



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY | 2024 – 2028

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#### **Acknowledgement of Country**

We at Charters Towers Regional Council acknowledge the first nations people of the land on which Charters Towers and its greater region are located, and where we conduct our business. We pay respect to their Elders past and present.

We are committed to a positive future for all.





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# Mayor's Message



**Mayor Liz Schmidt**

*Charters Towers Regional Council*

Charters Towers Regional Council (Council) is dedicated to fostering transparent and accountable governance. We are deeply committed to the future of our Region and believe in actively engaging with our community. Our Community Engagement Strategy 2024-2028 (the Strategy) outlines our approach to connecting with the community, including who we engage with, when and how we engage, the decision-making process, evaluation of the engagement outcomes, and reporting on those outcomes.

By implementing the Strategy, we aim to ensure that we involve, listen to, and maintain transparency with the community when developing policies, programs, or delivering projects and activities. Community engagement is increasingly important and expected, and it is crucial for Council to provide meaningful engagement on significant topics and projects in the future.

The Strategy will serve as a guide for determining the most appropriate tools,

techniques, and methods of engagement, identifying and understanding stakeholders and stakeholder groups, and designing engagement activities that meet their specific requirements. The guiding principles outlined in the Strategy are based on the methodologies of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2). IAP2 has developed a set of tools that are widely recognised as best practices for promoting community involvement and engagement, and these practices are becoming more prevalent in local government.

The successful implementation of the Strategy relies on the shared responsibility of Council and key stakeholders, including employees, contractors, and consultants. We understand that productive and collaborative partnerships, particularly with our community, are essential for achieving successful engagement.

# Our Community Engagement

## Goals and Aspirations

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Council wants to engage meaningfully with the community, to understand it's needs and priorities and involve local people in designing the future of the Charters Towers Region.



## The Strategy reflects and supports our commitment to:



### **INFORM**

Inform the community about Council activities and services.



### **MEET**

Meet our statutory responsibilities for public consultation.



### **PROMOTE**

Promote community interest in Council activities and service provision.



### **PROVIDE**

Provide opportunities for the community to be involved in developing key initiatives, policies, and public spaces.



### **DEFINE**

Define pathways for the community to provide comment and feedback.



### **MONITOR**

Monitor and evaluate how community engagement is being conducted and integrated into decision-making.



### **FACILITATE**

Facilitate improved relationships between Councillors the broader community including hard to reach groups of the Charters Towers Region.



# What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement, also known as ‘public participation’, is about involving the community and others in decision-making and it is at the very core of the democratic process in local government in Queensland. Community input and participation is crucial for building a better Region where people want to live, work, and visit.

Charters Towers Regional Council has an organisation-wide commitment to engaging with our communities that matter in a transparent, open, and accountable way.



## Why is Community Engagement Important?

Council recognises that people have a right to be informed and to have a say on the projects and issues that are important to them, or which have an impact on their daily lives. Community engagement helps Council to better understand the community’s views and values and enables it to make more informed decisions and deliver better services.



## Why do we Need a Strategy?

This Community Engagement Strategy outlines our approach to engaging with the Charters Towers community and other stakeholders. It provides transparency and clarity for all so that they can understand their role in the decision-making process. This Strategy outlines who, when, and how we will undertake engagement on our plans and policies with the level of community involvement varying depending on the project or issue and the potential impact of the project or issue on the community.



# Objectives



## The strategy will:

- Provide a framework to guide Council's engagement with the community in a meaningful and appropriate way.
- Provide a consistent and flexible process for employees to guide the selection of the most appropriate method and level of engagement for projects or decisions.
- Support the environment of trust and confidence established with community and stakeholders to ensure a long-term sustainable and productive relationship and commitment to a shared vision for the Charters Towers Region.
- Strengthen Council initiatives that involve community and stakeholder partnerships, particularly in the creation of Council's Community Strategic Plan (CSP).

## Specific Community Engagement Objectives

- Involve community and stakeholders in the development of the Charters Towers Community Strategic Plan and supporting plans and strategies.
- Provide opportunities for feedback on issues or proposals that affect the region.
- Upskill Council employees in community engagement techniques, tools and ideas to improve community participation.
- Identify Councillor participation opportunities at community events and campaigns.
- Improve communication with the community using new technologies.

# Our Engagement Principles

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Council will apply the following principles for community engagement and communications:



## Partnership and Respect

Our goal is to collaborate with the community and stakeholders, ensuring respectful engagement at all times.



## Accessibility

We will provide access to information which is both easily obtained and understood by people of all abilities.



## Transparency

Decisions will be made transparently and openly, with stakeholders being provided reasons for the decisions made, along with an explanation of how their views were considered.



## Building Relationships

We act in an honest, open, and respectful way to build strong relationships, partnerships, and trust with our stakeholders. We encourage effective and ongoing partnerships with the community to provide meaningful opportunities for participation in decision-making.



### **Clarity of Purpose**

Our engagement is well-planned with a clearly defined purpose and stages for community input. We are clear about why, how, and what we are engaging about. If the community is affected by a decision, they should be consulted.



### **Timely and Coordinated**

We engage early on and provide enough time for stakeholders to provide input so that views can be genuinely considered. We collaborate across Council to ensure our engagement activities are coordinated.



### **Tailored**

We use a range of engagement and communication methods that suit the purpose and type of project or issue we are consulting on. We consider the impact of the proposed project, complexity, risk, timing, and the range of stakeholders involved. Information should be in plain language, easily accessible, and in a form that makes it easy for people to participate.



### **Learning from Practice**

We evaluate our engagement activities and learn from the feedback that has been provided to us.





# Engaging Our Community

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If Council is to effectively engage, we must have a clear picture of who we are engaging with.

The diversity of our community highlights that a 'one size fits all' engagement approach will not work and that we must constantly employ a range of engagement methods.



## Charters Towers Regional Profile

The Charters Towers LGA covers a land area of 68,580 km<sup>2</sup> (the land area of the State of Tasmania is 90,760 km<sup>2</sup> by comparison). As of

30 June 2023, Charters Towers had an estimated resident population of 12,013, and a population density of just 0.18 persons per km<sup>2</sup>.



## Total Population

The population base has been relatively stable over the last five years with an average annual growth rate of 0.1% and an average growth rate of -0.3% over ten years.

The median age is 42.2 years which is slightly higher compared to the Regional Queensland average of 38.6 years.



## Age Profile

In 2021, 27.1% of the population was 19 years and under (compared to 24.8% for Regional Queensland) primarily driven by the prevalence of boarding schools in Charters Towers. The working age population (20 to 59) totalled 44.7% compared

to the Regional Queensland average of 52.4%. Those aged 65 and over represent 21.2% of the population which is higher than the Regional Queensland average (16.9%).



## Diversity

In 2021, 79.8% of the population were born in Australia. The top 3 countries represented by those born overseas were New Zealand, England and the Philippines resulting in 84.4% of

the population speaking English at home (3.8% where a non-English language is used).



## Education Levels

Only 9.6% of the population has a university qualification compared with the Regional Queensland average (21.9%), with 23.8% of the population holding a trade

qualification (compared to 28.4% for Regional Queensland). 50% of the population aged 15 years and over has stated they have no educational qualifications.



## Working Population

The participation rate percentage of the population in the labour force is

low (53%) compared to the Regional Queensland average (61.6%).



## We recognise the Traditional Owners of our Land

We seek to address the legacy of our past and ensure a better quality of life for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The percentage of Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islanders as a percentage of the total population is 9.7% which is high compared to the Regional Queensland average of 4.6%.





# Who do we Engage With?

## Our Stakeholders

A vital component of the community engagement process includes identifying and gaining an understanding of the key stakeholders who will be impacted by or who have an interest in a decision.

Our engagement aims to reach everyone in the community to ensure a range of views are heard.



### Internal and External Group

Council has several committees made up of employees, Councillors, as well as external community members and they meet on issues relevant to specific topic areas. The committees include but are not limited to:

- The Regional Arts Development Fund (RADF) Committee
- Rural Industry Advisory Group
- Youth Council
- Indigenous Advisory Group
- Charters Towers Country University Centre Working Group



### External

The list of external stakeholders is long and varied. Stakeholder groups who may be identified in a community engagement process include but are not limited to:

- Chamber of Commerce
- Local Schools
- Sporting organisations
- Disability services
- Age Care providers
- Local businesses
- QLD Health
- Local State Member
- Local Federal Member









# Inclusive Participation

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Council is committed to providing opportunities for these communities to participate and have a say by:

- Translating resources and information where necessary.
- Avoiding technical jargon and using language which is easy to understand.
- Providing information in accessible formats.
- Ensuring a variety of engagement methods are available.
- Ensuring venues are accessible.



## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

Council recognises the First Australians, peoples of the oldest living culture in the world. We are committed to working with Traditional Owners on matters of land, water, language, culture, and cultural heritage. Council is working to embed Indigenous issues and interests throughout the organisation. We want to ensure that the voices of all Indigenous peoples within the Charters Towers region are included in this process and that our relationships with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are meaningful.



## Young People

Council is committed to building a Region that is welcoming and inclusive of young people. We provide opportunities for young people to become active citizens through our Youth Council but recognise that further work is needed through co-design initiatives, online engagement, and more face-to-face engagement activities.



## Vulnerable People

We have vulnerable people that live, work, and visit the Region including low-income households, social housing tenants, people with disabilities, and people experiencing homelessness. Council has not currently identified any groups representing the Region's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex (LGBTQI) community but will endeavour to develop this knowledge over time.



## Elderly People

Council is committed to engaging with our elderly community members, recognising their invaluable contributions and unique perspectives. Through regular consultations, social programs, and dedicated support services, we strive to ensure that our seniors are actively involved in shaping decisions that affect their lives. By fostering an inclusive environment, we aim to enhance their well-being and strengthen their connection to the broader community.



# Decision Making Process

This Strategy will guide the way engagement is planned and undertaken.

Planning for engagement considers a range of factors including identifying who the project or issue will impact, how much impact the project or issue will have, and a project or issue. The requirements for public participation will also be considered,

for example, minimum or maximum timeframes, to ensure that there is enough time available for the community to have a say. Council's process for commencing engagement is shown below:







# How we Engage

## Levels of Participation

Our engagement approach can vary depending on the need and impact of the project or issue. There are some legislative requirements which govern the minimum level of engagement for some services provide by Council.

The IAP2 (International Association of Public Participation) Spectrum ([www.iap2.org.au](http://www.iap2.org.au)) shows that differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals,

timeframes, resources, and levels of concern in the decision to be made. The IAP2 model is recommended in the local government sector for the preparation of Community Engagement Strategies.

Importantly, the Spectrum defines the public's role in any community engagement program and sets out the promise being made to the public at each level of participation. The levels of public participation are:

				
Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Usually means that a decision has been made or an action is needed, so the community and stakeholders are provided with information.	The community can provide feedback on the issues, options, and decisions.	The community's concerns and feedback are reflected in decision-making.	The community and Council partner in decision-making towards a common goal.	The community and stakeholders have final decision-making power.

Community engagements will be undertaken at various times, however, they must all align with the Community Engagement Strategy, and be guided by an engagement plan. Appropriate support and guidance will be provided to deliver effective and appropriate community engagement activities and initiatives which align with Council's Strategy

Council provides a range of ways for the community and stakeholders to participate in the decision-making process, these are outlined in Table 1.



## Table 1. Community Engagement Options

Participation Level	Channel	In Practice
<b>Inform</b>	Website and social media	Provide information via social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, and Council's website/s.
	Advertisements, signs, letters, and notices	A letter, sign, advertisement, or notice may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite the community to participate in engagement</li> <li>• Describe the matter, project, or issue</li> <li>• Outline how people can get more information</li> <li>• Advise how to make a comment or be involved</li> <li>• Outline the timeframe for consultation</li> </ul>
	Administration Centre & Excelsior Library	Information is made available for public exhibitions
	Translated communication materials	Materials are translated to align with key projects and demographics.
<b>Consult &amp; Involve</b>	Have Your Say Platform	A place for the community to share their ideas, have active conversations, and help shape plans, policies, and projects.
	Youth Council	The Youth Council is an opportunity for young people to engage directly with Council to discuss and provide feedback on Council plans and activities that are relevant to young people.
	Community meetings and workshops	Meetings and workshops to provide an opportunity to work through an issue to gather feedback on aspects of a project or policy.
	Council Meetings	Members of the community can participate in Council's General Meeting process prior to a decision being made as outlined in Council's Standing Orders. This can include speaking at a public forum, making submissions and petitions or as an observer at Council Meetings.
	Public exhibitions and submissions	Council's public exhibition process seeks written community and stakeholder feedback on a plan, policy, or project.
	Surveys	Using market research software for telephone, online, and offline surveys optimised for mobile phones and language translations. Hardcopy surveys to be available to access at the Administration Centre and Excelsior Library.
	Drop-in sessions and pop-up stalls	Provide a face-to-face opportunity for the community to attend a drop-in session or a pop-up stall often held as part of a wider event to gather information and provide feedback on an issue or project/ policy related decision.
<b>Collaborate &amp; Empower</b>	Advisory Committees	These Committees are made up of various members of our community and Councillors who advise the Council on their views, needs, and interests in the Region. Committee members are selected because of their experience or skill in the area relating to that Committee interest.
	Deliberative processes such as Town Hall style meetings and citizen juries	Deliberative forums are used for in-depth consideration of an issue by a cross section of the community to provide well informed feedback on how a decision should be made.
	Community and stakeholder reference groups	Groups of community and stakeholder representatives that meet with staff, Councillors, or others to work through an issue, determine a decision for a project, policy, or plan and provide advice on the decision.

# When we Engage

Council employees should consider community engagement at any time depending on Council's program of work.

Every time there is a project to be developed, or a decision to be made there is an opportunity for a community engagement process. Early notice of emerging issues puts Council in a better position to respond in a proactive way.

In a successful engagement planning process, Council employees should consider the impact and complexity of the issue and the optimal time and tools needed for people to engage and respond. Whilst the Local Government Act 2009 sets out minimum requirements for some specific consultations, each engagement process is considered on its individual basis and merit.

Council's approach to community engagement draws from the best practice principles of community engagement as promoted by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), which provides a guide for undertaking engagement activities based on the required outcome. This approach underpins Council's engagement focus and provides a clear reference for all staff considering community engagement.

Table 2 explains how we will engage with the community about plans and strategies, as well as other work we do, so the community knows what to expect.

Planning related projects have specific public exhibition timeframes which must be met, and these are also outlined below.

## Table 2. Engagement Timeframes

When	Engagement Level	How	What	Exhibition Period
<b>Council plans and Strategies</b>	Consult	Ask for community views about Council plans and strategies. In addition to minimum statutory provisions, take all reasonable steps to ensure stakeholders are advised of the opportunity for feedback.	Recognise community views and concerns and ensure these are reflected as inputs into Council's final decision.	28 days
<b>Council's long-term plans</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Strategic Plan (Corporate Plan)</li> <li>• Community Engagement Strategy</li> <li>• Economic Development Plan</li> <li>• Destination Management Plan</li> </ul>	Involve	Involve the community to ensure priorities are reflected in the decision. Provide a range of opportunities and channels for the community to share their views.	Directly reflect community concerns and aspirations in the finalised plan.	28 days
<b>Council's Annual Operational Plan and Budget</b>	Inform	Involve the community to ensure priorities are reflected in the decision. Provide a range of opportunities and channels for the community to share their views.	Directly reflect community concerns and aspirations in the finalised plan.	14 days

**Table 2. Engagement Timeframes – continued**

When	Engagement Level	How	What	Exhibition Period
Maintenance and renewal capital works	Inform	Share balanced information on current activities and plans. Take all reasonable steps to ensure stakeholders are advised of Council's projects.	Communicate updates to keep the community informed.	Minimum of 7 days
New capital works and place making	Involve	Involve the community to ensure priorities are reflected in the decision. Provide a range of opportunities and channels for the community to share their views.	Directly reflect community concerns and aspirations in the finalised plan.	Minimum of 14 days
Annual Water Meter Readings	Inform	Advise the townships impacted by manual reads.	Communicate timeframes to keep residents informed.	Minimum of 7 days
Council's key land use planning instruments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regional Town Plan</li> <li>Voluntary Planning Agreements</li> <li>Local Government Infrastructure Plan</li> </ul>	Consult	Ask for community views about Council plans and strategies. In addition to minimum statutory provisions, take all reasonable steps to ensure stakeholders are advised of the opportunity for feedback. The extent of notification will be determined based on a series of considerations including the scale, complexity, nature and potential impact of the planning proposal or instrument.	Recognise community views and concerns and ensure these are reflected as inputs into Council's final decision.	Minimum of 28 days
Planning Scheme amendment proposals – major	Involve	Involve the community to ensure priorities are reflected in the decision. Provide a range of opportunities and channels for the community to share their views. The extent of notification will be determined based on a series of considerations including the scale, complexity, nature and potential impact of the planning proposal or instrument.	Recognise community views and concerns and ensure these are reflected as inputs into Council's final decision. Reasons for decision are provided in the Council Report and website.	Minimum of 40 days
Development Applications Other than for accepted or code assessable development	Consult	Ask for community views about Council plans and strategies. In addition to minimum statutory provisions, take all reasonable steps to ensure stakeholders are advised of the opportunity for feedback.	Recognise community views and concerns and ensure these are reflected as inputs into Council's final decision. Ensure Council's statement of reasons for decision is published.	Governed by statutory timeframe requirements – usually 15 business days but could be greater if involving a variation request or prescribed by the <i>Planning Regulation 2017</i>
Application for a change of the development Permit	Consult	Ask for community views about Council plans and strategies. In addition to minimum statutory provisions, take all reasonable steps to ensure stakeholders are advised of the opportunity for feedback.	Recognise community views and concerns and ensure these are reflected as inputs into Council's final decision.	28 days
Ensure Council's statement of reasons for decision is published	Consult	Ask for community views about Council plans and strategies. In addition to minimum statutory provisions, take all reasonable steps to ensure stakeholders are advised of the opportunity for feedback.	Recognise community views and concerns and ensure these are reflected as inputs into Council's final decision.	28 days

# Evaluation and Reporting

Monitoring and reviewing Council’s engagement activities is essential in order to identify areas or improvement and to realise our goals and objectives more efficiently. Council will use a range of evaluation and reporting methods to assess and communicate its community engagement progress including:



Progress	Review	Reporting	Engagement
Undertaking annual audits to check progress against the objectives identified in this Strategy.	Reviewing the strategy, policy, and toolkit every four years.	Undertaking a community satisfaction survey every two years and reporting on the outcomes.	Reviewing participation levels in engagement activities



Feedback	Expertise	Delivery
Reviewing verbal and written feedback from stakeholders on the effectiveness of engagement activities.	The number of staff trained in the IAP2 framework.	Quarterly Executive Leadership Team and Council reporting to improve the visibility of engagement delivery.



# Responsibilities and Budget



Community engagement across Council is supported by the Media, Marketing and Communications Team, providing advice on resources, engagement design, and engagement planning.

Although Council's Media, Marketing & Communications Team play a key role in engagement, community engagement is a key component in all Council projects at all levels of activity.

A dedicated budget for community engagement activities relating to key Corporate Planning documents and the Community satisfaction Survey sits with the Office of the CEO.

All other community engagement activities are to be funded by the relevant Council Department.

## **Charters Towers Regional Council Engagement Strategy Team**

This group will oversee the delivery of the Strategy. Participants will include the following with the involvement of the Chief Executive Officer and other relevant staff as may be required:

- Executive Services Manager
- Community Engagement Officer
- Marketing & Communications Officer/s

# Councillor Involvement

Council employees will raise opportunities for Councillors to be involved throughout the year. These opportunities will be offered according to local geography and issues. Councillor involvement opportunities include but may not be limited to:



**Councillor  
Appointments**



**Pop Up &  
Community  
Connect Sessions**



**Specific  
Project Based  
Opportunities**











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