Camden Council

Communications and Community Engagement Strategy
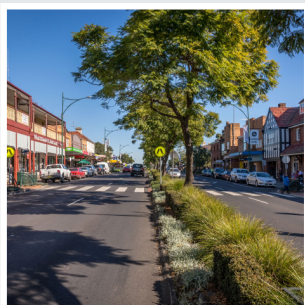
camden council

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Council's Communications and Community Engagement Strategy Framework and related documents have been developed using research and information from other local government authorities, the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), Council's Community Consultation Policy and Resource Kit and the input from staff across the organisation.

Communications and Community Engagement Strategy

1.0   Introduction

A strong and positive relationship with the community is integral to a local government authority effectively serving its community. Camden Council is strongly committed to effective and open communication and engagement with its many audiences and as significant growth occurs in the Camden Local Government Area (LGA) over the next 25 years, it is a priority for Camden Council to maintain best practice in communication and community engagement to ensure a consistent and positive corporate image and to build relationships with the community.

Camden Council's Communications and Community Engagement Strategy and its related policies and tools provide an integrated framework for communication and engagement activities between Camden Council and its many audiences. It will help to ensure that communication is accurate, consistent and reflects the values expressed in Council's Community Strategic Plan, Camden 2040. This Strategy is also linked to Council's Business Improvement Plan. Through effective and advanced communication and community engagement, Council aims to foster trust and respect from internal and external audiences and streamline organisational communication processes.

Through the various communication channels that fall within this Strategy, whether written, verbal or online, Camden Council staff will have access to the resources they need to communicate clearly and effectively within Council's corporate standards and policies.

In developing this framework, Council recognises that its audiences interact with Council staff each day, on many levels and through a variety of channels. This Strategy identifies the various channels of communication as – external and internal communication, media, events, community engagement and customer service as per the diagram below.

Some communication through the above channels is highly public and structured, such as formal Council Reports and media releases, while other communication is less formal, but no less important, such as face to face communication or the use of social media.

2.0   Scope of the Strategy

Camden Council's Communication and Community Engagement Strategy framework applies to representatives of Camden Council (whether full-time, part-time or casual), Councillors and all persons performing work at the direction of, or on behalf of Camden Council including volunteers, contractors, subcontractors, agents, consultants and temporary employees.

3.0   Strategy Objectives

- To identify external and internal communication objectives
- To define Council's key audiences and stakeholders
- To identify Council's key messages
- To identify Council's committment to community engagement
- To link with individual strategies, policies and procedures in the areas of external and internal communication, media, events, community engagement and customer service
- To be guided by findings from available research and the Camden 2040 Strategic Plan
- To link to communication activities outlined in Council's Business Improvement Plan
- To meet and exceed Council's community engagement requirements under the Integrated Planning and Reporting Legislation
- To provide strategic direction for Council's Communications and engagement activities

4.0   Communications Environment

Camden Council faces similar challenges to other local government authorities in meeting the increasing expectations of its residents and stakeholders. Those challenges are amplified by the fact that the population of the Camden LGA is planned to increase significantly over the next 25 years.

Camden's current and future growth is a key driver of Council's efforts to ensure that communication is consistent and effective across all audience groups including long-standing residents, new residents, future residents and stakeholders.

At the same time, rapidly evolving technology has transformed the way councils communicate and engage with their communities. These changes in technology bring exciting opportunities for the way Council communicates and positions its corporate image and identity. However, it also brings risks as new and cost-effective tools allow instant and interactive communication involving all levels within Council's structure and members of the public.

While formal communication methods will continue to play an important role in Council's interactions with the community, this Strategy and the associated policies and tools, will provide staff with clear guidance to effectively and positively communicate, regardless of their role.

Staff communicate and engage with the public daily and Council aims to ensure that its representatives have the understanding and access to the guidelines and tools to communicate effectively and consistently.

5.0   Community Engagement Principles

Community engagement helps to create a sense of belonging and community ownership and is a process to enable Council to inform the community, seek out, understand and consider the diverse interests and aspirations of the community, and involve the community on issues, plans and decisions that impact the local area.

When engaging with the community, Council is committed to:

- Keeping our community informed
- Listening to our community
- Proactively seeking and encouraging contributions from those who may be affected by or interested in a decision
- Considering the needs and interests of people in the decision making process and ensuring engagement opportunities are inclusive and accessible
- Consulting broadly, enabling a large number of residents to provide input through a range of mechanisms

- Collaborating with stakeholders and other levels of government to achieve common goals
- Explaining decisions to the community and how their input was considered
- Evaluating engagement processes and outcomes
- Providing the resources and support to staff in undertaking community engagement processes
- Being open, honest and providing timely and balanced information so the community can contribute in a meaningful way
- Utilising cost-effective and high value consultation opportunities
- Where possible, linking engagement processes with existing events, groups and activities

Council recognises that there will be limits to what can and cannot be influenced by the community. It is important that the extent of the community's influence is identified at the start of the community engagement process, so that expectations are understood. There are circumstances where Council will contact the community to provide information on a particular matter, rather than seek opinion or feedback. Council staff may use just one or more levels of engagement when undertaking community engagement activities.

6.0   Audience and Stakeholders

The Camden LGA has a current population of approximately 63,000, and this is set to reach more than 250,000 by 2040 through the urban development of the South West Growth Centre, and other smaller land releases.

While 'the community' of Camden is Council's primary audience, it has many different dimensions and these must be taken into account when planning and managing Council's communication and engagement activities. There is no 'one size fits all' approach. The rapid growth of the Camden LGA also creates diversity in the community's expectations of Council.

Council communicates and engages with many other key audiences, including:

- Non-residential ratepayers – they may have a particular interest in decisions affecting the value of their property
- Businesses – likely to be keenly interested in economic development and business growth opportunities
- Visitors – attracted to iconic locations and tourism attractions
- Staff – many of whom also live in the Camden LGA
- Future staff – opportunities to promote Council as an employer of choice, and the lifestyle attributes of the LGA
- Government agencies/MPs/peak bodies – important stakeholders in Council decision-making and service provision
- Suppliers – interested in any information that might impact their business with Council or offer new opportunities
- Media – a critical channel for Council's communication and dissemination of information

7.0   Key Messages

Because Council operates across such diverse service areas and communicates in so many different ways, it's important that consistent messages are used regardless of the communication method or subject matter. Just as Council has developed a style guide for the way it is represented visually, its key messages provide a framework for the language used when conveying any Council information.

The key messages are based on, or come directly from the Camden 2040 Strategic Plan, and link to its key themes. Many other messages can be drawn from the plan, and these can be applied in relevant situations. It's important to stress that not every message will be used in every form of communication, messages won't necessarily be used verbatim and additional messages may be identified over time. Key messages provide a guide for those communicating on behalf of Camden Council or engaging with its audiences. Whatever the channel and audience, the communicator will be able to endeavour to ensure that what they are seeking to communicate aligns with the essence of one, some, or all of Council's key messages.

Another important point is that these are not at all intended as meaningless statements that do not reflect the reality of a given situation. Messages must always be authentic, appropriate and relevant. In some cases, they might be used because Council is explaining why something hasn't happened, or why a particularly challenging decision has been made. Council's key messages (guided by research for the Camden 2040 Strategic Plan) are:

- We're working with the community towards a shared vision for Camden
- We listen to the community
- We're making sure Camden's growth gives residents the best of both worlds
- We want to ensure that as Camden grows, residents have access to the services and facilities they need
- We're committed to a healthy built and natural environment for Camden
- Council provides and maintains open spaces and play areas
- Council initiatives help reduce waste and promote recycling
- We support a growing local economy that creates jobs
- We understand the community's concerns about effective and sustainable transport, and we're working towards this at every level
- Council supports an enriched and connected community
- We deliver events, activities and facilities for the whole community
- We create opportunities to celebrate Camden's heritage and culture as well as foster community pride
- Council provides strong and inclusive leadership
- Council aims to be a modern, contemporary Council committed to best practice standards

An example of how key messages can be incorporated into Council communication include:

- In a speech or presentation on a relevant issue, with a phrase like 'this is just another example of Council's commitment to reducing waste in our Local Government Area'
- In a media release with a quote that reflects Council's commitment to delivering the community vision
- Through a social media post that relates to Council's commitment to economic development
- Delivery of an event that focuses on creating community pride and spirit
- In a newsletter story that highlights Council's work in sustainability

8.0   Communication Objectives and Goals

This Strategy and the related policies and tools aim to achieve a range of communication objectives and goals, both internally and externally. The objectives are listed below and six key objectives have been listed in the Communications and Community Engagement Action Plan in 9.0 (page 5).

External Communication Objectives and Goals

- Ensure Camden Council has a proactive program of communication and community engagement activities through a range of diverse channels to build a positive image of Council
- Improve Council's social and online media presence and engagement
- Ensure that communication is targeted to Council's audiences
- Ensure consistent branding and an engaging visual corporate image for Council
- Strengthen partnerships with the community and foster trust and respect
- Improve Council's visual presence and consistency of branding
- Use social media to communicate consistently across a range of audiences
- Increase awareness of, and strengthen, Council's community engagement processes
- Improve Council's corporate image and branding through an updated style guide
- Build relationships with the media through consultation and efficient management of media relations

Internal Communication Objectives and Goals

- Improve communication across the entire organisation by streamlining internal processes
- Provide Camden Council staff with the information and tools they need to be reputation ambassadors
- Foster teamwork and a connected workforce through best practice communication
- Raise awareness of the role of Council's Community Engagement team and the assistance that the team can provide to staff in communicating and engaging with Council's audiences
- Provide tools, training and resources for staff to communicate effectively and have an understanding of the methods of communications available to them
- Provide clear guidelines for effective management of media across the organisation

9.0   Communications and Community Engagement Action Plan

Key Objectives	Strategy	Priority
Ensure Camden Council has a proactive program of communication and community engagement activities through diverse channels to build on Council's positive image	Implement an effective and proactive program of regular, accurate and timely external communication using the following channels (but not limited to): corporate publications, advertising, website, fact sheets, social media, signage, noticeboards and media releases so that the community is well informed of issues, services and projects	High
	Build and maintain strong relationships with local media outlets by consulting on a regular basis and implementing Council's Media Policy	High
	Monthly meetings with Council Managers to indentify upcoming positive news stories, media opportunities, issues and community engagement activities and opportunities	High
	Attendance by Team Leader, Community Engagement at Council's Senior Management Team meetings to foster proactive management of media opportunities and issues, provide reporting on Council's communications and engagement environment and to identify organisational communication needs	High
	Develop proactive media strategies for major projects and issues in consultation with the project manager, so that Council remains at the forefront of communicating its initiatives and projects with its audiences	High
	Conduct community surveys to seek feedback on how Council communicates and the preferred methods of communication of Council's audiences	High
	Review Council's media distribution list on a six-monthly basis to ensure accurate channels for distribution of information to the media	Medium
	Implement a Media Policy with clear internal guidelines of Council's media management processes	High
	Implement external communications procedures that outlines processes for communicating externally on behalf of Council	High
	Implement a 'Communications and Community Engagement Toolkit' booklet for staff with clear guidelines in using internal and external communication and community engagement processes and methods	High
	Review Council's media monitoring program and establish the most efficient process for Council media monitoring, review and reporting	High
	Develop an 'Events Kit' on the website as a guideline and tool for external events organisers to refer to when organising events on Council land	Medium

Improve Council's social and online media presence and engagement	Develop a Website Strategy including addition of e-services, staff training activities, content management and initiatives (linked to Council's Business Improvement Plan) to be developed in consultation with Information Technology Solutions	High
	Develop a Social Media Strategy with implementation of new social media platforms (such as YouTube,Twitter, Blogs and Apps) and guidelines and processes for managing social media within Council's communications environment	High
	Investigate a series of E-newsletter templates for use across the organisation (internally and externally) to provide consistent, timely and contemporary dissemination of information	Medium
	Completion of rollout of updated corporate material on website (including all forms, publications, fact sheets and other corporate material)	Medium
Ensure consistent branding and an engaging visual corporate image for Council	Introduce a new Style Guide and review Council's 'taglines' for use across the organisation. Roll-out new style in communciations materials	High
	Style Guide and Communications and Community Engagement Toolkit 'roadshow' introducing the toolkit and new corporate style guide to all staff, providing information and training	High
	Standardise email formats across the organisation for consistency, to enhance visual appearance of email communication and to provide a more professional standard in email formats	Medium
	Improve consistency of Council branding in promotional material used at events, trade shows and public functions. Develop a central database of promotional material for sharing across the organisation. Communciations and Community Engagement Toolkit to reinforce approval processes	Medium
Ensure that communication is targeted to all of Council's audiences	Develop communication strategies for all major projects and events, identifying key audiences in the process and the most effective methods to communicate with identified audiences	High
	Let's Connect publication distributed to all households in the Camden Local Government Area, Council facilities and available on the website. Social Media used to notify and promote availability of each edition	High
	Meet with the Community Services Team on a regular basis to understand demographics of the area for a targeted and inclusive approach to communication and community engagement as the population grows. Also work closely with this section in the delivery of community events and development of new communications and engagement strategies	Medium
	Work collaboratively with Community Services on the 'New Residents Kits' to be distributed to all new residents in the Camden LGA. This is linked to the Business Improvement Plan	Medium
Provide Camden Council staff with the information and tools they need to be reputation ambassadors	Media coverage sent to relevant Council officers so that they are informed of current issues and Council's communications environment relating to their area of operations	Medium
	Communications overview provided at staff induction and training, including training on the Communications and Community Engagement Toolkit	Medium
	Implement internal communications guidelines and promote communication methods such as emails, staff induction and training, intranet, staff newsletter, payslips and e-blasts	High
	Media training program for relevant staff	High
	Re-launch of 'Inside Word' staff newsletter on a quarterly basis to promote internal communication and awareness of the key priorities of the organisation	Medium
	Launch of a 'Communications and Community Engagement Support Program'. This program will provide training in communication, media, use of plain language, provide advice on the use of various forms of communication and assistance with the development of communications strategies	High
	Intranet strategy developed and re-launch of Council's intranet site	Medium

Increase awareness of and strengthen Council's community engagement processes	Launch of a 'Communications and Community Engagement Support Program'. Staff can draw support when undertaking community engagement. This will be coordinated by the Team Leader, Community Engagement. Promotes sharing of outcomes and experiences of community engagement activities across the organisation	High
	Develop a community engagement page on Council's website to create a greater awareness of Council's commitment to community engagement and outlines Council's processes	High
	Establish a section on the Intranet for staff with community engagement tools, procedures and guidelines and sample strategies for equitable, meaningful and accessible engagement and evaluation	Medium
	Create a training program for staff, promote training and development opportunities including 'best practice' examples	Medium
	Develop an internal steering committee to lead community engagement processes and develop strategies for maximising inclusive and accessible engagement	Medium
	Inform staff of Council's Community Engagement Policy and support its implementation	Medium
	Establish a database to capture key findings and record community engagement activities	Medium

10.0   Implementation

The Community Engagement Team will implement the Communications and Community Engagement Strategy, which will include working collaboratively with other sections of Council in its delivery, and provide training and resources for staff to effectively utilise the framework within this Strategy.

11.0   Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy and its framework will take place on a regular basis through provision of qualitative and quantitative data and staff reporting. This will include media statistics (including social media), community and staff surveys, participation numbers in consultation processes, informal and formal customer feedback and staff reporting.

A regular update will be provided to the General Manager and implementation of the Communication and Community Engagement Action Plan will be presented to Council's Executive Leadership Group and Council's Senior Management Team twice annually as stated in Council's Business Improvement Plan.

The Strategy will be reported for review to Council at the commencement of each Council term.

12.0   Conclusion

This Strategy and its related policies and tools will provide Council representatives with the necessary procedures and guidelines to ensure that communication and community engagement across the organisation meets best practice standards and provides strategic direction to improve and enhance Council's corporate image and communication and engagement standards. The Strategy supports the communication needs of a larger, growing organisation and community through a contemporary and integrated approach to Council's communication and engagement.