



**Have your say
Whitsunday!**

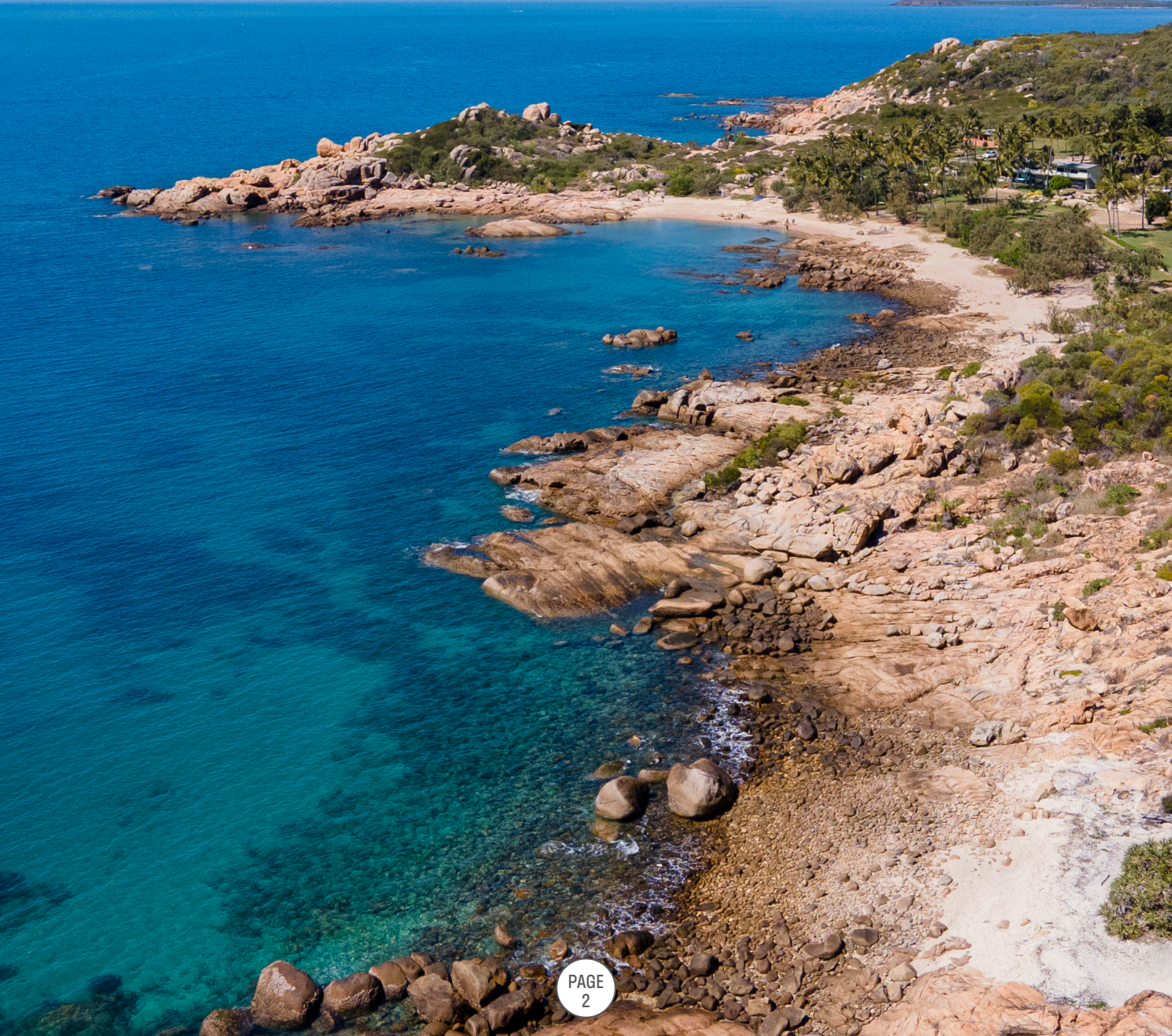
**Community Engagement
Strategy 2024 - 2028**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO COUNTRY

Whitsunday Regional Council acknowledges the Traditional owners and Custodians of the lands in our region. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge their ongoing relationship and connection to Country.

Our Mission is to make a sustainable future possible by building stronger relationships, mutual respect and encouraging cultural practices that strengthen and support harmony between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the broader community within the Whitsunday Region.

We value input and active participation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into our consultation and decision-making processes.



MAYOR'S WORD

Have your say Whitsunday! is Whitsunday Regional Council's Community Engagement Strategy that defines the framework for how we collaborate with the community. The framework aims to foster relationships and guide the flow of information, such as community values and interests, into Council decision making. A key component in facilitating the flow of information into decision making is through building our relationship with the community.

This Community Engagement Strategy has been developed by listening to the combined feedback from the community across all of Council's consultations in recent years, including our *Shape our future consultations* project undertaken during 2023.

Community sentiment has identified the following key focus areas that are the subject of the Community Engagement Strategy, which aims to improve Council's relationships with the community and decision making into the future by:

- Improving decision making transparency
- Continuing to facilitate face-to-face engagement, meetings and workshops
- Leading more proactive engagement
- Making engagement more genuine



1. Our Aim

Our community engagement aim:

To facilitate a respectful consultation process with open, transparent, and meaningful communication that empowers the community to contribute to Council decision making and build our relationship with the stakeholders.

The aim will be achieved through the following principles:

Table 1: Engagement principles

ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLE	EXPLANATION
PROACTIVE AND COLLABORATIVE	Where possible, we will seek early and high-level feedback from the community to inform the direction of a project, strategy or policy.
MEANINGFUL AND RELEVANT	Consultations will occur in a manner than ensures contributions can have a meaningful impact on decision making for a project, strategy or policy.
INFORMED	We will aim to educate the community through various communication tools, to support informed feedback.
ACTIVE LISTENING	We will actively listen to the community, promote more collaborative approaches, and show we have listened by reporting upon consultation outcomes, 'closing the loop.'
TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE DECISION MAKING	We will make transparent decisions that show our accountability in acting on advice from the community.
INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE INPUT	We will make efforts to hear from all stakeholders, including various communication tools and efforts to ensure that busy families, visitors, persons of all cultures and abilities have an opportunity to guide decision making.
RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST	Through execution of the above principles in engagement processes, we will develop our relationship with the community on a foundation of trust that we are acting and making decisions in their interest. In time, this will support an increased desire to participate and trust in shared decision-making processes.

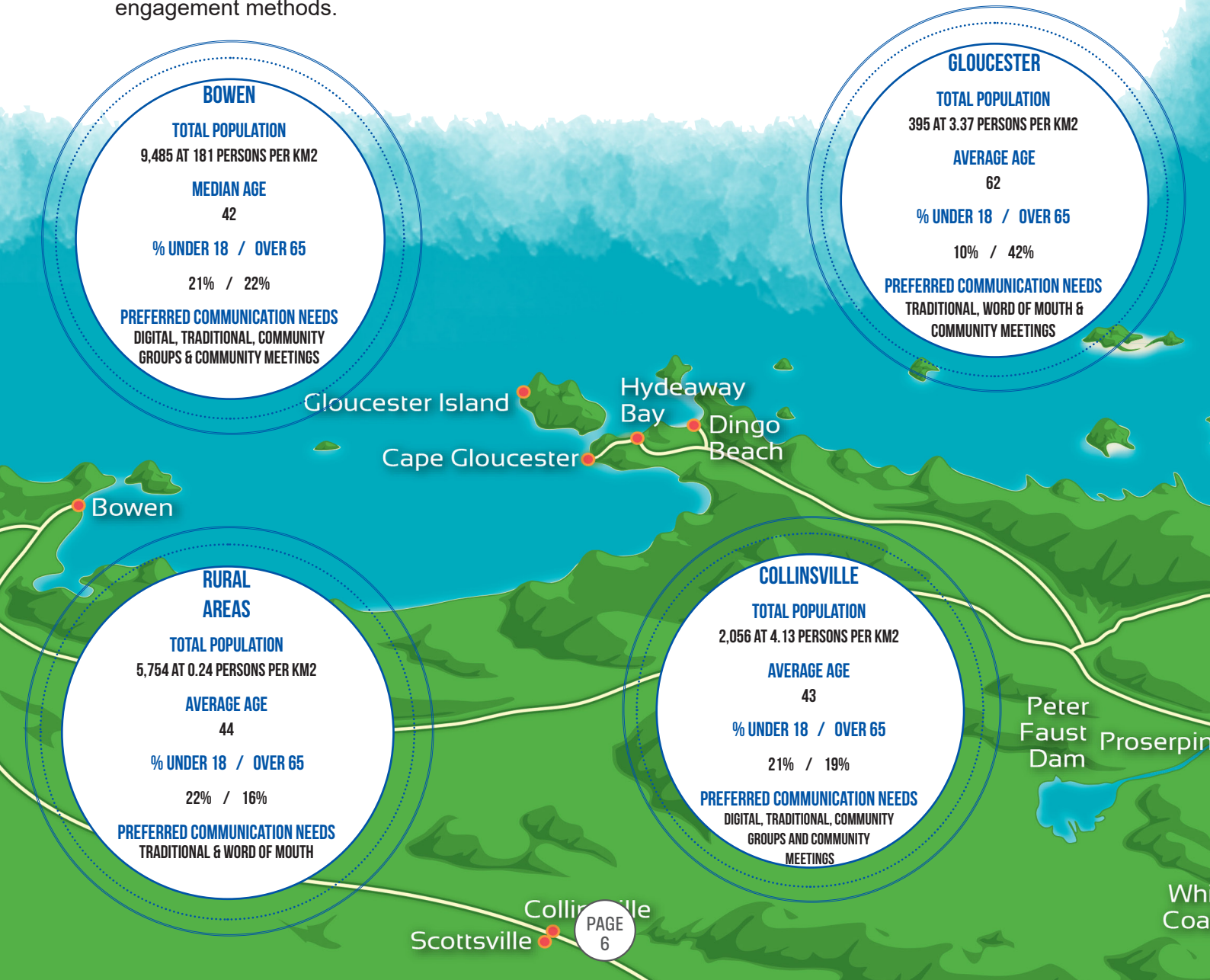


2. Our Whitsunday Community

The Whitsunday Region has an estimated resident population of 38,506 persons (ABS 2022), who live between the main towns of Greater Airlie Beach, Bowen, Collinsville, Proserpine and the Whitsunday Islands, as well as several rural and coastal communities scattered throughout. In addition to permanent residents, the Region attracts up to 1,000,000 visitors per annum, transient workers and over 3,000 new residents per annum, that are important users to be considered in decision making.

The Whitsunday region is one of the fastest growing regions in Queensland, and as the population continues to grow, there is a need to engage more with the public and consider the different needs of our communities. People expect to have a voice and be heard about issues which affect them, and with the increase in social media activity and online consultation methods, public debate and discussion is more accessible than ever.

The Whitsunday community is diverse and includes a mix of demographics that each have different communication expectations and interests, so we consider the needs of each community during our planning. Each of the four main towns has a unique identity and we target our engagement towards the needs of each community. To ensure we reach a broad demographic of audiences during our engagement processes, we use a mix of traditional, face-to-face and online digital engagement methods.





REGION

TOTAL POPULATION
38,506 AT 1.61 PERSONS PER KM2

AVERAGE AGE
42

% UNDER 18 / OVER 65
21% / 18%

VISITORS PER ANNUM
UP TO 1,000,000

YOURSAY MEMBERS / YOURSAY VISITS 2022/23
1,738 / 26,619

AIRLIE BEACH & SURROUNDS

TOTAL POPULATION
12,323 AT 135 PERSONS PER KM2

AVERAGE AGE
40

% UNDER 18 / OVER 65
20% / 13%

PREFERRED COMMUNICATION NEEDS
DIGITAL, TRADITIONAL & COMMUNITY MEETINGS

PROSERPINE

TOTAL POPULATION
3,432 AT 1,151 PERSONS PER KM2

AVERAGE AGE
44

% UNDER 18 / OVER 65
23% / 24%

PREFERRED COMMUNICATION NEEDS
DIGITAL & TRADITIONAL

CONWAY

TOTAL POPULATION
347 AT 16.7 PERSONS PER KM2

AVERAGE AGE
56

% UNDER 18 / OVER 65
15% / 30%

PREFERRED COMMUNICATION NEEDS
TRADITIONAL, WORD OF MOUTH AND COMMUNITY MEETINGS

3. Our Engagement Approach

How we approach engagement will be informed by the following principles:

3.1. Proactive and Collaborative

- Where possible, Council will consult with the community in a pro-active and collaborative manner to guide the strategic direction of a project, strategy or policy.
- Early and proactive consultation will generally be 'high level' to define the objectives, terms of reference or concerns that will guide the evolution of the project. Integrating community interests early increases participation by creating a sense of ownership in the projects development and reduces the chance of major changes later in the project, that add time and cost.

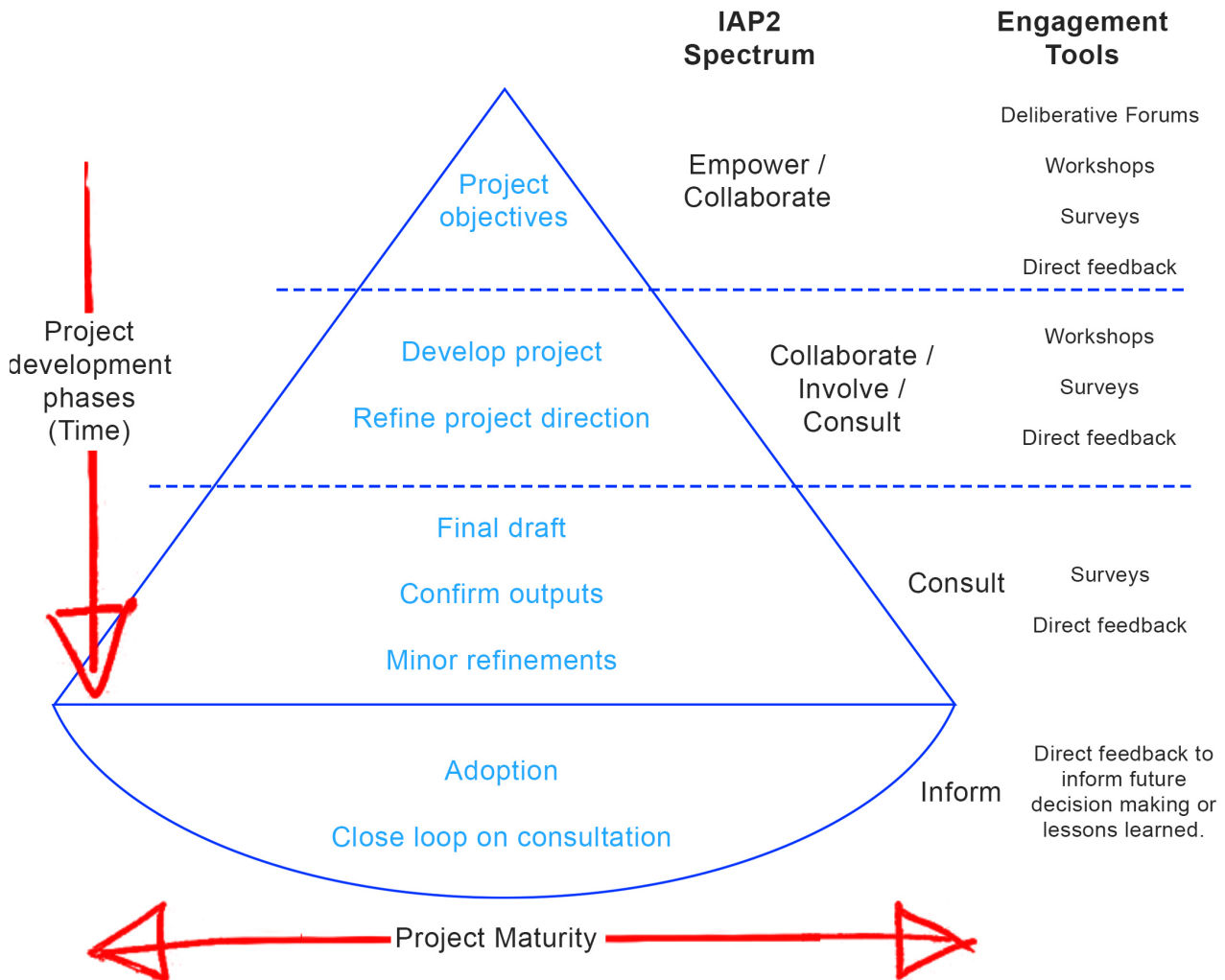


Figure 1: International Association of Public Participation spectrum, relative to project phase.

Note - Proactive and collaborative engagement is not possible in all Council projects, that may have time, cost or technical constraints that limit opportunity for meaningful early feedback.

3.2. Meaningful and Relevant

- Consultation efforts will be strategically designed to seek feedback from the community that is beneficial to the growth of the project and can have a meaningful impact on decision making.
- Feedback sought may vary in scale, from high-level project direction to targeting specific details on individual components of a project that may be subject to change. As per Figure 1, as a project grows in maturity and time, the potential for major changes reduces, as this adds time and cost to the project.
- Communication tools that raise awareness of consultation will focus on providing interested stakeholders with relevant and digestible information, to avoid consultation fatigue suffered by over-consulting or complex and irrelevant information.

3.3. Informed

- Educating the community on consultation projects to highlight key issues, options, costs, benefits, and potential flow-on impacts of a decision ensures that the community can make informed submissions that add value to the decision-making process.
- When submitters and decision-makers have access to and understanding of the same project information, it is more likely that Council and community values align, and understanding of decisions is respected. It is important to simplify long or complex documents or decision-making options for informed community engagement.

3.4. Active Listening

- Consultation seeks to understand the key issues, interests, or ideas presented by the community. Active listening means not just hearing what is said but fully understanding the meaning, intent, or fears behind feedback.
- Active listening understands not just the issues but the motivations behind them to ensure that integration into a project or decision appropriately responds to the concern.
- Active listening is best achieved within deliberative forums, stakeholder meetings, or surveys that explore components of an issue or encourage further responses.

3.5. Transparent and Accountable Decision Making

- Our decision making following public consultation will be transparent, accountable and justified to allow the community to understand how their feedback was considered.
- Transparent decision making is achieved by communicating project outcomes to 'close the loop' a consultation, such that submitters may see a summary of feedback themes and how themes were considered in a project.

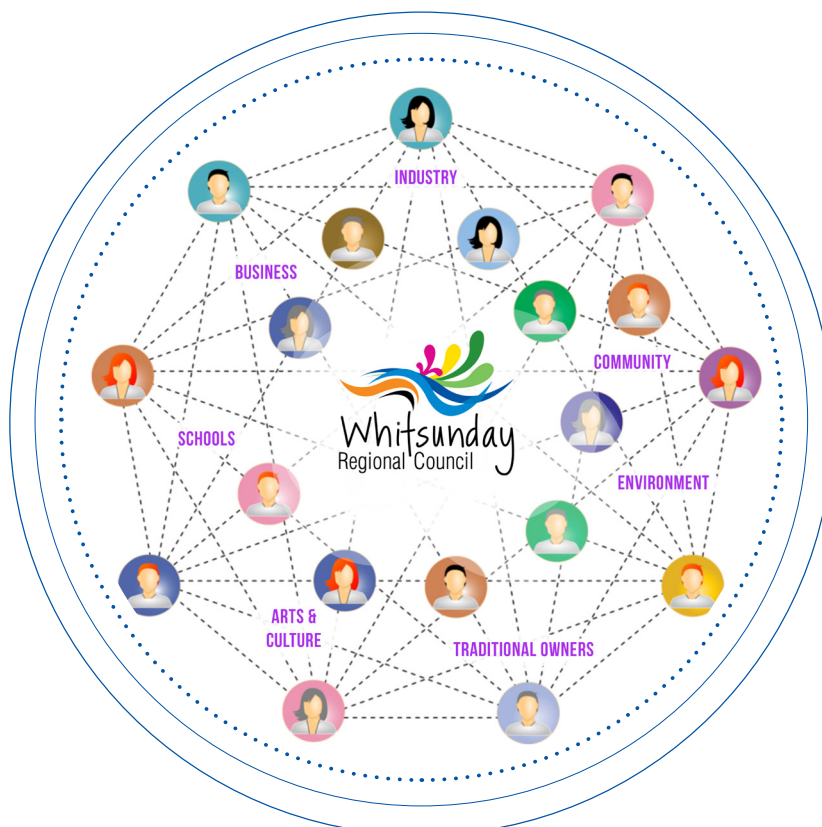


3.6. Inclusive and Equitable Input

- The opportunity for every citizen to take part in the conduct of public affairs is a key component of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- Where possible, we seek to engage residents that don't traditionally participate, such as young persons, busy professionals, parents, culturally diverse and technologically illiterate, by offering various opportunities to participate and, where possible, allocating resources to directly seek their feedback.
- Inclusive and equitable input is important as decisions made by Council impact all residents, not just those who are most interested in engaging. It is achieved through:
 - Utilising a wide variety of communication tools and physical presence in person or via signage, to raise awareness of consultations
 - Permitting various ways for persons to provide feedback
 - Utilising incentives to encourage participation, or directly meeting with impacted stakeholders that may not otherwise participate, and
 - Offering multi-lingual communication tools, via our Online Engagement Portal.

3.7. Relationships and Trust

- Through the above principles, we will develop our relationship with the community on a foundation of trust that we are acting and making decisions in their interest.
- The goal of public consultation in projects is to create a sense of ownership in the projects development. It aims to foster the feeling that individuals are part of it, included, and that the government cares and is genuinely listening and responding to their input.
- In time, this will support an increased desire to participate and trust in shared decision-making consultation processes.




4. Our Engagement Process

4.1. Engagement Spectrum

Our engagement approach and methodology is based upon the *International Association of Public Participation* spectrum shown in Table 2 and the principles that we have defined to support our *Engagement Aim*.

Table 2: *International Association for Public Participation* public participation spectrum.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION 					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

© IAP2 International Federation 2018. All rights reserved. 20181112_v1



Whilst considering the aforementioned principles, our engagement approach and methodology is also subject to the type of project, technical complexity, historic consultation, scale of impact and timeline for a decision. Variations in consultation approaches and level of engagement under the *International Association of Public Participation* spectrum are influenced by project components explored in Table 3.

Table 3: Project components that may influence our engagement process.

PROJECT COMPONENT	INFLUENCE ON ENGAGEMENT PROCESS
TYPE OF PROJECT AND TECHNICAL COMPLEXITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asset renewals, construction or highly technical projects may not involve consultation to inform the scope of the project, particularly where applicable technical standards are defining outcomes. Consultation in this instance would not be meaningful for participants as they are unable to influence the outcome. Consultation may be limited to <i>informing</i> the community of impacts, with communication efforts commensurate to the scale of interest and impact. Where the community can have a meaningful impact on the outcome of a project or set high level direction, consultation is supported and where possible, is proactive and collaborative.
HISTORIC CONSULTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Historic consultations may provide sufficient feedback to guide community sentiment and inform a project. Re-engaging the community can be beneficial where a significant time has lapsed or new factors may influence feedback, otherwise it can cause consultation fatigue from duplicated processes that make the consultation appear irrelevant.
SCALE OF INTEREST & IMPACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The scale of interest and impact of a project guide the intensity of consultation activities, from raising awareness to the engaging community for feedback.
TIMELINE FOR A DECISION AND RESOURCING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grant or financial deadlines, budget constraints, emergency works, or inclement weather may impact on a project plan, resulting in the degree of consultation being streamlined to achieve the project before environmental, economic, or social impacts worsen.
OPERATIONAL MATTER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational matters may include routine maintenance, asset renewals or minor asset upgrades. They occur within the framework of Council policies, governance, standards of service or in accordance with legislation. Consultation on operational matters may be limited to informing the impacted community.
COUNCIL IS NOT PROJECT PROPONENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Projects undertaken by Telecommunications, Ergon, Department Transport Main Roads, or private developers may involve public consultation in our Region. Council has limited influence over their engagement practices, which may be dictated by internal policies or legislation such as the <i>Planning Act 2016</i>.

4.2. Engagement Tools

Yoursay Whitsunday is our primary engagement tool. It is our Online Engagement Portal website that includes an overview of projects that we are raising awareness for or seeking feedback on. Yoursay includes project information, fact sheets to facilitate informed feedback, tools to capture feedback and customer accounts that help keep you in the loop with relevant projects.

In addition to Yoursay, the below communication and engagement tools may be utilised, corresponding to the *International Association of Public Participation* spectrum, degree of interest, impact and individual project components in Table 3.

Table 4: Consultation tools, in relation to consultation phase and *International Association of Public Participation* spectrum.

CONSULTATION PHASE	CONSULTATION TOOLS EXAMPLE	INFORM	CONSULT / INVOLVE	COLLABORATE / EMPOWER
Raise awareness of project and close the loop	Website / Online Engagement Portal Yoursay Whitsunday	●	●	
	Fact sheets	●		
	Email / Mail-out	●		
	Social media	●		
	Media release/Newspaper	●		
	Youtube video	●		
	Noticeboards/Billboards	●		
	Digital roadside signage	●		
	Fliers & posters	●		
	Community catch-ups	●	●	
	Information stall	●	●	
	'Walk the Street'	●	●	
Engage	Customer service requests		●	
	Surveys & quick polls		●	●
	Interviews / Walking interviews		●	●
	Community meetings / Workshops		●	●
	Targeted small expert meetings / Focus groups / Deliberative forums		●	●

Engagement tools that collect feedback can vary in depth of information collected and their frequency. Each contributes feedback for a project and helps collect data from diverse demographics. For example, quick-polls or pop-up information stalls may help seek feedback from busy parents, whilst workshops may suit heavily engaged volunteers. In depth conversations, such as workshops, generally occurring less frequently as they absorb more information from a single event than less intensive activities, such as quick-polls.

Figure 2 below provides an indicative example of the depth of information collected by each engagement tool, an example of their frequency and how all feedback themes can be consolidated over the long term to inform community profiles, Community Plan priorities and future project planning.

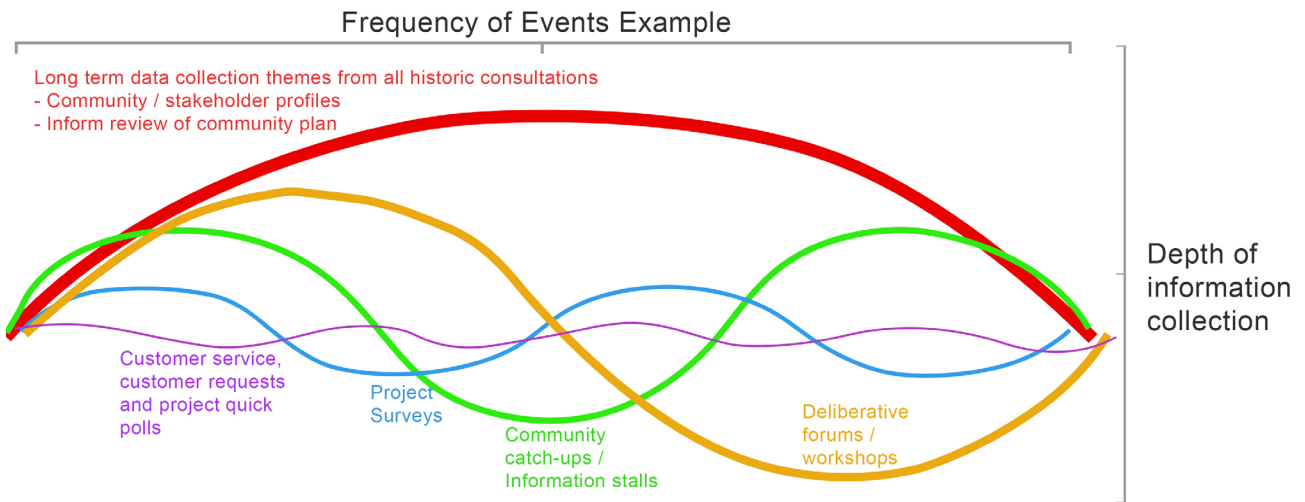


Figure 2: Indicative example of engagement tools frequency and depth of information collected.



5. Engagement Actions

The following actions are proposed to continuously improve our community engagement practices and promote our engagement principles in practice.

Table 5: Actions and investigations to improve our engagement processes.

ACTION	OVERVIEW	TIMING
Install digital noticeboards at Council customer service centres and offices.	Utilise to improve awareness of Council projects relevant to the local Township.	COMPLETE
Ongoing improvement of community catch-ups.	Continue to operate community catch-ups as a method to improve awareness of Council projects and understand community priorities. Consider optimal time of day to host community catch-ups.	ONGOING
<i>International Association of Public Participation</i> staff training and development of internal engagement guidelines.	Improve understanding of engagement practices and embed engagement principles within project planning across all levels of Council.	2023 - 2024
Develop methods and relationships to reach diverse cultural, minority groups and demographic age groups	Identify relevant upcoming projects and liaise with under-represented groups to understand challenges in engaging and how best to facilitate their participation. Methods to improve engagement may include improved 3-year project planning to enable earlier notice of upcoming projects, stakeholder meetings to share information and inclusive communications.	2024 - 2026
Develop stakeholder relationships with key expert stakeholders representing environment, economic and social interest groups.	Identify relevant upcoming projects and seek to develop relationships with stakeholder 'champions', for participation in collaborative consultation projects. Develop their understanding of constraints and absorb interests proactively into project planning.	ONGOING
Design more participatory / collaborative consultation practices.	Where possible, encourage workshops with key stakeholders early in project development to refine project direction.	ONGOING
Improve face to face engagement with community.	Make efforts to reach broader spectrums of the community and increase opportunities for active listening by attending local markets to promote Council projects and holding more pop-up information stalls or workshops.	ONGOING
Development of community and stakeholder profiles.	Ongoing data collection to refine Council understanding of priorities, concerns and historical context of Town and stakeholder profiles, to improve project planning and engagement.	2024 - 2025

ACTION	OVERVIEW	TIMING
Promotion of Yoursay engagement portal, to encourage users to sign up to an account.	Registering users in our system identifies their interests and preferred contact methods, allowing us to notify them of upcoming projects that are relevant to them. Competitions will be run annually to promote sign-up.	ONGOING
Investigate mapping capital works, road maintenance programs and other operational maintenance projects.	Spatially identify upcoming projects to help residents identify upcoming projects in their neighbourhood, service improvements and potential impacts.	2024 - 2025
Develop <i>My Place, My Neighbourhood, My Town</i> Community Newsletters.	Create bi-annual newsletters for each Town to send to Yoursay members, to cap off recently completed consultations, projects and upcoming consultations.	2024 - 2025
Investigate Yoursay Mobile app	Investigate technology solutions to make Yoursay more accessible and easy to use. Consider developing mobile app that may easily notify of upcoming projects, link into community newsletters and spatial mapping of projects	2025 - 2026

6. Alignment with Strategic Documents

Whitsunday Corporate Plan 2021 - 2026

The Whitsunday Corporate Plan 2021-2026 identifies its mission “is to provide engaged, accountable, proactive and unified leadership that is focused on delivering sustainable outcomes.”

This Community Engagement Strategy aligns with the Plan's Social Pillar, stating “*We will engage with our community, consider feedback and the social aspects of our decisions and activities, to ensure the various needs and requirements that exist in our diverse community are met.*”

Community Plan 2022 - 2032

Community Engagement was a key part of the process through the development of the Community Plan 2022-2032, with surveys, workshops, community conversations, undertaken as part of the process. Feedback identified a strong desire to ensure that views of the Whitsunday community are reflected in the long-term planning process, visions, and aspirations of Council projects.

Communications & Marketing Plan 2021 - 2024

This Strategy sits alongside the Communications & Marketing Plan 2021-2024, which outlines community engagement as a key element of effective governance and transparent communications. Several objectives for community engagement are linked to this document, aiming to support effective communications practice and building community trust.

7. Engagement Framework & Reporting

Community Engagement Strategy

- This *Community Engagement Strategy 2024 - 2028* provides a high-level overview of our consultation philosophy that defines how we engage with the community.

Community Engagement Plan (individual projects)

- Community Engagement Plans are created for individual projects that detail how consultation will occur with specific stakeholders to integrate community sentiment into project outcomes.

Consultation Report and Consultation summary (individual projects)

- Consultation Reports are created following major consultation, reporting on all aspects of the consultation, including communication tools, who was engaged, consultation results and recommended next steps for integrating results into an outcome or decision.
- The report is supplemented by a 1-page summary that identifies key results and next steps, prepared for participants in the consultation to 'close the loop'.
- This information is placed on Council's Online Engagement Portal Yoursay Whitsunday project page and emailed to participants to facilitate transparent decision making.





83 Main Street

PROSERPINE QLD 4800

Phone: 1300 WRC QLD

Email: info@whitsundayrc.qld.gov.au

Web: www.whitsundayrc.qld.gov.au