

## COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

### Considerations:

Research and better practice case studies all point to the same conclusion – that effective consultative strategies and community participation in change initiatives can galvanise communities through a shared vision; facilitate localised and meaningful collaboration; create successful partnerships; and establish a deeper understanding of the intent of the change.

Involving the community and encouraging public participation should be among the key elements considered throughout all the stages of reform. The reform process is evolutionary and will demand a consistent, timely and effective approach to working with community representatives and the community at-large.

As councils progress through the transition stages, different levels of community involvement will be required and thoughtful consideration should be given to this throughout the process. In some cases, providing information to the community and encouraging feedback may be all that is required - in others, more intense consultation may be necessary. Regardless of the level, effective two-way communication will be a fundamental requirement at all times.

Community-facing consultation is a skill so ensure your facilitator (or equivalent) has a good understanding of the objectives and desired outcomes and is an excellent communicator. Outcomes of the consultation sessions will also need to be accurately documented.

The International Association for Public Participation Australasia (IAP2) sets out the underlying principles to be considered when planning and undertaking community consultation. It also provides a guideline on the different levels of consultation and public impact. The information is on their website, [www.iap2.org.au](http://www.iap2.org.au).

Here is a great opportunity to review community governance / engagement strategies and frameworks, develop and integrate new systems and build upon current practice.

### Checklist:

- Has a consultation framework and communications strategy been developed and approved? If not, develop and seek approval.
- What is the purpose of the consultation? Are there place management issues?
- Does it link with the objectives in the communications strategy? Are they consistent?
- What are the benefits?
- What are the risks?
- What resources are required? Budget?
- Is there enough time?
- Is the budget available to do it properly?
- What are the options?
- What level of community involvement is needed?
- Who should be involved? What is their position on the matter? Will they support or disrupt the consultation?
- When? What is the best timing?
- What level of input will they have?
- How much information can be provided to them? How complex can it be?
- What authority will they have? Will their decisions be implemented or acted on?
- Do they understand the limitations, what is open for negotiation, what is not?
- What will happen to their input, how it will be used?
- How will feedback be provided to them to show their efforts were valued?
- Is a venue required? Catering etc?
- Who is allocated the task of facilitation, administration support (documenting outcomes etc)