



Engagement guide for local government



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Our world has changed

The public health restrictions associated with the management of COVID-19 mean that we need to do things differently.

For councils, this means that in some cases we need to temporarily change the way we engage with our communities and stakeholders.

We have prepared this engagement guide to help you navigate your engagement options under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act).

Before you do anything!

As a council, you have an opportunity to reach out to your community and stakeholders and seek to understand how they can engage with you. This is not the time for assumptions. Reach out to your communities and stakeholders and ask the question.

Right tools for the right job

To make sure you are choosing the right engagement tool for the context and scale of your project, consider the following questions.

- Are there legal requirements for the consultation? Do you need formal feedback/submissions?
- Can you use all or only some of your regular engagement methods?
- Do you need to reach specific stakeholder groups that you cannot reach digitally?
- Do you need to consider extending consultation time frames to ensure adequate stakeholder reach?

Regulatory compliance

- The community participation plan (CPP) of most councils refer to a wide range of engagement methods
- DA's can now be displayed from council websites or the NSW Planning Portal
- If you need help with the e-planning portal contact epanning@planning.nsw.gov.au
- Councils do not need to provide physical copies of documents for public inspection at their offices
- Councils should contact the department if their administrative capacity is impacting their notification requirements

Stay up to date

Please check out www.planning.nsw.gov.au for further information as advice, restrictions and guidelines may be updated regularly.



Doing things differently in the context of COVID-19

- Consider using more than one engagement technique and have longer consultation or public notification periods.
- If you need to purchase new software licences, consult with neighbouring councils—it may be cheaper to share costs.
- Don't think that having more communication and engagement channels is necessarily better—it creates work and people get frustrated when things are not kept up to date.
- Be flexible—people in your community are stressed, your staff are stressed, and this is uncharted territory.
- Digital engagement is different to in-person engagement—don't think you can just do the same thing online. You will have to adapt your content, style and format.
- Nothing is impossible—reach out to engagement specialists for advice, including the department.
- Don't rely on hardcopy newspaper advertising notifications. Explore options like Australia Post's mailing services.
- As the social distancing requirements may be in place for six months, consider mixing up your engagement methods.

Alternative methods of engagement

The table below provides you with alternative engagement methods for your consideration.

Method	Description	Platform	Audience size	Pro	Con	Tips and tricks
Virtual public information sessions, workshops, meetings and focus groups	<p>Online platform where you can invite questions and ask stakeholders to participate</p> <p>Just like your regular in-person sessions (meetings, etc.) just online</p>	Digital	Range from 2 - 500	<p>Can be invitation only or open to anyone to register</p> <p>Questions can be private or viewed by all</p> <p>Live captions—great accessibility</p> <p>Data and metrics available</p> <p>List of participants and questions</p> <p>Recordable</p> <p>Can be live or pre-recorded</p> <p>In-conference polling</p> <p>Share screen and documents</p> <p>Can do panel discussions</p> <p>Built-in registration and reminder functionality</p> <p>Can have a combination of video and teleconference</p>	<p>Licence fee</p> <p>Some platforms have different levels of accessibility and functionality depending on how much you pay</p> <p>Only the digital audience have full functionality</p>	<p>Check the licence, privacy and security of every third-party platform</p> <p>No one needs to be in the office to run these</p> <p>Do shorter, more frequent sessions</p> <p>Do the sessions across different areas of your LGA to get specific localised responses and to help manage registration and capacity</p> <p>Turn the questions into published FAQs</p>

Method	Description	Platform	Audience size	Pro	Con	Tips and tricks
Webinar	On line interactive education presentation	Digital	Range from 2 to 500	As above	As above	<p>Can turn questions into FAQs and share these on your website</p> <p>Consider combining with a pre and post survey</p>
Mail out and other postal services	<p>Can meet legal requirements for notifications</p> <p>Wide variety of services available</p> <p>Letters can be to impacted stakeholders or as a board information activity</p> <p>Can include surveys and voting cards</p>	Post	Customisable	<p>Can target specific areas, post code, streets or your mailing list</p> <p>Can be fully managed by Australia post</p> <p>No reduced service from Australia post at this stage</p> <p>Reaches everyone</p> <p>Metrics available for some mail outs via Australia Post</p>		<p>This can be delivered by Australia post</p> <p>Can include a return self-addressed envelope</p> <p>Work with your local postal service to get them to hold your mail</p> <p>Australia Post have bulk mail partners who can help you</p> <p>Can all be organised on line</p> <p>Research shows post is still a fantastic platform with great reach</p> <p>Returned mail can be managed under the COVID -19 guidelines</p>



Method	Description	Platform	Audience size	Pro	Con	Tips and tricks
Gamefication	Digital game where participants solve problems, navigate scenarios and challenges that are applicable to the project etc. Creates awareness of impact of actions and choices.	Digital	Public	Highly applicable to planning and community space design Great for hard-to-reach audiences Can create behaviour change Accessible Free for user	Cost Digital audience only	Great for projects where you need to generate interest If you need to get the community to do something differently quickly, use gamefication FANTASTIC FUN!
Graphic recording	Make a teleconference come to life with a visual representation of the discussion	Digital Print	Small – large groups	Cost effective Can be used across multiple digital and social media platforms Accessible for hearing impaired people	Digital audience only at the current time	See if there are local artists who can help Can all be displayed on line
QR codes & augmented reality	QR codes can be used to display building projects in combination with a smart phone	Digital	Public Customisable	Can replace site tours	Some are really expensive — shop around Digital audience only	Consider replacing site tours
Blogs	Regular online posts on issues or projects by council, councillors and mayors	Website	Public	Keeps people interested, entertained and informed Visual connection during self-isolation	Must be regular Only digital audience	Keep a discussion relevant Great for councillors and the mayor to retain a presence in the community



Method	Description	Platform	Audience size	Pro	Con	Tips and tricks
Research	Used to gather community views or get greater understanding of community priorities and values	Phone	Customisable	Keep up to date on local issues Opportunity for participation while people are self-isolating Wide reach Topic specific or general	Cost involved	Do it for a range of topics to get better return on investment Passive promotion of council Can combine well with on line discussion forums
Live/work/play maps	Interactive mapping with 'pins' to capture community feedback Great add ins, can run whole consultation from this one platform	Digital	Public Can be closed group	Great visual tools On the ground feedback Customisable required fields Can include add ins such as surveys, discussion forums and post it walls	Digital audience only	Consider expanding how you currently use this tool
Interactive mobile apps	Interactive application for use on smart phones and other devices. Apps can help you design parks and open spaces and you can look at including voting and polling	Digital	Public	Get people involved in design Metrics available Easy to use Highly accessible Free for user	Some are really expensive — shop around Digital audience only	Need a strong relevance Agencies can help you Get your local TAFE or school to design your App
Virtual post it note walls	Digital platform where people can stick a virtual post it note to share their thoughts, provide feedback	Digital	Public	Great for early engagement when identifying values and broad issues Great for closing the loop and 'tell us how you feel' questions	Digital audience only	Social pinpoint is a platform used by the department and councils People can also post their photos etc.

Method	Description	Platform	Audience size	Pro	Con	Tips and tricks
Alternate radio	Many cultural specific radio stations are available	Radio	Culturally specific	Target hard to reach groups	May be a cost	Community service announcements are a great way to reach people and spread the word
Polling / voting	Voting on a number of options or projects	Digital	Customisable	Get clear indication of community views Cheap		Need to be very clear on content and question design
Live chat	Chat time with a specified councillor or the mayor Live from website or YouTube	Digital	Public	Chat function allows people to ask questions Can be moderated Can be used across social channels	Be careful what you say Check your environment and background carefully	Keep your council front and centre Pick a mix of topics to keep people interested
Community notice boards – radio and TV	Radio stations and TV channels have a free service in the morning where they announce community notices	Radio TV	Public	Free Great reach Long standing platform		Messages need to be short and sweet with a clear action
Feedback cards Front window display	Pre-paid postcard that can be filled out and sent back to council Or Card could be put in the front window of a house / business to indicate support – council staff can see household preference by driving past	Post	Public Targeted	Can include simple tick-the-box voting Can track responses Can be creative Interactive and reinforces the 'stay at home' message	Compliance rate Neighbours can see how you vote	Councils could use these as a check-in for your community Can be organised via Australia Post People can get to a post box without compromising social distancing requirements Make it visually eye catching

Method	Description	Platform	Audience size	Pro	Con	Tips and tricks
Incentives to engage	Consider different ways you can acknowledge or reward your community and stakeholders for engaging in these challenging times	Any and all	Customisable	Will keep people interested Creates an interest and focal point	Manage expectations around incentive type and frequency	This doesn't have to be a monetary reward Think outside the square
Surveys	Surveys can either be stand alone, hard copy or digital or can be interactive and/ or embedded into other digital engagement platforms	Hard copy, digital	Customisable	Great way to get feedback without formal submission Can be used at any stage of a project	Survey design is a skill and careful consideration must be given Often needs an incentive to get compliance	Work backwards - consider the end data that you need to help you focus your question design Stick with simple, plain English



Engagement check list

- We have identified the stakeholders we need to engage with
- We know how our stakeholders want to be engaged during COVID 19
- We are confident that we are meeting all our statutory requirements with our engagement methods
- Our mix of engagement methods means that we are effectively engaging with all our relevant stakeholders