

**POLICY PURPOSE**

The Alice Springs Town Council's Community Consultation framework has been adopted to guide Council in undertaking consultation as well as clearly defining the ways in which the community will be involved in governance and decision making through an effective communication and consultation process.

Council undertakes a range of diverse services, projects and activities. This framework will guide Council in determining the appropriate level of impact of an issue and the appropriate level of community participation required.

**POLICY STATEMENT**

Alice Springs Town Council will consult clearly with specified purposes. Consultation will recognise the rights of citizens and stakeholders and Council will listen to all ideas and comments put forward. Information presented to the community will be clear, appropriate and easy to understand.

Consultation will ensure that the needs of a group or an individual will be identified and reflected in the consultation process, and once a decision is made, participants will be informed of the decision and the reasons behind it.

**Refer to attached document "Community Consultation Framework" that supports this policy via consultation principles, issues, methods and a checklist.**



# COMMUNITY CONSULTATION FRAMEWORK

July 2005

## **Introduction**

Consultation is an integral part of good governance and Alice Springs Town Council is committed to consulting with the community and stakeholders on matters that directly affect them.

Ensuring that the right consultation processes are put in place for each issue is essential to delivering quality outcomes that provide a level of inclusion and a sense of ownership by relevant stakeholders.

The Alice Springs Town Council is committed to open, honest, accountable and responsible decision making, which facilitates effective communication between Council and the community, encourages community involvement and partnerships in planning and decision making, sets out the steps Council will take in relation to public consultation, and ensures that the most cost effective methods of informing and involving the community which are appropriate for the specific circumstances and consultation topics are used.

## **Purpose**

The Alice Springs Town Council's Community Consultation Framework has been adopted to guide staff in undertaking consultation as well as clearly defining the ways in which the community can be involved in governance and decision making through an effective communication and consultation process.

Council undertakes a range of diverse services, projects and activities. This framework will guide staff in determining the appropriate level of impact of an issue and the appropriate level of community participation required.

## **Why Consult?**

Community consultation is an essential part of the democratic process, and is an informed, 2-way communication process between Council and the community on a particular issue.

Consultation builds community ownership and empowers citizens to actively participate and to assist in developing their community. It provides opportunities for people to influence decisions that may affect their lives and is about gaining input into decision making in partnership relationships.

## **Principles of Alice Springs Town Council's Consultation Framework**

Alice Springs Town Council will consult clearly with specified purposes. Consultation will recognise the rights of citizens and stakeholders and Council will listen to all ideas and comments put forward. Information presented to the community will be clear, appropriate and easy to understand.

Consultation will ensure that the needs of a group or an individual will be identified and reflected in the consultation process, and once a decision is made, participants will be informed of the decision and the reasons behind it.

### ***Inclusive***

Consultation will encourage the participation of people affected by or interested in a decision. Affected and interested parties will be given equal opportunity to participate in consultation. Consultation will be sensitive to the needs of particular groups to maximise the ability to contribute. Council will actively seek out people to consult.

### ***Focused***

Consultation will be purpose driven, and the chosen consultation methods will be appropriate for the task. A clear statement on what the consultation is to achieve will be provided, as well as what the role of Council and the participants are throughout the consultation.

### ***Responsive***

Council will consider and respond to contributions from all participants. Consultation will be transparent, and all people involved will have a clear understanding of how their feedback and comments are to be used. Council will maintain openness and take new ideas on board. Council will ensure respect for the diverse range of interest that may be represented during a consultation and will make reasonable attempt to resolve conflicts if they arise to reach a suitable solution.

### ***Informative***

Information relating to the consultation will be readily available to allow participants to make informed and timely contributions. Information can be easily accessed by all involved before key decisions are made, and it will be presented in an easily understood format.

### ***Decisive***

All consultations will be evaluated after the decision making to which they contributed to is completed. Participants will receive feedback about inputs received and how the decision was reached. If a difference occurs between the input and the final decision, the reasons will be documented. Council's decision making process will be evaluated after a final decision has been made.

## Issues for consultation

There are a broad range of community issues that Council may wish to consult on including:

### ***Site Specific***

Issues about a particular site, such as a change in use.

### ***Area Improvement***

Matters that affect people in the Central Business District, a suburb or neighbourhood or shopping precinct (e.g. traffic management).

### ***Service Planning***

To develop or improve a service which could have an impact on the whole municipality.

### ***Policy Development***

To develop or improve policies for Council's position on particular matters which may affect the whole municipality.

### ***Major Projects / Strategic Issues***

Projects of such size which impact on the finances or future of the whole municipality.

### ***Strategic Plans***

Establishing the decision making framework of council.

## Methods of Consultation

Methods of consultation are a means by which the consultation is set up and how information is provided to allow quality consultation to take place. All communication must provide accurate information to both the community and to Council to ensure that the decision making is informed. Methods can include:

### ***Write a Letter***

Personally addressed letters to all the affected households, outlining the issues and invites comment, indicating where the comment should be directed within Council.

### ***Survey***

Almost always conducted by independent survey specialists and may be done by phone, written survey or doorknock of individual households.

### ***Letterbox Drop***

A non-addressed leaflet or flyer that summarises the issues and invites feedback to Council.

### ***Council Newsletter***

As a regular publication of Council, it can include articles about a policy or issue. If it is used for consultation, then the article must inform and encourage feedback.

### ***Special Publications***

These can range from a special bulletin to a brochure or a draft printed policy.

***Advertisements in the Local Newspapers***

Advertisements in the news section of the local papers are an important means of advising the community about the matter under consultation and how they might have their say.

***Media***

Involving distributing media releases and conducting interviews with local journalists.

***Community Leaders***

Community groups have their own systems of communication. In any consultation, the leaders of those community groups play an important part in circulating information and receiving feedback.

***Personal briefing***

Held at the request of a member or members of the local community to discuss a particular issue with a responsible officer, perhaps including an Alderman.

***Focus Groups / Workshops***

Discussion groups of 5-20 people, usually led by a trained facilitator. The participants are invited as residents or because of a particular interest in involvement in the issue. The purpose is to find out the range of opinions that exist on a particular topic. Focus groups cannot measure how widely those opinions are held in the community.

***Community Meetings / Forums***

With some issues, the community may decide to call a meeting as part of the consultation process.

***Public meeting***

This may be held at a community venue and invitations can be sent by several methods.

***Other methods***

Can include setting up steering/advisory committees, expert panels, and email/website based consultation.

## Which method?

Consultation methods will vary according to the issue. This consultation chart should be used as a guide only for staff to determine the correct level of consultation on an identified issue.

	Site Specific	Area Improvement	Service Planning	Policy Development	Major Projects	Strategic Plans
Write a letter	1	1	2	2	4	4
Survey	4	2	2	2	2	3
Letter drop	3	2	4	2	2	2
Council newsletter	5	3	1	1	1	1
Special newspaper	5	3	3	2	3	1
Ads in newspapers	2	2	1	1	1	1
Media	4	1	1	1	1	1
Community Leaders	3	2	1	1	1	1
Personal briefings	2	1	2	3	3	4
Focus groups	5	4	1	2	1	3
Community called meeting	1	1	1	1	1	1
Public meeting	2	2	2	1	1	1

### Consultation key

- 1 - Every time
- 2 - In most circumstances
- 3 - Depending on the program
- 4 - On the odd occasion
- 5 - Rarest of circumstances

## The Consultation Checklist

This checklist provides a framework for council officers and a reminder of key points of the consultation process. It also provides a means of ensuring that consultations can be properly evaluated. Listed below are examples for inclusion in the checklist.

### ***What is the aim of the consultation?***

Ensure that the consultation is targeted and appropriate. There must be a clear statement about what the consultation is to achieve and to ensure objectives sensible, measurable, achievable, realised and timely.

### ***Have the main groups been identified?***

### ***Have the secondary groups affected been identified?***

### ***Do the groups identified adequately reflect the range of views?***

These questions meet the principle of inclusiveness. The way the consultation is set up and administered encourages participation of the appropriate groups who are to be affected by a decision.

### ***How will you ensure that those to be consulted have clear and precise information to make informed comments?***

This question meets the principle of providing information. People who are to be consulted must be given sufficient information to assist them to provide informed ideas.

### ***Will the consultation be advertised widely?***

### ***Will the main target group be reached by the advertising?***

### ***Will the secondary target group be reached by advertising?***

### ***Will your plan reach the main target group directly?***

### ***Will your plan reach the secondary target group directly?***

### ***Are you going to meet your target groups?***

### ***How do you know if the process is working along the way?***

### ***Will you inform people as to how the information which they provide is to be used?***

This question meets the principle of responsiveness. It also relates to focus. Council must ensure that its decision making processes are such that they genuinely incorporate consideration of the information gained from consultation, i.e. the decision has not been already made. This in turn must be communicated to the participants in the consultation process.

### ***Will you reach people from non-English speaking backgrounds and from all cultures?***

### ***Will you use the appropriate communication tools to reach your target audience?***

### ***How do you know if the process worked?***

### ***Are there feedback forms to fill in?***

### ***Have you prepared mailing lists from this consultation for further research if needed?***

### ***Have you developed an evaluation process?***

**A final step** To close the process, send a thank you letter to all people involved in the process, advising them of the decision and any continuing process.



## HOW TO DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT A SURVEY

The Australian Government's Statistical Clearing House recommends how to design, implement, and evaluate a survey for the purpose of community consultation.

A manual is available on their website which is a valuable and available tool, and covers the following topics:

**Definitions of Concepts used when collected data** – Survey, Census, Sample, Unit, Population, sample statistic, mean, variability, variance, standard deviation etc

**Survey set up** – the importance of, how to identify the key factors in planning the survey, objectives of the survey, the target population, conducting preliminary research, financial and time constraints, existing data sources, case studies, survey design considerations, survey management, advertising, training of staff.

**Data Collection Methods** – methods of collection, factors affecting the collection, personal interviews, telephone surveys, mail out surveys.

**Errors in statistical data** – sampling error, variance, non-response

**Sample Design** – probability and non-probability, sampling, random sampling, size issues

**Questionnaire Design** – design and development of questionnaire, defining collection objectives, researching the topic, types of questions, answer formats, type of data sought, question wording and response categories, structure and layout of questionnaire

**Basic Survey Design** – stages in data processing, data capture, editing, analysis, descriptive statistics, condensing data, estimation, measures

**Presentation of Results** – written reports, statistical presentation, forms of presentation

**Confidentiality** – factors to consider, types of disclosure, types of confidentiality assurance techniques

Source: Statistical Clearing House, Australian Government, [www.sch.abs.gov.au](http://www.sch.abs.gov.au)

The content of the Manual as described above is reflected in the '**Code of Conduct for Research Policy**' of Charles Darwin University. [www.cdu.edu.au](http://www.cdu.edu.au)