues
- we seek the views of a wide cross-section of the community, selecting methods that are flexible, inclusive, recognise community diversity and are appropriate to those being engaged
- we are meeting legislative requirements in relation to community consultation.

5.   Target audiences

Primary audiences

- Community
- Ratepayers (residential and non-residential)
- Staff (current and future)
- Visitors
- Community groups and organisations
- Local businesses and investors
- Media
- Advisory groups and committees

Secondary audiences

- Professional associations and peak bodies
- Government authorities and representatives
- Government departments

6.   Community profile

The Tablelands community is an eclectic mix of generational farming families, tree-changers, retirees, traditional owners, and young families. This melting pot creates diversity in the communication and engagement expectations of the community. The proportion of the community aged 65+ is well above the regional Queensland average and, while it shouldn't be assumed age is a determining factor in communication preferences, it is well-documented that people over 65 years are the least digitally engaged demographic. Other factors that can be used to group the community into defined audiences include geographic locations, socio-economic group, cultural heritage, education level and migrants.

Three separate community target audiences have been identified from the region's age data:

1. Youth — 0 to 20
2. Families, couples and singles — 20 to 45/50
3. Empty nesters and retirees — 45/50+

Current information about how these target groups like to receive information includes:

6.1   Youth

- Depending on age, may only receive information from parents, guardians and other significant adult influencers.
- Depending on age, are passive receivers and want information directly and easily.
- Online apps like Snapchat and Instagram.

6.2   Families, couples and singles

- Often juggling busy careers, social commitments and family life so want to receive information directly and easily.
- Usually highly engaged with social media, watch TV (pay and free-to-air) and listen to commercial radio stations. Some read local newspapers.

6.3   Empty nesters and retirees

- Read more paper-based products like newspapers and magazines.
- 65+ are less digitally connected than other audiences and light users of the internet.

6.4   Community groups

Within these target audiences are members of our community who have additional and specific communication and engagement requirements. Consideration must always be given to members of our community who live with a disability, are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and that are disadvantaged and/or homeless.

We are guided in our engagement with these specific groups in accordance with regulated standards, and established policies and procedures, as well as our Cultural Plan, Reconciliation Action Plan and the Inclusion Advisory Committee.

We will undertake culturally appropriate communication and engagement and will consult in relation to any projects in accordance to the *Native Title (Queensland) Act 1993* with approval through the North Queensland Land Council. We will follow cultural protocols and conduct respectful engagement with traditional and historical owner groups, community and community Elders wherever appropriate and possible.

7.   Priorities

For the next five years we will focus on these six key communication and engagement priorities:

1. Improving community education and awareness of our role, projects, programs, facilities, services and events.
2. Proactive and strategic approach to communication and engagement.
3. Increasing audiences and fostering relationships.
4. Using cost effective techniques to reach our diverse audiences.
5. Meaningful conversations with our community and stakeholders.
6. Continually improving and learning in everything we do.

8.   Key messages

Because we operate across diverse service areas and use a range of communication techniques and channels, it is essential we use consistent messaging, adhere to our corporate style guide, and check for accuracy, interpretation and ease of use. The key messages below provide the framework for the language we use when communicating and engaging with the community, regardless of the subject matter or communication medium.

- We are a forward-thinking, community-minded, progressive and inclusive Council, delivering a range of services and programs for the community.
- We have worked with the community to develop a vision for our future.
- We are financially responsible, enterprising and transparent.
- Together we are building vibrant communities, and embracing our natural, cultural and economic diversity.
- We are committed to providing a sustainable approach to renewing community assets, improving liveability and increasing the attractiveness of the region.
- We pride ourselves on delivering value for money services that target the needs of our diverse community.
- We collaborate with partners and stakeholders, and support initiatives that help deliver a positive and healthy lifestyle and cohesive community.
- We have a highly skilled and dedicated workforce who have a sound work ethic.
- We appreciate the opportunities we have to engage with our community.
- We collaborate with all levels of government to facilitate and advocate the best outcomes.
- The Tablelands is a great place to work, live, play and invest. It has high-quality education and health services; safe, friendly and inclusive communities; recreational opportunities; spectacular natural scenery and unlimited opportunities for growth.
- We provide services across the geographically dispersed region.

9.   Objectives

While we already have a strong communication and engagement presence, it is important we build on existing relationships to grow and improve our methods and techniques across the organisation. To achieve this, four objectives and associated strategies will inform the future direction of our communication and community engagement.

9.1 We have proactive, appropriate, effective and sustained communication and engagement with identified target audiences across a variety of relevant channels.

Strategy	Outcome	Action	Priority	Responsibility
Ensure information on all key decisions, projects, programs, events, opportunities, incidents and issues is communicated through a mixture of online and traditional tools.	Our community and staff are well-informed and aware, and know how to access information when they require it.	Provide information to the community across multiple communication platforms so can be accessed by preferred methods by all sectors of the community including, but not limited to: • website • intranet • social media • broadcast media • rate notice inserts • community meetings • e-newsletters (external and internal) • letters • training • printed products including brochures and fact sheets • advertising • media interviews • targeted emails/letters • customer service centres, information centres and libraries • displays/stalls at community events and TRC facilities • quarterly, annual and other reports	High	Communications team
		Engage with the community to identify target audiences and the best ways to communicate with them.	Medium	Communications team and community engagement officer
		Establish and maintain relationships with media outlets by providing timely response to requests and interviews, and notification of media opportunities.	High	SCA and ELT
		Ensure compliance with statutory and funding bodies through clear and concise paid advertisements in print media and promotion of career and tender opportunities.	High	SCA and project officers

Strategy	Outcome	Action	Priority	Responsibility
		Implement plans to respond to emergency situations, crises and other major issues, using appropriate media channels to reach audiences.	High	SCA and senior advisor emergency management
		Ensure appropriate and timely follow-up and resolution of customer enquiries and requests.	High	All
		Monitor, analyse and report on our media presence across all platforms	High	SCA
Take part in and provide professional development to ensure we are informed and abreast of emerging technologies.	We communicate using engaging content at the forefront of industry standards.	Undertake continuous learning through conferences, training, seminars and webinars, and maintain networks with communication and engagement specialists.	Low	Communications team
		Provide training to staff on emerging and existing communication platforms and skills development.	Medium	Communications team
Continue to develop and implement communication and engagement plans.	We have a coordinated and consistent approach to communication and engagement, capture lessons learnt and evolve our techniques, tools and approaches to meet community needs.	Work with project officers to develop and implement communication and engagement plans to ensure all communication and engagement opportunities are identified and actioned.	High	SCA and community engagement officer
Promote a positive image of ourselves and our region.	Our community and visitors are aware of our services and facilities and has a positive impression of what we do.	Produce, distribute and promote e-newsletters that highlights services and programs delivered or funded by TRC, updates the community on TRC achievements and promotes events and activities in the region.	High	Communications team
		Promote services, events and facilities using other communication platforms including broadcast and social media.	High	Communications team
		Nominate projects and staff for industry awards and share success stories across industries and local government.	High	SCA and ELT

Strategy	Outcome	Action	Priority	Responsibility
Identify and implement short, medium and long-term strategies for destination marketing and regional promotion.	Our destination marketing is strategic, collaborative and effective and reflects the vision and brand for our region.	Work with the community and stakeholders to achieve preferred visitor and population attraction products.	Medium	Communications team, economic development officer and community services
		Increase TRC brand recognition on visitor and population attraction communication products.	High	Communications team

9.2 Use consistent messaging and engaging visuals, and ensure our communication is strengthened by a strong brand presence.

Strategy	Outcome	Action	Priority	Responsibility
Ensure relevant elements of the style guide, brand, persona and key messaging are implemented in all communication products.	We have strong brand recall — our products, services and facilities are easily recognisable, relatable, professional and consistent.	Update and implement the Style Guide for use in all marketing, communications and operational areas, with appropriate training and support.	Medium	SCA
		Empower, inform and educate staff to ensure consistent use of TRC logo and brand through internal communication and provision of advice.	High	SCA
		Educate key staff and suppliers on TRC brand and guidelines.	Medium	Communications team
		Continually review and develop branded products.	High	SCA
		Establish key message for staff and Councillors on key topics.	High	SCA and ELT
		Conduct full review of information and functionality of website and identify improvements.	Medium	SCA, and knowledge and systems
		Review multiple TRC websites and social media accounts and investigate consolidation and efficiencies.	Low	SCA, and knowledge and systems
		Develop, produce and coordinate branded event material.	Low	SCA, community engagement officer and events officer
Maintain and develop image and film library, and establish clear guidelines around conditions of use.	We present ourselves using high quality visual elements that are attractive and appealing.	Provide staff training on capturing and storing photos and footage.	Medium	Communications team
		Provide staff training on image and footage copyright and consent requirements, and provide and store forms.	Medium	Communications team
Implement plain language communication.	The community and our staff easily understand, comprehend and can communicate our messaging.	Provide advice, writing, editing and proofreading for consumer-facing products.	High	SCA
		Approve all consumer-facing products before production.	High	SCA

9.3 Strengthen our relationships and partnerships through appropriate and effective community engagement.

Strategy	Outcome	Action	Priority	Responsibility
Ensure engagement is built into all relevant projects and processes.	We have a culture of community engagement, and key staff are including engagement early in the planning of projects and programs.	Work with project officers to develop and implement communication and engagement plans to ensure all communication and engagement opportunities are identified and actioned.	High	SCA, community engagement officer and project officers
Ensure staff have an understanding and awareness of our commitment to involve the community in relevant decision-making processes.	We execute best practice philosophies of community engagement by identifying the appropriate level of engagement for each project.	Establish an internal community engagement network with representatives from all operation areas.	High	Community engagement officer
		Develop an engagement register that captures all engagement activities and lessons learnt.	Medium	Community engagement officer
Ensure key staff are provided with necessary tools and training.	Our staff are confident, capable and have access to the necessary tools to engage effectively with stakeholders and the community.	Provide ongoing training, support and guidance to the internal community engagement network and other staff.	High	Community engagement officer
Manage a proactive program of community engagement, ensuring all sectors of the community are included.	Our stakeholders, partners, community and staff have an active role in decision making and problem solving. We embrace feedback and research and apply this information to our strategic thinking.	Establish community reference groups and advisory committees for consultation, decision-making and information dissemination on key projects and programs.	High	Community engagement officer
		Establish people panels where the community can sign up to be involved.	Medium	Community engagement officer

Strategy	Outcome	Action	Priority	Responsibility
Engage the community, celebrate diversity and community achievement, bring people together, generate networking opportunities and create partnerships.	We have meaningful and productive relationships with our community. We collaborate with partners and stakeholders, and support initiatives that help deliver a positive and healthy lifestyle and cohesive community.	Host, support, promote and participate in community events.	Medium	Community services and community engagement officer
		Initiate, promote and facilitate activities and competitions that benefit our community and promote us as a community-focused organisation.	High	All
		Provide an integrated approach to developing projects and initiatives where we are the lead organisation / key stakeholder to gather community input, encourage local leadership and develop capacity building and skills.	High	Community engagement officer
		Facilitate collaboration with multiple stakeholders to achieve public, private and community partnerships.	Medium	All

9.4 We have proactive, appropriate, effective and sustained communication and engagement with our staff.

Strategy	Outcome	Action	Priority	Responsibility
Ensure information on all key decisions, projects, programs, events, opportunities, incidents and issues is communicated to staff through a variety of methods and techniques.	Our staff are well informed and have access to accurate, current and appropriate information so they are proud and confident ambassadors and our greatest champions in the community.	Provide information across multiple communication platforms so it can be accessed by preferred methods by all staff including, but not limited to: • intranet • Talking Point (e-newsletter) • noticeboards and in lunchrooms • all staff emails • CEO/ELT updates (email/video) • WH&S updates • site visits by management teams • team meetings • all staff meetings	High	SCA, CEO, OLT and community engagement officer
		Encourage staff to subscribe to and make themselves aware of information we provide to the community including, but not limited to: • website • intranet • social media • broadcast media • rate notice inserts • community meetings • e-newsletters (external and internal) • letters • training/induction material • printed products including brochures and fact sheets • advertising • customer service centres, information centres and libraries • displays/stalls at community events and TRC facilities • quarterly, annual and other reports	Low	SCA, CEO and OLT

Strategy	Outcome	Action	Priority	Responsibility
		• contribute and share stories within the workplace e.g. recognition, best practice and learnings		
Continually assess communication methods and techniques to ensure our staff is receiving information in the most appropriate format.	The techniques we use to communicate to our staff are diverse, appropriate, meet their needs and is relevant to their interests and requirements.	Maintain processes around what information is provided to the different sectors of staff and how it should be communicated.	Medium	SCA and OLT
		Regularly review and survey uptake of information by staff and adjust processes and techniques as appropriate.	Medium	Communications team
		Investigate a subscription-based method of staff communication.	Medium	SCA, and knowledge and systems
Continually engage and collaborate with our staff to seek advice and ensure their feedback and opinions are considered.	We have a considered change management approach, using input from staff to shape outcomes.	Develop Change Management Framework.	High	People and culture
		Engagement for change initiatives is part of planning, implementation, review and continuous improvement.	High	OLT

10.   Acronyms

SCA   Strategic communications advisor
CEO   Chief Executive Officer
ELT   Executive Leadership Team
OLT   Organisational Leadership Team

11.   Responsibilities

Effective communication and engagement need the support of all staff. Everyone is responsible for TRC's reputation, and how we are presented and perceived in the community. Everything we develop, present, produce, say and deliver impacts the community's perception of who we are and what we do.

The effective implementation of this strategy requires a commitment to communication and engagement by elected members and staff. Managers and coordinators have a high degree of responsibility to communicate and engage openly and actively, and to guide their teams in developing an effective communication and engagement culture.

The strategic communications advisor and community engagement officer are responsible for overseeing the implementation of this strategy.
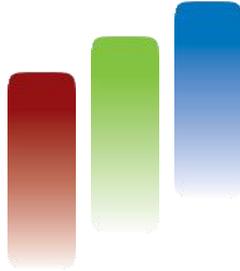
Live, discover and invest in a Tablelands community

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