



Community Engagement Framework

January 2018

1 Introduction

Western Water's strategic intent is "Strong communities, growing together".

Western Water first established a formal consultation mechanism in 1997. Since then our approach has evolved and expanded to reflect the changing demographics, needs, technologies and interests of our growing region.

This Community Engagement Framework outlines our current engagement and consultation approach as we continue to strengthen our relationship with the community and key stakeholders, whilst providing more sustainable decision-making, informed by community needs and goals.

2 What is community engagement?

2.1 Defining community engagement

Community engagement describes the ongoing interactive relationship between Western Water and its customers and community to ensure they are kept informed and, where practical, involved in planning and policy decisions. It is a two-way process where relationships are developed or strengthened, information is shared and there is an opportunity to understand and influence the decision-making process.

Community engagement may be referred to as 'community consultation', 'stakeholder engagement', 'public involvement', 'public participation' and 'public consultation'. It is any process that involves the community in problem-solving or decision-making and uses community input to make better and more informed decisions.

The community is any individual or group of individuals, organisations or political entities with an interest in the outcome of a decision (IAP2 2005).

Community engagement for the purpose of this document *is not*:

- Western Water's ongoing relationship and connections with stakeholders and customers through key account management, community relations or business-to-business relationships.
- Western Water's ongoing management of customer enquiries and complaints delivered by Western Water's customer service processes.

2.2 The importance of community engagement

Involving the community in decisions that affect them is explicit in our strategic intent.

Western Water's community is undergoing significant change due to population growth and changing demographics. Western Water recognises the value that the community brings to understanding problems and risks and identifying solutions that are more likely to work. Transparent and well managed engagement allows everyone with an interest in the subject to have their say whilst building trust in the organisation and leading to better informed and accepted decisions.

Importantly, our customers are expecting more from Western Water than they ever have before. They are seeking value for money beyond our high-quality water and sewer services. Engaging with our community and building strong relationships will enable us to ascertain how we can meet and exceed their expectations.

Consumers in general have a stronger, louder voice than in previous decades due to the growth of social media, abundance of information and knowledge of rights and escalation channels. Through effective engagement, customers are able to feel heard, be kept informed and contribute to decision making processes.

Western Water has a positive reputation for timely, meaningful community engagement on a range of issues including:

- Capital works
- Price Submission/Water Plan processes
- Incident and emergency response (bushfires, large water outages).

It is critical that our organisation continues to engage with community and customers and meet their need/interest in being involved in decision-making processes. It makes good business sense and helps drive customer value and satisfaction.

2.3 Key benefits of community consultation

Community consultation is useful for Western Water and the community and is strongly linked to benefits such as enhanced trust and reputation and improved community relationships. In addition, it can offer:

- New levels of expertise and information to Western Water through local knowledge. This can be in the form of dynamic, locally driven, sustainable and innovative solutions.
- Improved relationships with the community which enhances reputation and positions Western Water as an integral member of the community.
- Greater understanding of the range of needs and aspirations of the community which help Western Water make informed decisions that are more readily accepted by the community.
- Greater community trust which helps aid behavioural change messages and support for increasing capital works or pricing plan.
- For the community, they can feel their concerns or issues have been heard and their opinions matter, helping them to take ownership over decisions that affect them.

2.4 Western Water's Values and relation to community engagement

People - the provision of water and sewer services to customers in our service region and consulting with our community in an open and transparent way about our strategic direction

Integrity shown through open and transparent communication and providing water and sewer services in a manner respectful of the environment and the communities it supports

Respect - servicing communities with differing needs; acknowledging our traditional owners and being inclusive of our new and emerging communities

Excellence - by building confidence in our customer base through quality customer service, innovation and expert project planning and implementation

Teamwork - by working together with our community and customers to ensure representative views are included during our consultation processes where appropriate.

2.5 Our principles for effective community engagement

Timely

Engagement should occur when the community has the best chance of influencing outcomes and not appear to be tokenistic. Opportunities to be involved should be identified early in the process so that the community has time to digest the information and express their ideas or concerns, rather than just inviting feedback on a solution that has already been selected. Once engagement has occurred, milestones and outcomes must be made in a timely manner.

Informative

The community should be provided with enough information in order for them to decide their level of participation and for them to understand and be able to contribute in a meaningful way.

Inclusive

Participation should be open to all those who have an interest in or are directly affected by the project/decision to be made. If a selection of stakeholders needs to be identified, it should be done so in a way that is not open to manipulation, and should include a cross-section of the population.

Providing appropriate time and resources to ensure that those affected can participate in a meaningful way.

Community-focussed

Participants should be asked to consider what is appropriate for the community, not what they want personally or what is in their self-interest.

Interactive

Participants should be allowed to have space to explore topics and not be reduced to an either/or response.

Effective

Although decision-making can strive for consensus, complete agreement need not be the outcome. All participants should have appropriate time and information to enable them to have informed input. How the participant's contribution influences the project or decision should be clearly communicated at the beginning of the process.

Transparent and connected to decision making

Participants should be made aware from the start how recommendations will be adopted. Promises must be appropriate, clear and most of all, kept. Ensure information collected is planned, analysed and used within the decision-making process. Communication with participants as to how their input affected the decision then needs to be provided.

Fair

The consultation method should be appropriate to the target group. How the 'success' of the consultation will be measured must be decided at the start of the consultation. The engagement process will promote sustainable decisions by acknowledging the needs and interests of all participants (including Western Water).

Flexible

A variety of consultation mechanisms are available and chosen to best suit the level of engagement, circumstances and stakeholder. Western Water will seek input from participants in relation to the process of participation.

3 Best Practice in Community Engagement

3.1 Developing and delivering Community Engagement Plans

Western Water is a member of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). IAP2 is an international member association which seeks to promote and improve the practice of public participation or community engagement, incorporating individuals, governments, institutions and other entities that affect the public interest throughout the world.

Western Water follows best practice as identified in the IAP2's Public Participation Framework, this involves a series of steps to identify the best approach for each project:

- Clearly define the opportunity/decision to be made
- Identify and understand community and stakeholders affected by the project/decision
- Analysis of the community's and organisation's goals and limitations
- Identify potential concerns and areas of agreement
- Determine the purpose, process and tools to be used
- Determine how the risks will be managed
- Outline how success will be measured
- Document the engagement approach with an engagement plan
- Achieve the engagement objectives by implementing the plan
- Evaluate engagement process and apply lessons learnt.

Several key customer groups require individual approaches and for this reason on large projects individual engagement methods may be used for the following groups:

- Recycled water customers
- Key accounts
- Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities
- Indigenous communities
- Business customers
- Trade Waste customers
- Education and community services
- People with disabilities
- Other community groups that may have specific needs with individual projects.

3.2 Factors to be considered on a project:

- Stakeholders
- Cultural heritage requirements
- Groups that reflect the diversity of our community and who may have particular interests or needs
- Media/social media
- Values
- Previous works in community
- Complaints received
- Disruption
 - Traffic
 - Noise
 - Water quality
 - Water/sewer service interrupted
 - Environmental impact
- Project
 - Size of project
 - Expertise in delivery
 - Degree of public knowledge about project or technology
 - Length of delivery of project
 - Risk

- Number of customers affected
- Recovery time if project failure
- Long term supply issues
- Ability to attract attention

(see Attachment 1 for more detail on each of the potential influencers)

3.3 Levels of engagement

An engagement plan is developed and implemented for each project requiring engagement. Evaluation of the public participation process is critical. Quantitative and qualitative measures will be selected on an individual project basis.

Western Water uses the IAP2 Spectrum and levels of community engagement as a guide when developing engagement plans (see Attachment 2).

It is likely Western Water will find the majority of projects requiring community and stakeholder engagement at the Inform and Consult levels, some at Involve, and very few at the Collaborate and Empower levels. This is due to many reasons including water and sewer services being an essential service, and the technical nature of decision-making.

3.4 Engaging at different levels, at different times on the same project

Community engagement plans are tailored to each project. Stakeholders are assessed based on project impact and influence with some groups requiring a higher or lower level of engagement than others. As the project progresses it may also be necessary to adjust the level of engagement.

It may be necessary to engage affected stakeholders at multiple levels on the same project and this may change throughout the life of the project (from planning to construction to operation). Using the example of building a replacement water main, we could:

- **inform** those affected - 'To meet demands Western Water will build a replacement water main along Z road; we will keep you informed about opportunities to have your say; and will provide construction timeframes and prior notice of any disruptions'
- **involve** those affected by working with them to ensure appropriate timing – 'Is your preference for the replacement works to commence in Summer or Autumn?'

In the above examples, the **non-negotiable** aspect of the decision was that '*we will be building a replacement main*' and those affected were engaged to help decide the **negotiable** decisions (timing) associated with the project. If there were no negotiable aspects to the project, it is likely the level of engagement would be to 'inform' only.

3.5 Capacity building

Western Water is committed to professional development for staff to ensure best practice community engagement through:

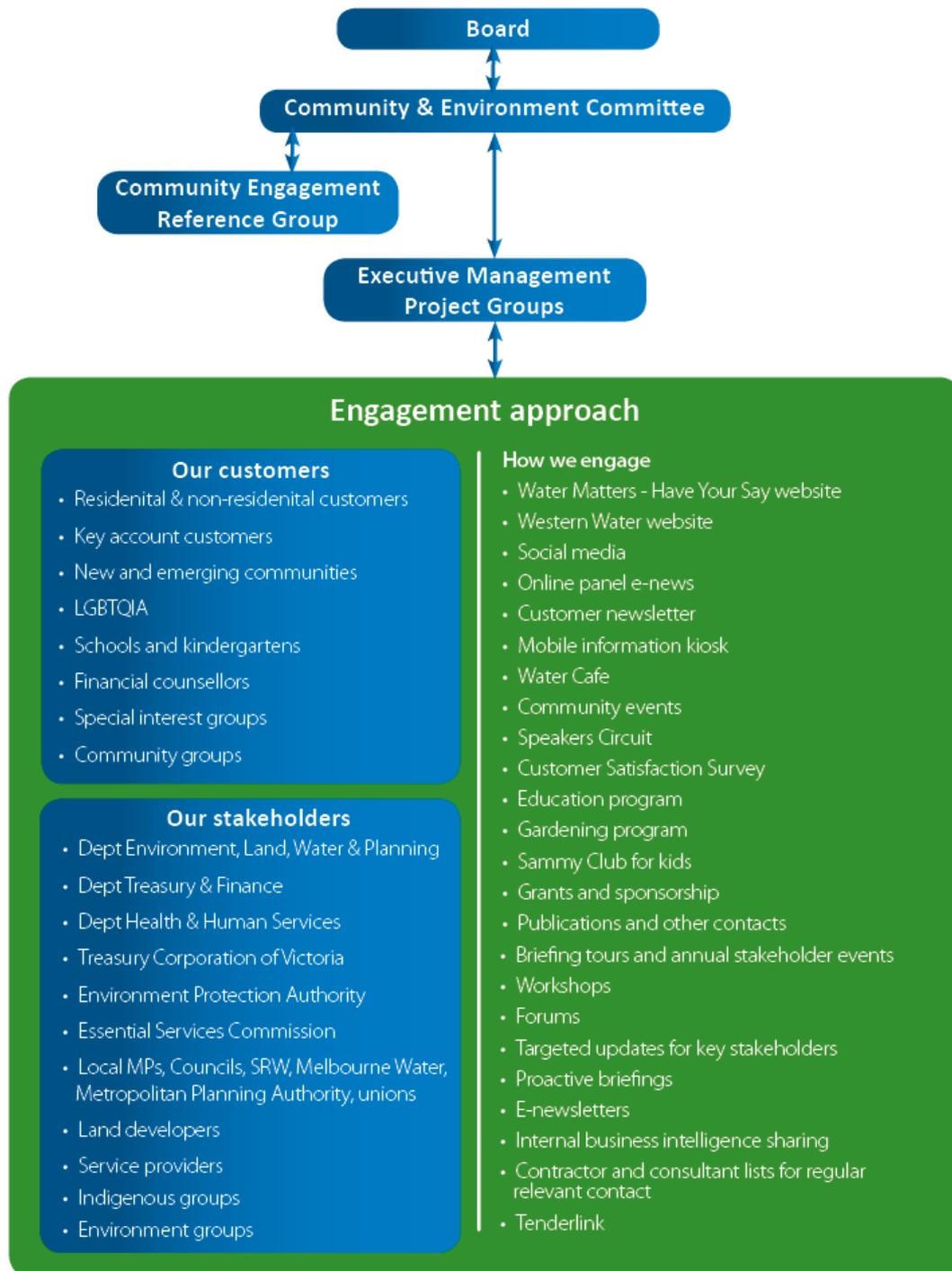
- IAP2 training for relevant staff (including project managers),
- training on active listening, facilitation and negotiation, all skills which are beneficial when delivering community engagement activities,
- community engagement professional development at relevant forums.

3.6 Role of Western Water staff

The role of Western Water staff when delivering community engagement activities is to inform, provide background and relevant project information. It is not to add personal or professional opinions which would skew input and results from engagement activities.

4 How we engage

The following diagram explains the structure:



In addition, Western Water informally engages with our community on a daily basis via online, phone and face-to-face channels.

This engagement is reported to each meeting of the Community and Environment Committee and Community Engagement Reference Group (CERG). The CERG is made up of community members and community group/organisation representatives. Refer to the Terms of Reference for the CERG, found at westernwater.com.au

All customers and community members can get involved in our pricing submission consultation and other business engagement opportunities via the 'Have your say' website.

5 Conclusion

This strategy is a commitment to involve customers and key stakeholders in decisions that directly affect them. Our current engagement and consultation approach ensures improved customer and stakeholder relations, reduced risk of complaints, enhanced reputation of the organisation and builds accountability and transparency. Subsequently sustainable decisions are made, informed by community needs and goals.

Note: Where there's a situation which requires Western Water to act quickly to avoid an immediate threat to the health and safety of the community or environment, it may not be possible to involve customers and key stakeholders prior to taking action.

Attachment 1**Community influencers**

- *Stakeholders*
Stakeholders can be positive or negative, known or unknown. When assessing a particular issue or project, stakeholders can be important in influencing segments of the community.
- *Cultural heritage*
Prior to commencing works, we engage with indigenous community representatives to ensure appropriate, respectful cultural heritage management plans are in place.
- *Respecting diversity*
Our community reflects the rich diversity of our Australian culture and as part of our engagement program we assess opportunities to engage with groups about issues that may be of particular interest to them, not just mainstream community groups.
- *Media/social media*
Comments made on social media can quickly gain momentum and support in the community. This could happen without any customer making contact with Western Water to advise of a problem/issue. Western Water monitors both media articles and social media posts (particularly local groups). Subsequently, management may be required.
- *Values*
A community's interest in water and the service delivery of water and sewer needs to be measured as it impacts the level of engagement required. This may differ throughout the region and throughout different target audiences.
- *Previous works in community*
A community's acceptance of a major project, new policy/strategy or disruption to a service may be based on previous experience with Western Water and needs to be accounted for when assessing the community's readiness to accept further action by Western Water.
- *Complaints received*
Complaints can point towards a particular issue or interest of the different communities within Western Water's service area. They could also indicate more education or information about the project/issue needing to be provided.

Disruption

- *Traffic*
During construction, disruptions to traffic can have minimal impact if planned and managed. Issues become more apparent when there are lengthy disruptions to a customer's daily routine.
- *Noise*
The impact noise has on a customer is assumed to be relative to the constancy and/or loudness of noise, timing and how this can disrupt or impact a resident's life.
- *Water quality*
Water quality issues during construction and the time it takes to resolve can range from none to severe with varying degrees of risk and public impact.

- *Water/sewer service interrupted*
Planned interruptions may be more easily communicated to affected residents but the likelihood of unplanned interruptions needs to be measured, the extent of the water/sewer interruption and the impact on the customer will drive the level of community engagement.
- *Environmental impact*
Western Water assesses and measures the environmental impact of all works undertaken. Particular groups and areas may be more involved with their environment requiring Western Water to communicate and engage more closely with these groups.

Project

- *Size of project*
As an indicator of impact on community it is assumed larger projects have longer lead times for completion which may increase probability of risk of issues and customer dissatisfaction.
- *Expertise in delivery*
A risk measurement linked to expertise as an indicator of probability of project success or failure.
- *Degree of public knowledge about project or technology*
Education is an important community engagement tool particularly when it pertains to new technology and the anxiety associated with change and the unknown within the community.
- *Length of delivery of project*
The longer the length of delivery the greater the need for Western Water to assess the community's patience to endure works within their proximity of their residence or place of business.

Risk

- *Number of customers affected*
Western Water's risk increases proportionally with the number of customers potentially affected.
- *Recovery time if project failure*
Community acceptance of project failure will be linked to time it takes to recover from the situation.
- *Long term supply issues*
A customer's perception of Western Water as a trusted company will be severely impacted by long term supply issues such as a decrease in water pressure or intermittent water and sewer interruptions.
- *Ability to attract attention*
This may include visibility of works to customers or visibility to external stakeholders such as government bodies or larger media.

IAP2 Spectrum

Based on the IAP2 Spectrum and levels of community engagement, Western Water uses the tables below as a guide when developing the engagement plan:

INFORM

Goal – To provide information to assist with understanding the project or problem/opportunities/solutions.
Promise – To keep you informed
Tools – Fact sheets, project updates, website, information sessions

CONSULT

Goal – To obtain feedback
Promise – To keep you informed, answer questions, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how your input influenced the decision
Tools – Phone calls, meetings, site visits, focus groups, surveys

INVOLVE

Goal – To work with the community throughout the process to ensure their concerns and objectives are understood and considered
Promise – We will work with you to ensure your concerns and objectives are reflected in the options explored and will provide feedback on how your input influenced the decision or project
Tools – Workshops, deliberative forums, expert panels

COLLABORATE

Goal – To partner with the community in decision making including the development of alternatives and identifying the preferred solution
Promise – We will seek advice and innovation and incorporate your recommendations on the decisions as far as possible
Tools – Workshops, deliberative forums, expert panels

EMPOWER

Goal – To have the community make the final decision
Promise – We will implement what you decide
Tools – Citizen juries, ballots