# Communications & Engagement Strategy

2024–2027

**The City of Albany respectfully acknowledges the Menang Noongar people as the traditional custodians of the land on which the City conducts its business and pays respect to Elders past and present.**

### Alternative Formats

The information in this document is available in alternative formats, including large print, audio, and braille, on individual request.

Please contact the Community Development Team on **(08) 6820 3023** for more information.

### Language Assistance

We can provide access to City of Albany services and information for non-English speaking residents.

Interpreting and translating services are available via the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS). The service provides language interpreting in 160 languages. To use this service, please phone TIS on 13 14 50 or contact the City of Albany Community Development Team on (08) 6820 3023 for assistance.

### The National Relay Service (NRS)

The NRS can contact the City of Albany on your behalf:

• **TTY / Voice Calls: 133 677**
• **Speak and Listen: 1300 555 727**
• **SMS Relay: 0423 677 767**

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# Message from the Mayor

## At the City of Albany, we're passionate about our community.

Our councillors and staff live in the community, are part of the community and want to do the best job they can for you, the community.

Albany is your home, it's your workplace and it's your recreation space, so you should know what's going on.

It's our job to let you know and get you involved. That's why we've been striving to get better at keeping you informed and included in conversations and decisions.

We've made some great improvements, but we can always do better too. The way we communicate and engage with you is vital to ensuring that the information we send out is relevant and is reaching the right residents at the right time.

We also acknowledge that engagement is more than just feedback to inform our decisions. Quality engagement can also strengthen relationships between the City, community members and stakeholders. It can also provide an opportunity for education and capacity building. The City also has a role to play in facilitating and supporting community-led projects and initiatives that will help develop and grow our community.

This Strategy is guided by established principles that shape our communications and engagement initiatives. Based on previous community feedback, the Strategy outlines who wants to be communicated with, when communication will be best received from the City and in what format our communications are best received by the community.

The Strategy also will guide our engagement activities to ensure that our engagement is as accessible and inclusive as possible, providing an opportunity for all stakeholders to be involved.

Following consultation with our community and valuable ongoing feedback; this is your Communication & Engagement Strategy.

*Greg Stocks*

**GREG STOCKS**
MAYOR

## Executive Summary

**At the City of Albany, we aim to provide key services to the community through a range of functions that mean our community can continue to have the support they need to thrive.**

Much of what the City does relies on engaging with our community to ensure they are informed and included in decisions the City make that can impact them and their local community.

In 2019, the Communications and Engagement Strategy was developed following extensive market research undertaken by independent consultants. It has given us a better understanding of what Albany residents want from their local government and how we can improve our communications and engagement processes to ensure more of our residents are engaged and informed than ever before.

Five years following the development of the Communications and Engagement Strategy is a timely opportunity to review what we have achieved and look at what we can improve, accomplish, and implement in the three years to come.

This Strategy has had a large part to play in how the City engages with our community which goes hand-in-hand with how the City communicates with our community.

Council meet and greets, City newsletters, social media channels, an online public comment portal and bespoke educational campaigns are some of the ways the City has adapted to community feedback.

We have also utilised the feedback that the community provided us through the Strategic Community Plan 2032, which was adopted by the Council in August 2021, and the recent 2023 Community Scorecard.

The Strategic Community Plan 2032 provides the City with an understanding about what our community's priorities are and has developed outcomes and objectives to ensure we are on track to delivering on these priorities.

Key Pillars of People, Planet, Place, Prosperity and Leadership provide the framework for the Plan. It requires a high level of community engagement and communication not only with our community but also with stakeholders, organisations, and various levels of government to succeed.

With a fantastic and diverse community, getting to every resident is a challenge with no single approach that will satisfy every one of our more than 40,000 residents. This Strategy aims to consistently engage numerous residents with the City, maintaining the goals and priorities outlined within it.

We hope this Strategy assists us to deliver high-level communications and best-practice engagement into the future.

**ANDREW SHARPE**
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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# Who We Are

## The City of Albany is a large local government area, covering 4,310 square kilometres situated along the south coast of Western Australia.

It boasts an enviable mix of urban and rural lifestyles, with agriculture and retail among its main industries. Tourism is growing as the region's profile and reputation increases, driving visitation.

It's a large and diverse community for the City of Albany to run, managing a budget expenditure of $123 million in 2023-2024 that balances value for money with maintaining the high-level of service delivery the community expects.

Eighty-three different ancestries are represented within our community, which has a strong community spirit with 21% of residents volunteering in some capacity.

While Albany's median age is 45, it has a lower proportion of children under 18 years old and a higher proportion of persons aged over 60 years old.

The City of Albany is one of the region's biggest employers with approximately 450 staff and is responsible for local roads and pathways, gardens and playgrounds, rubbish collection and recycling, local fire brigades, public buildings, community health and safety, and much more.

It also provides community facilities like Albany Public Library, Albany Leisure and Aquatic Centre, Albany Regional Airport, Albany Town Hall, Vancouver Arts Centre, Albany Regional Day Care, Albany Visitor Centre, and the National Anzac Centre.

### City of Albany

- **11 Elected Members**
- **Employs 452 people**
- **Manages $907,687,269 in assets**

### Community

- **40,416 people living in the City of Albany**
- **17,955 private dwellings in the City**
- **3,617 local businesses**
- **19,956 people are employed**

### This Strategy aligns with the following:

- **Strategic Community Plan**
  **Theme: Leadership**

  **Outcome:** A well informed and engaged community.

  **Objective: 15.1** – Grow awareness, understanding and engagement in City projects, activities and decisions.

- **Corporate Business Plan**
  **Theme: Leadership**

  **Outcome:** A well informed and engaged community.

  **Objective: 15.1** – Grow awareness, understanding and engagement in City projects, activities and decisions.

# Community Engagement

## What is Community Engagement?

**Community Engagement is an intentional process to work inclusively and respectfully with the local community to shape decisions, actions, impacts or change.**

Within a local government, most of our engagement with the community and stakeholders is to make better-informed decisions. In this instance, community engagement does not replace the final decision-making power of the Council but is considered invaluable as it enhances the City's capacity to make well-informed, acceptable, and sustainable decisions.

Projects with a high level of community engagement in the decision-making process create community ownership of the decision. Examples of projects co-designed with the community include Youth Challenge Park.

However, there are times when the City is a facilitator rather than the decision-maker, especially during community-led engagement. Examples of this include the Motorplex and projects funded under our Rural Townsite Enhancement Funding in Wellstead, Bornholm, Youngs Siding and Redmond,

Many of our teams also engage regularly with the community and stakeholders to strengthen relationships, build capacity, and empower local community groups.

The City aims to align with the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement in our engagement activities.

The IAP2 tools and methodology serve as the foundational structure for our approach to Community Engagement. This approach ensures that our engagement processes are inclusive, transparent, and responsive to community needs and preferences.

The City of Albany has gone one step further, by integrating the well-established IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation with the Deciding/Doing Continuum, introduced by Bijoux in 2018. This combined approach draws on key insights from Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (1969), Wehipeihana (2013) and the New Economics Foundation (2014).

The Continuum has more levels of engagement than the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation, which more accurately reflects public participation approaches utilised by the City when engaging with our community. It emphasises the dynamic nature of public participation by highlighting the connection between decision-making and action. The Continuum helps us understand not only how communities are involved in decisions but also the tangible impact of their participation on the outcomes.

This integrated approach aligns with contemporary best practices in public participation. It goes beyond the traditional role of local government using engagement to guide decisions and acknowledges the role the City can play as a facilitator, with the community playing a more active role in delivering locally led initiatives.

## DECIDING/DOING CONTINUUM
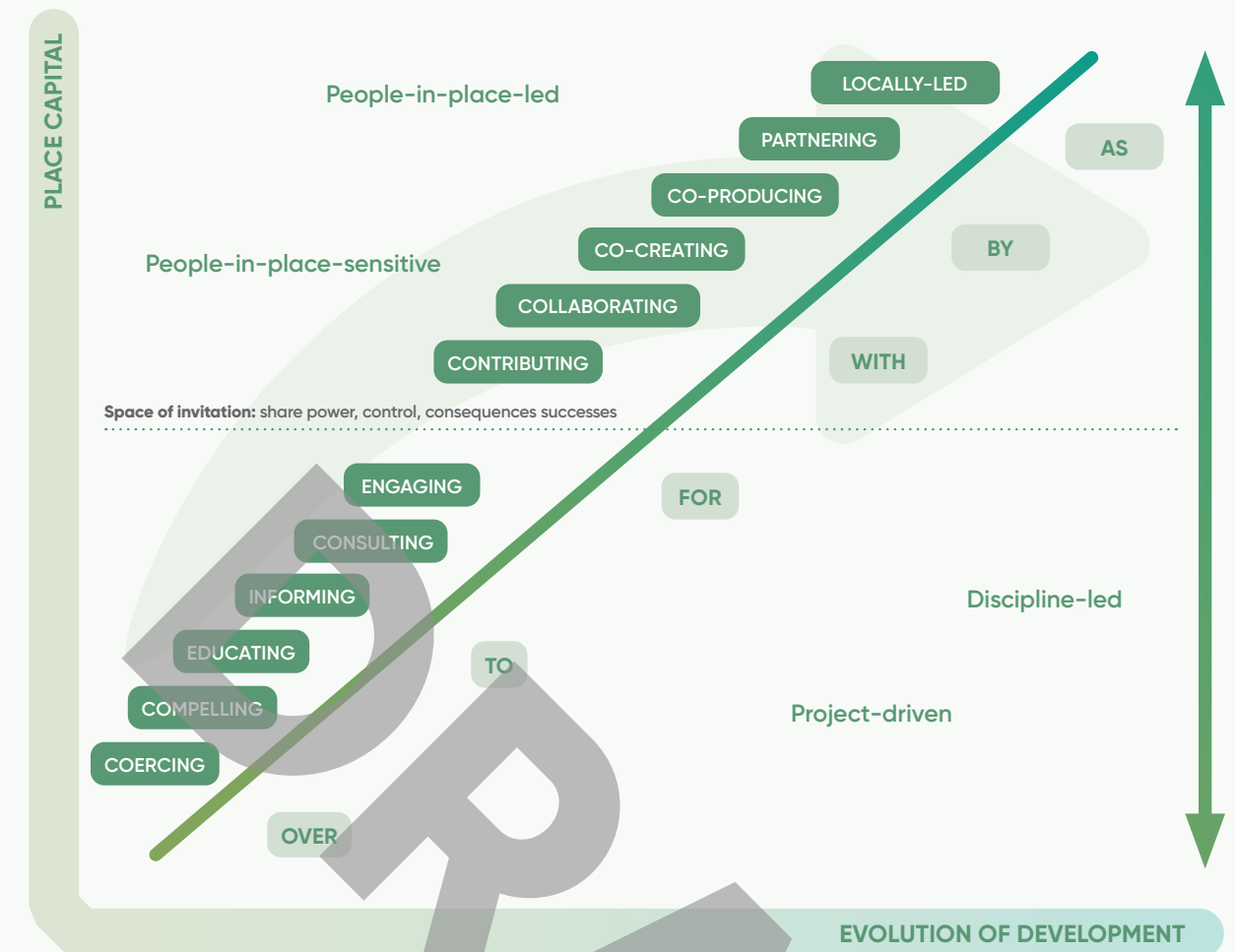


## Why do we engage?

**The City may engage with the community for a number of reasons.**

While predominantly it may be to inform decision-making, it may also be to engage with community members and/or stakeholders to:

- **Comply with legislation**
- **Understand community sentiment**
- **Change behaviours**
- **Manage risk**
- **Generate support**
- **Build and/or strengthen relationships**
- **Respond to an issue or concern raised by community members**
- **Facilitate community led engagement to support a community project or initiative**
- **Work collectively, in partnership with community for shared goal or outcome**
- **Provide greater access to information**
- **Build the capacity of community groups or stakeholders**

The City of Albany aims to make decisions backed up by community feedback, input and views alongside technical, financial and legislative advice. This helps the City to make better decisions for Albany.

Community participation within a decision making process;

- **Fosters a relationship between the community and the City.**
- **Allows for a more confident and informed decision to be made.**
- **Builds a sense of pride and ownership among community about the city they live in.**
- **Encourages more community participation into the future.**

There will be times when we do not engage. For example:

- **Activities where there is no scope for community influence**
- **Public health and safety are at risk**
- **Responding to an emergency**
- **Matters of strictly confidential or commercially sensitive nature**
- **Legal constraints**

## Community Engagement Framework



## Roles and Responsibilities

**To ensure the integrity of the Community Engagement Framework, everyone involved has a role to play, including our Councillors, staff and community.**

Our staff and Councillors have a responsibility to ensure our community engagement practice is planned and delivered in line with this Strategy. External stakeholders and community members also have a role to play in supporting its implementation.

| Stakeholder | Responsibility |
|---|---|
| Council | • Responsible for decision making in accordance with relevant legislation.<br>• Endorsing the City's strategic approach to community engagement.<br>• Supporting the City's commitment to planning and delivering community engagement by approving adequate resources.<br>• Promoting community engagement opportunities and encouraging participation of the community.<br>• Ensuring that community and stakeholders views are given due consideration when making decisions,<br>• Articulating how the community's views have been considered in the decision made.<br>• Undertaking their own consultation, receiving feedback and lobbying messages from the community and stakeholders. |
| City Staff | • Ensuring the Community Engagement Framework is consistently implemented and applied across the organisation.<br>• Ensuring the community engagement needs across all projects, issues and initiatives are effectively considered and resourced.<br>• Analysing feedback received during community engagement activities and using this information to make recommendations and/or inform a course of action.<br>• Communicating the outcome, the decision made, and how the community's views have been considered in the decision.<br>• Evaluating community engagement activities.<br>• Ensuring adequate feedback is provided to all participants and where necessary, the whole community. |
| Communications and Community Engagement Teams | • Providing ongoing guidance and support to staff and contractors in planning and delivering community engagement activities.<br>• Coordinating the management of community engagement resources, including documents, templates, website, marketing collateral, written copy, social media content.<br>• Communicating upcoming community engagement activities to the community.<br>• Identifying and responding to the training and development needs of staff in relation to community engagement practices.<br>• Measuring and reporting on the effectiveness of the City's Community Engagement activities |
| Community and Stakeholders | • Openly receiving and considering information provided during the community engagement phase of projects.<br>• Actively participating in community engagement activities by providing considered constructive input.<br>• Promoting engagement opportunities and encourage participation among relevant networks.<br>• Identifying opportunities for collaboration or partnership with the City of Albany to resolve local issues.<br>• Sharing experience and knowledge through participation on City of Albany Project Working Groups and Advisory Groups<br>• Engagement with Councillors and City Staff to discuss issues, needs or opportunities to enhance community engagement activities including participating in relevant evaluation processes. |

## Decision Making Criteria

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION
Does it fit in with our strategic direction as outlined in the Strategic Community Plan?

### COSTS
How well does the option fit in with the Long Term Financial Plan?

What is required to manage the whole of life costs of the asset/project/service?

### COMMUNITY VIEWS
What does the community think?

Were they provided with adequate information when providing feedback?

### COUNCIL DECISION

### RISKS
What type of risks are involved?

Does it fit in with our risk tolerance level?

### EQUITY
Are we ensuring equitable distribution of benefits in the community?

Does the option consider and balance current and future community needs?

# Communications

**Communications plays a crucial role in keeping our community informed. It is the vital link between the City, residents and ratepayers; ensuring transparency, accessibility and effective communication.**

The fundamental importance of City of Albany communications is to foster a connected and informed community.

Efficient communication is important for the successful delivery of local government services and maintaining a foundation of good governance. Clarity in communication proves to be indispensable when collaborating with residents, councillors, employees, external organisations, government entities, and stakeholders invested in our region.

## Communications Principles

The City produces a vast range of varied communications collateral which are all guided by different priorities, outcomes and audiences. However, the underlying principles of each piece of communication remain the same for each project and allow the City to ensure its public image, reputation and brand are long lasting.

| Principle | Description |
|---|---|
| Timely | Communications are delivered within a reasonable timeframe for community to be able to prepare, react or respond. |
| Authentic & Relatable | Community messages are delivered with empathy, honesty and without pretence or deception. Our messages feel relevant and familiar to audiences that allows them to trust the information and personally connect. City communications are open and accessible, fostering a sense of trust and accountability. |
| Accurate & Transparent | Communications from the City have a high degree of correctness and a reputation for precise information. |
| Creative | City communications collateral incorporates new and original ideas that offer a different approach and perspective. |
| Clear & Consistent | Messages are straightforward, simple, short and easy to understand making them more efficient and effective. Messages, information, branding and style of specific City communications is the same across all sources of information. |
| Responsive | Quick to react and respond to situations, actions, queries and circumstances that arise. |
| Courteous | All the City's communications efforts are in vain if it does not use good manners. |

## Communications Tools

Depending on the specific messages, audience and timing, the City may consider the following methods of communication:

- Email
- Website Updates
- Social Media
- Suggestion Box
- Media Release
- Poster/Banner/Sign
- Letter
- Phone calls
- Public exhibition
- Display stalls
- Newsletter
- Flyer/pamphlet
- Paid advertising

## Communicating to our audiences.

The City's audience is as large as it is vast. Those with whom we are communicating with are not limited to the municipality, and can be found across the globe. From road closure notifications and rates information to tourism campaigns and major event promotion; no one day is the same in the scope of communications at the City of Albany.

**Key audiences include.**

- Residents
- Ratepayers
- Creditors
- Customers
- Local Businesses
- Community Groups
- Media
- Sporting Clubs
- Project partners
- Federal Government
- State Government
- Other Local Governments
- Visitors
- Tourists
- Funding bodies
- Suppliers
- Mayor and Councillors
- Staff
- Rural residents

# Our Communication & Engagement Challenges

Much of what we learnt in 2019 hasn't changed significantly. A lot of what we do has shifted to a more substantial online model following the Covid-19 pandemic. How we communicated and engaged with community during this period had a heightened factor of public health safety.

**Our key challenges continue to be:**

- **Reaching the segments of our community who traditionally do not engage with the City.**
- **Internal resourcing and capacity to engage and communicate effectively.**
- **Ensuring people know what their local government is doing.**
- **Reaching the broader community on topics that are important to them.**
- **Ensuring our communications and engagement is open and transparent.**

## 1. How can we reach segments of our community who traditionally do not engage with the City?

- Expand the membership of our Communications & Engagement Advisory Group to include representatives from identified low participation groups.
- Seek the advice of these members on what we need to do to improve and increase our engagement with these groups.

## 2. How can we improve our internal resourcing and capacity to engage and communicate?

- Revise our engagement toolkit and guidelines to align with contemporary engagement practices.
- Increase training and professional development opportunities to build the knowledge and skills of staff.
- Revise our processes to provide additional internal support to teams when undertaking engagement and communication activities.

## 3. How can we ensure our community knows what the City is doing?

- Improving how we communicate before and after making decisions, so that residents know what the decisions are and why.
- Share the good things the City and Council are doing in our community, to improve public awareness of who we are and the positive work we do.
- Brief staff before community to assist our commitment to providing best practice customer service.

## 4. How do we reach our residents with the topics and issues important to them?

- Take notice of what community has told us is important to them.
- Utilise our market research to better understand the residents we are engaging with.
- Identify champions within traditionally 'low engagement' segments of the community to assist in sharing information on issues important to them.
- Ensure our communications and engagement activities are inclusive.
- Be inclusive of our rural communities.
- Consider time delays in regional mail services when communicating via post.

## 5. How do we improve what we are doing to ensure openness and transparency?

- Provide more opportunities for our community to participate in conversations with the City and elected members.
- Develop a consistent and coordinated internal approach for engagement using a best-practice framework.
- Provide feedback to community after engagement activities and explain our decision-making processes.
- Strengthen internal communication.
- Increase community understanding of local governance processes, procedures and responsibilities.

**An action plan will identify specific ways we can address these challenges against our strategic objectives.**

'Improving how we communicate before and after making decisions, so that residents know what the decisions are and why.'

## Our Engagement Guiding Principles

We want to build on our strengths while finding ways we can get better at meeting the needs of our diverse population.

| Principle | Description |
|---|---|
| Commitment | Effective policymaking requires strong leadership and a dedicated commitment to providing resources for public engagement and participation, including financial, personnel, and technical support. |
| Inclusivity | Consultation will be conducted to engage all affected parties, ensuring sensitivity to diverse needs and maximizing opportunities for participation. |
| Clarity | Clear objectives and defined boundaries for information, consultation, and participation, along with transparent stakeholder roles and responsibilities, are essential from the outset. |
| Timing | Early community engagement and active participation enhance solution diversity and improve best practice outcomes, requiring sufficient time for effective consultation throughout all project stages. |
| Transparency | Stakeholders need clarity on the purpose and scope of consultations, including limitations and potential influence, while also receiving regular updates on progress and outcomes. |
| Resources | For effective public involvement in major planning projects, sufficient financial, personnel, and technical resources are essential, alongside a supportive organisational culture and access to relevant skills. |
| Accountability | The City must be accountable for utilising community and stakeholder input received through feedback, consultation, and participation by ensuring an open, transparent process amenable to external scrutiny and review. |

This means we will be involving our community more in our decision-making process, inviting them to have a say on issues that are important to them in the way they want to be involved, so their feedback is influencing the decisions we make.

Achieving this relies on open, honest and transparent dialogue between staff, Councillors and our community.

To guide this we have set a range of strategic aims and objectives, which are underpinned by these principles:

1. **Our process is inclusive**
2. **Our communications are proactive**
3. **Our approach is creative and engaging**
4. **Our delivery is direct and transparent**
5. **Our information is accessible, relatable and easily understood**
6. **Our interactions are positive and two-way**
7. **Our process involves the whole organisation**

# Our Purpose

**We will provide our community with clear, timely and transparent communication, and create two-way conversations with our community, to ensure our community understands what we are doing and why.**

Our engagement will create opportunities for meaningful interaction and collaboration between stakeholders, ultimately leading to more inclusive, transparent, and responsive decision-making processes and outcomes.

# Priorities and Objectives

## Community Engagement

**Community Engagement is essential to not only making sure our residents and businesses are informed about what we are doing, but to provide opportunities for us to get feedback from the community before we make our decisions.**

The City has been striving to improve its engagement with the community since 2019 where 49% of residents said they were happy with the level of engagement they have with the City.

Around half of our residents, 51%, told us that they wanted to be more engaged by the City, but the challenge is not everyone wants to know about the same things.

Roughly 4 in 10 people have wanted to be involved in the issues concerning the City at large, with 38% of our residents wanting to be part of conversations and initiatives. Another 45% said they only wanted to be engaged on decisions that affect their neighbourhood or household.

Our Aspiration and Objectives set the high-level goals for our engagement with community.

## Our Aspiration for Engagement

The City aspires to meet the IAP2 Quality Assurance Standard for Community & Stakeholder Engagement in all of our engagement activities.

Our engagement will be more inclusive and accessible, ensuring that all community members feel that their views and opinions are valued and have been considered within the decision-making matrix.

Where possible the City will also facilitate and/or support community led projects and initiatives, which will build the capacity within our community.

## Our Objectives and Priorities for Community Engagement

**Objective 1:** Deliver planned and consistent community engagement in an open, transparent and inclusive way through a whole of City approach.

| Our Priorities | We know we are succeeding when |
| --- | --- |
| A diverse range of stakeholders are invited to participate in engagement activities that may be of interest or impact on them. | Engagement activities have a diverse range of community participation. |
| The results of our engagement activities is shared with participants and the broader community. | The community feels we are listening to them, acknowledging their concerns, and their input is contributing to our decision making. |

**Objective 2:** Build the capacity of the City staff and elected members to engage effectively with the community on projects.

| Our Priorities | We know we are succeeding when |
| --- | --- |
| Regular training and development opportunities available to staff and elected members to implement and follow best-practice engagement procedures. | When staff are using IAP2 tools to report and evaluate on our engagement activities. |
| Identify opportunities to make our engagement more welcoming, accessible, and inclusive. | We have a diverse range of community members participating in our engagement activities. |
| Accountability | The City must be accountable for utilising community and stakeholder input received through feedback, consultation, and participation by ensuring an open, transparent process amenable to external scrutiny and review. |

**Objective 3:** Provide regular opportunities for Councillors and executives to connect informally with community.

| Our Priorities | We know we are succeeding when |
| --- | --- |
| Community has the opportunity to meet with Councillors regularly in informal settings | The community feel Councillors are more responsive to their needs and concerns. |
| Staff and community have the opportunity to engage with executive in informal settings that provide a platform for open dialogue. | Staff and community feel executives are more responsive to their needs and concerns. |

## We will measure community satisfaction with:

1. **Engagement evaluation process**
2. **Participation in engagement activities**
3. **Level of community input in decision making**
4. **Community Perception Survey results**
5. **Staff satisfaction survey results**
6. **Reputation of the City**
7. **Positive community perceptions of the City**

## Communications

Our mass communications is one of our strengths, so it's important we continue to achieve the high benchmark we have set, but there are also areas where we can strive to get better.

In 2019 more than 50% of our residents said we use social media, online, print, television and radio well to communicate. More than 70% of residents have used our website, and almost half of residents said we provide information that is easy to understand.

With social media providing a cost effective, immediate, and two-way communications avenue to reach our residents; we worked to increase our following.

The City of Albany Facebook page receives the highest level of engagement from community and has become a natural leader in the platforms we use to communicate. From 2019 to 2022 our followers grew 34% from 12,134 to over 16,500 followers.

With our focus on social media not showing any signs of slowing down, we expect this to continue increasing.

## Our Aspirations for Communications

**To deliver timely, informative, engaging, and transparent communications that shares information in a diverse way, is easy to understand, promotes what we do and celebrates our success.**

**'...50% of our residents said we use social media, online, print, television and radio well to communicate.'**

## Our Objectives and Priorities for Communications

**Objective 4:** To strengthen the City's brand so that it is recognisable, trusted, consistent and proud.

| Our Priorities | We know we are succeeding when |
|---|---|
| Continue to use appropriate City branding to reinforce familiarity and trust with the City. | There is increased awareness of the City brand and often subliminal familiarity. |
| Ensure our suite of documentation and collateral have a consistent look and feel. | Our communications will be visually consistent and easily identifiable with the City of Albany. |

**Objective 5:** To disseminate relatable and easy-to-understand communications through multiple channels that meet the needs of our community

| Our Priorities | We know we are succeeding when |
|---|---|
| Share information that is easy to understand, is timely and reaches relevant target audiences. | Our community feels informed and has a better knowledge of the decisions we are making and why. |

**Objective 6:** Create marketing campaigns that meet objectives and budgets for city-wide projects and make use of appropriate communication channels.

| Our Priorities | We know we are succeeding when |
|---|---|
| Marketing strategies and advertising plans will utilise communications channels relevant to the scale and size of the project. | Our community is informed about City projects that are relevant to them. |

**Objective 7:** To promote the good work of the City of Albany.

| Our Priorities | We know we are succeeding when |
|---|---|
| 7.1: Identify positive promotional opportunities through strong internal communication. | Media are reporting on the good things we do, not just any issues. |
| 7.2: Our engagement with all media is positive, informative, and polite. | Our community continue to engage on this platform with pleasant interactions. |

### We will measure community satisfaction with:

1. **Participation in City events and activities**
2. **Community use of City services**
3. **Awareness of City of Albany branding**
4. **How the community perceives the accessibility of our information**
5. **Customer service satisfaction**

## Monitor, Measure and Reporting

**An Action Plan will support this Strategy and allow us to monitor and report against our Objectives and Priorities.**

This Action Plan will also support our annual business planning process, which will track progress in implementing this Strategy.

This Strategy will guide the Communications and Engagement activities of Council and staff through to 2027. It will be implemented with the Community Strategic Plan and Corporate Business Plan, as well as in consideration other influencing City policies and external social, technological, economic, environmental, political, legal and ethical factors. The Action Plan will be updated throughout the life of this Strategy.

## References

- **Deciding Doing Continuum**
- **IAP2 Quality Assurance Standard for Community & Stakeholder Engagement**
- **The Engagement Triangle, Understanding the Purpose of your engagement**

City of Albany

City of Albany