

Sydney, Australia

Sydney builds trust with a unique community engagement strategy

Project planning with input from and consultation with community members

Effective mitigation and adaptation to climate change only happens with the broad support of the population. To address this, Sydney has created a unique community engagement approach with a centralized Community Consultation group involved in every project and with methods targeting those that traditionally do not take part in participatory processes.



What are the key lessons learned?

Community engagement is an important process for involving people in the decisions that affect their lives. It is often a legislated requirement of the decision-making process. However, it often attracts those that are already well informed on the topics, well positioned in the community, and equipped with the resources to attend outreach events and voice their opinions. Sydney is taking community engagement to the next level through an innovative and welcoming community engagement strategy that is equally practical, successful, and inspirational.

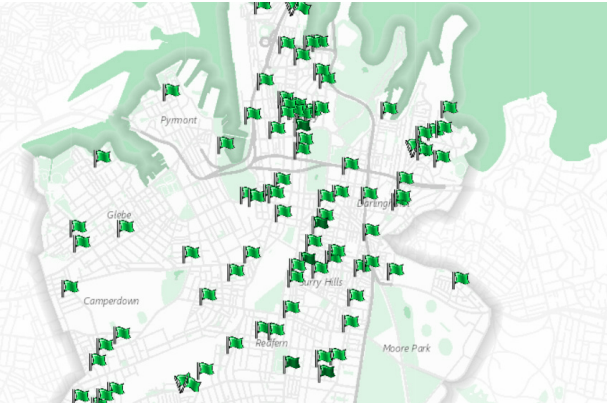
With a new approach to community engagement and backed by the Lord Mayor’s support, the City hoped to engage citizens and elicit feedback and suggestions for the City’s vision and for other policies and programs addressing the City’s strategic directions such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving housing affordability, mitigating traffic congestion, and more.

The City approaches community engagement with four principles in mind: Integrity, Inclusiveness, Dialogue, and Influence. With centralized resources and a vision forward, the City undertakes engagement across five tiers each depicting increasing influence that the public can have on an outcome (based on the International Association for Public Participation’s IAP2 spectrum of public participation)^[1]: inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower.

Upon completion of any community engagement process, the City collects information on the success and effectiveness of the engagement and provides feedback to participants on the results of their contributions. Reports on the

process are provided to the public via the website sydneyyoursay.com.au categorized by project. By taking the time to reflect on the community engagement process, the City is able to better understand what works and what needs to be reworked for the next project.

Sydney has identified that their community engagement strategy has a profound impact on citizens. In a previous engagement effort, 96% of participants reported their expectations were met and would participate again in a similar process while 80% believed their contribution would make a difference. These impacts demonstrably led to increased connectivity and trust in the government and its decisions and increased civic equity so that people feel their individual opinions are being heard and are influencing city decisions.







Location of Sydney projects each with local engagement.

Climate

The City’s approach to community engagement has ensured citizen input into important climate and sustainability policies that are often considered the domain of experts. This creates broad buy-in to the City’s ambitious sustainability targets and policies and reduces polarized debates. One example of making the community’s support for climate action clear through engagement in policies development, is the icons in the City’s Climate Change Adaption Plan that indicate ‘this idea came from the community.’

Inclusivity

Sydney’s community engagement framework aims to strategically involve each and every one of the City’s diverse communities such as the Aboriginal communities, tenants of social housing, youth and older populations, residents with disabilities, among others. These communities take part in urban planning and policy-making through engagement across multiple, carefully planned methods that are always evolving to represent best practices and lessons learned.

Case Study Type:	 Guidelines	Primary Sector:	 Urban Planning
ICA Pillar:	 Process	Primary Impact:	 Quality of Life & Urban Livability

How might these lessons be used in your City?

Develop a set of principles to engage the public

The City of Sydney Community Engagement Strategy^[2] was adopted in 2014 to support the implementation of Sustainable Sydney 2030. The strategy formalized a strong engagement practice that developed out of the large-scale consultation process conducted during the creation of the Sustainable Sydney 2030 plan. The engagement strategy is focused around three main objectives:

- Provide opportunities for communities to take part in the City of Sydney’s decision making process for outcomes that benefit the community.
- Provide a strong foundation for understanding and working with the communities – promoting a shared responsibility for decisions and trust in the decision making process.
- Develop a sustained collaboration, partnerships, and new ways to involve and empower the community to achieve Sustainable Sydney 2030.

Guided by these objectives, the City developed a process for open, inclusive, and iterative community engagement. Before any project begins engagement, a rigorous data collection and planning phase is conducted to determine what the proper methods are for engagement based on the project and its goals.

Adapt your engagement methods based on the target audience

Often there will be targeted engagement where certain groups are identified as important to a project and advisory panels are called upon (for example: the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory panel, the retail advisory panel, or the inclusion [disability] advisory panel).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel^[3] is made up of community members and industry professionals, alike, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds who live, work or study in the local area. This advisory panel meets six times a year and is called upon for advice on matters of importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This group, for example, consulted with the City on new signage for City parks. With the input and support from this advisory panel, community members and Elders, and City staff, new signage was agreed upon. The new signage would be inclusive of the indigenous Gadigal language in an effort to acknowledge, share and celebrate the languages and cultures of the aboriginal people, native to the area.



Identify representative forms of engagement

Most engagement, however, is intended to represent the diversity of the City’s population through wider and more inclusive methods such as random selection for surveys or focus groups. For example, the City recently completed a consultation process on updating Sydney’s Development Control Plans (DCP). During the process, there was an awareness that the 18 – 35 year old residents should be specifically targeted as they are not often engaged and are less likely to use traditional channels for engagement. Engagement methods used to engage this group included online surveys (with 10,000 completed in a matter of weeks) through the sydneyyoursay.com.au website or through the Sydney Your Say app^[4], and pop-ups in neighborhoods with a predominantly younger population. A unique aspect of this engagement was the self-directed consultation conducted by private venues. With the support of City-generated guides, these venues would invite people in for beers and a talk to have their own conversations, sharing findings with the City through completed surveys.

Following this approach, the community engagement strategy has been particularly applied to climate action and sustainability planning as described in the following examples.

Sustainable Sydney 2030 – People’s Summit on Social Sustainability

Following Sustainable Sydney 2030, the City led an engagement process to gauge people’s thoughts and opinions on social sustainability in Sydney. The engagement process sought out feedback on Sydney’s social sustainability policy, A City for All, for determining and directing the creation of the Community Engagement Strategy. The community engagement process included a City Talk event, a major workshop with community groups, government organizations, and industry groups, and the engagement of children through pop-up information sessions and an online engagement including a kids-say page. The engagement process concluded with a People’s Summit to determine how to act on the community’s feedback and to agree on ideas that the City could turn into actions. This feedback was then used to engage the community further on the Sustainable Sydney plan and to create the Community Engagement Framework for future engagement.

Climate Change Adaptation Plan

In order to address the impacts of climate change, the City has developed a Climate Change Adaptation Plan with a high level of community engagement. The plan was drafted through an internal assessment, identifying and ranking climate risks as well as projecting changes and the impacts. For each climate risk, the internal assessment resulted in a series of actions. Enacting community engagement, the City randomly selected 30 community members for a two and a half day deliberative democracy citizens’ panel to review the climate risks and actions and add additional risks and actions. The group also identified principles around vulnerability to guide the policy and actions. As a measure to illustrate the impact the community input had on the Plan, the final write-up incorporated green indicators next to each action that the group directly influenced, suggested, or supported.

A centralized approach to community engagement



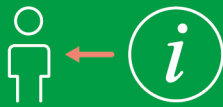
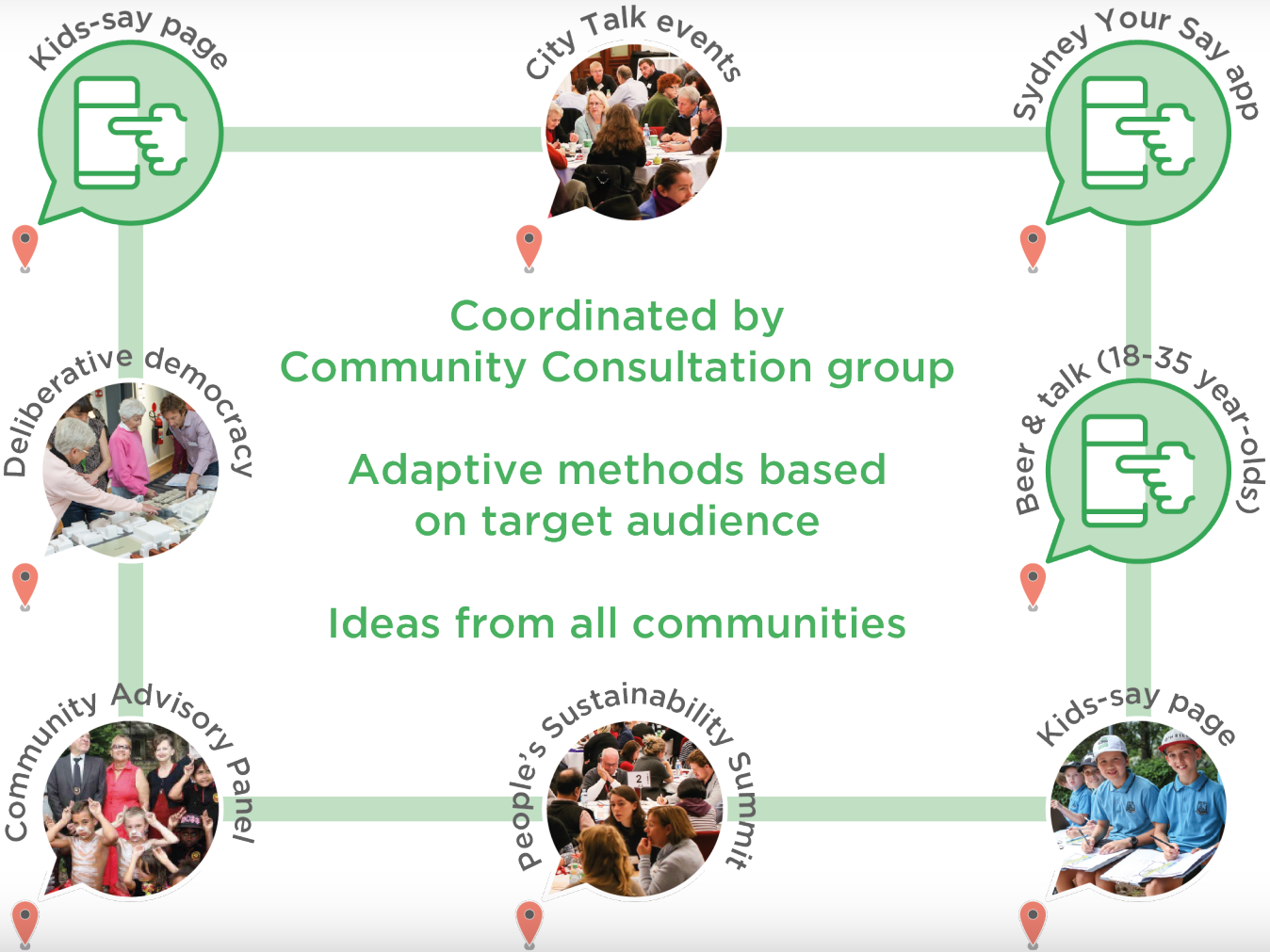
Buy-in from other levels of government



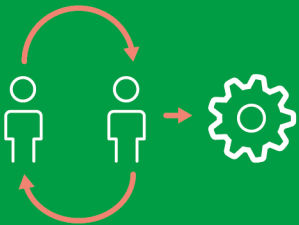
Increased trust in government



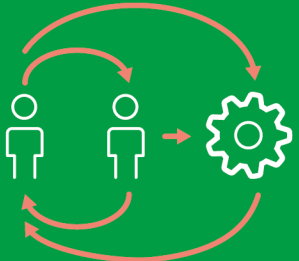
Low investment compared to impact



1. Informing
One-way flow of information from City to communities



2. Consulting
Two-way flow of information facilitated by engagement



3. Active participation
Added feedback for participants to see their impact

The final step in the engagement process is reflection. With surveys and anecdotal assessments, the City evaluates the success of the engagement and creates reports, for those involved, on the impact of their contributions. This step allows the City and community engagement leaders the opportunity to reflect and rework the approach for the next project or policy creation. This ensures the community engagement is effective and adaptive to the needs of targeted communities or specific projects.

Create a central public engagement unit to pool resources

Community engagement requires resources, predominantly in people, who are dedicated to reaching out and engaging with the public. The City launched a department known as Community Consultation with the sole mission of delivering the strategy and building a more connected Sydney. The Community Consultation group would replace any community engagement efforts within individual departments, and provide a centralized resource for community engagement across the City. With consolidated resources and a relatively small budget the team is able to deliver unique methods to engage the community. The City never thought twice about the resources needed to make community engagement a priority – their thinking: “we can’t afford not to engage citizens.” The costs of poorly informed projects and strategies are often much more than an up-front community engagement process.

Project milestones



Use engagement to leverage buy-in from other levels of government

A direct impact of the community engagement process and its well-defined strategy is that it helps to legitimize a project and its goals. This encourages other levels of government to come to the table and participate, adding leverage to turn these projects into reality. According to polls and post-engagement evaluations the community engagement’s impact on the people of Sydney has been significant. People’s engagement has led to increased connectivity and trust in the government and its decisions, increased civic equity so that people feel their individual opinion is being heard and influencing city decisions.

“We are developing strong citizens by showing their views and knowledge is valued by the council.”

Yvette Andrews, Manager of Strategic Community Consultation

By developing a community engagement strategy that is inclusive in nature, Sydney is creating an environment that lures in communities of all means to contribute to City planning and project development. With all voices represented, the City is able to deliver projects and policies that have equitable impacts, especially on low-income and traditionally marginalized groups.

Use feedback and data to continuously improve your engagement strategy

Sydney is preparing to start a second round of intense community engagement for the Sustainable Sydney 2050 plan. Starting in November 2018, the team will set out to consult with people of all backgrounds, using new techniques with feedback for participants to more clearly see their impact and the messages they are portraying. Many cities prioritize community engagement and it should be common to ensure that inclusivity is a leading principle of City government. By taking the strides to create a sustainable city vision that is informed by its residents, Sydney is setting an example of a City building community trust and developing a plan that truly speaks for the people. As marginalized and low-income communities increasingly experience and feel the worst impacts of climate change, making special efforts to engage those communities in planning for climate mitigation and climate adaptation is crucial. Sydney is setting an example of how that can work successfully and how it can help to achieve equity goals.

References

- 1 https://www.iap2.org.au/Tenant/C0000004/00000001/files/IAP2_Public_Participation_Spectrum.pdf
- 2 https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/291979/FINAL-Community-Engagement-Strategy-2017_DE5_web.pdf
- 3 <https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/community/community-support/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-communities/the-city-advisory-panel>
- 4 https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.ntropydata.ntropy.cos&hl=en_US