1. Policy Intent

1.1   This intent of this policy is to provide direction for the delivery of community engagement initiatives by Tablelands Regional Council (TRC) by outlining principles and responsibilities.

1.2   This policy provides a framework for delivering community engagement programs and initiatives that:

    a.   fosters relationships with Council's customers, community and other stakeholders

    b.   informs and facilitates the involvement of community in the decision-making process

    c.   helps to optimise delivery of services to the community.

2. Scope

2.1   This policy is applicable to all TRC employees (permanent, temporary, full or part time, trainee, casual or volunteer), Councillors, students and work experience, contractors, consultants, advisory committee members and anyone else working in any other capacity for TRC.

2.2   This policy provides directions for projects and initiatives delivered by TRC across all facets of Council's operations. It is not intended to direct Councillors in their interaction with the community.

3. Background/Supporting Information

3.1   Queensland's *Local Government Act 2009* Section 4 outlines the following principles guiding the operation of local government:

    a.   transparent and effective processes, and decision making in the public interest

    b.   sustainable development and management of assets and infrastructure, and delivery of effective services

    c.   democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement

    d.   good governance of, and by, local government

    e.   ethical and legal behaviour of councillors and local government employees.

    TRC aims to deliver its operations and services in alignment with these principles.

3.2   Council is required to undertake public notification in specific circumstances by several pieces of state and federal legislation including, but not limited to, the *Local Government Act 2009*, *Local Government Regulation 2012*, *Planning Act 2016*, and *Land Act 1994*. TRC aims to comply with these minimum benchmarks and, in alignment with the principles of the Local Government Act, pursue best practice in community engagement in accordance with the expectations of our community.

3.3   The strategic goals identified in TRC's [Corporate Plan (2021-26)](#) are underpinned by successful community consultation and engagement, including:

      a.   Collaborate and build partnerships to plan and deliver quality services

      b.   Grow partnerships to improve community services

      c.   Recognise and respect opportunity for our First Nations Peoples and celebrate diversity

      d.   Plan and deliver contemporary infrastructure and spaces for community need

      e.   Protect, manage and promote our natural environment and diversity

      f.   Assist in developing business capacity, growth, diversification and resilience

3.4   The Communication and Engagement Strategy provides the following objectives for communications and engagement undertaken by TRC:

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

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

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

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

This policy is aligned to these objectives and provides guidance for how TRC will undertake the actions outlined in the Strategy.

3.5   This policy acknowledges the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) [Spectrum of Public Participation](#) as an industry-accepted means of defining the purpose of community engagement practice. TRC will apply a range of practice tools, engagement techniques and communication methods to suit the purpose and target audience.

4.   Principles

4.1   TRC will aim to deliver community engagement in accordance with the following principles:

      a.   Engagement is delivered in a way that is clear in its purpose and intent.

      b.   Information presented is accurate and easy to understand.

      c.   Engagement initiatives are delivered in a strategic, timely and cost-effective manner.

      d.   Engagement is designed to be accessible to as wide as possible an audience and may be targeted to support communication with under-represented parts of our community.

      e.   Engagement allows for diversity of opinion and communication style, and promotes mutual respect.

      f.   Flexible and interactive engagement methods will be used in order to provide a high level of appeal and accessibility.

      g.   Engagement will be undertaken in a culturally appropriate manner.

      h.   Engagement will focus on the best interests of the community and communicate TRC's strategic objectives.

i.   Engagement will promote transparency in decision making by publicising outcomes to the community.

5.   Roles & Responsibilities

5.1   Organisational Commitment

5.1.1   Community engagement is the responsibility of all TRC service areas and employees in accordance with their role and function.

5.1.2   Consultation and engagement should be considered at the initiation or planning phase of all strategic or significant projects, activities, initiatives and changes in service or infrastructure.

5.1.3   TRC is committed to embedding a culture of high-quality community engagement across the organisation by:

a.   Seeking to continually improve engagement practice.

b.   Providing community engagement training for Councillors and staff.

c.   Establishing a network of community engagement practitioners within the organisation to share information and prepare appropriate engagement plans and strategies to guide projects, initiatives and events.

d.   Including details of any community engagement undertaken in reports to Council.

e.   Establishing performance indicators to measure engagement outcomes.

f.   Committing to the development of innovative engagement approaches, learning from each engagement experience and using learnings to improve approaches to engagement.

g.   Identifying new and emerging technologies and how they could be used to better engage the community.

h.   The implementation of the Project Management Office placing an emphasis on more strategic, longer-term planning of projects.

5.2   Councillors

5.2.1   Councillors play an important role in representing the interests of residents, ratepayers and community organisations. Providing community leadership, guidance and facilitating communication between the community and Council is a Councillor's core role.

5.2.2   Councillors may be involved in community engagement initiatives delivered by TRC through:

a.   Representation on committees or working groups.

b.   Speaking at or assisting with the facilitation of engagement events.

c.   Attending community engagement events as a member of the community.

d.   Engaging with consultation initiatives as a member of the community.

5.2.3   When working together Councillors and staff should consider:

a.   Informing all relevant Councillors of community engagement initiatives of interest.

b.   Opportunities that may exist through Councillors' wealth of information about the community they represent, including networks, issues and opportunities.

    c.   Established policy and procedures governing interactions between staff and Councillors.

    d.   The appropriateness of undertaking engagement initiatives while observing a pre-election caretaker period.

    e.   Councillors' obligations under the *Local Government Act 2009* and *Integrity Act 2009* to disclose conflicts of interest.

5.3   Staff

5.3.1   TRC employs staff from across the region who are also customers of Council and whose daily work involves liaison with community in many forms. As members of the community TRC staff should be encouraged to participate in engagement processes delivered to the broader community, in accordance with the TRC Code of Conduct.

5.3.2   Including relevant TRC staff via internal engagement processes is important for the successful delivery of projects and initiatives. The Project Management Office will help facilitate this process. This will enable early project planning to acknowledge diversity of views, corporate knowledge and experience, and an awareness of potential issues, solutions and impacts.

5.3.3   TRC staff are expected to:

    a.   Consider legislative requirements for communication and consultation at the initiation and planning stages of all projects.

    b.   Consider any issues or risks to the project relating to stakeholders and community perceptions.

    c.   Consider the potential community interest in a project, and the potential to add value to the project by engaging with the community.

    d.   Seek the input of the Community Engagement Officer as part of the initiation and planning stages of relevant projects.

    e.   Where there is an identified need for consultation and engagement, prepare a community engagement plan in consultation with the Community Engagement Advisor. A community engagement plan provides a tool for staff to consider the appropriate engagement methods, target audience needs, project stages and resourcing requirements.

5.4   Community

5.4.1   To support open and participatory decision-making processes TRC invites all members of the community to contribute to engagement programs. To achieve equity and diversity of views, TRC may implement engagement programs that specifically target under-represented persons or groups within the community broadly or as relevant to a specific project.

5.4.2   TRC may invite community participation in advisory or working groups relating to specific subject matter. Participation will be subject to policies governing advisory committees and specific terms of reference that have been adopted.

5.4.3   TRC will promote an open and respectful environment where conversations may be had without fear or insult, and a diversity of views may be expressed. TRC will ask and expect that participating community members demonstrate mutual respect and appropriate behaviour towards each other and staff. The TRC Customer Experience Standards will be referenced to guide conduct during engagement programs and initiatives. TRC may discontinue engagement with any person who does not demonstrate this or otherwise wilfully compromises safety or the integrity of an engagement program.

6. Initiating Engagement

6.1 The need to undertake community engagement may be identified by the Council, Executive Leadership Team or relevant project staff. This should identify where a genuine opportunity exists for community to influence the decision-making process.

6.2 Where there are legislative requirements to be observed, the lead business group should consult with the Senior Communications Advisor and Community Engagement Advisor to ensure that proposed consultation appropriately meets with the requirements of legislation and is delivered in accordance with the principles of this policy.

6.3 Where there is a desire to understand the community's sentiment or the ability for community to influence the decision making process, the lead business group delivering the project or service should consult with the Senior Communications Advisor and Community Engagement Advisor.

7. Closure

At the conclusion of a community engagement process the following matters should be considered:

7.1 Appropriate recording and analysis of the data associated with community engagement processes.

7.2 Evaluation of the community engagement tools and techniques used.

7.3 Appropriate reporting of the outcomes of community engagement within TRC and to Council.

7.4 Providing feedback, information and results on the outcomes of community engagement to the community and stakeholders.

8. Responsibility

Council is responsible for the adoption, amendment and repeal of this Policy and the Chief Executive Officer is responsible for the development and amendment of any associated procedures and guidelines relevant to this Policy. Guidance on processes associated with initiating and delivering community consultation and engagement is included in the Community Engagement procedure.

9. Review

It is the responsibility of the Coordinator Communications and Engagement to monitor the adequacy of this policy and recommend appropriate changes. This policy will be formally reviewed every three years or as required by Council.

This Policy is to remain in force until otherwise amended/repealed by resolution of Council.

This Policy repeals the former Tablelands Regional Council Policy titled "Community Engagement Policy" adopted 28 June 2018.