

City of Ipswich **Guidelines for Community Reference Groups**



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
DEFINITIONS.....	3
BACKGROUND.....	4
COMMUNITY REFERENCE GROUPS.....	4
MEMBERSHIP.....	5
PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE.....	7
TERMS OF REFERENCE.....	7
REVIEW PERIODS.....	7

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Ipswich City Council respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners as custodians of the land. The traditional owners whose earth, winds and water we share and have had a deep spiritual and cultural connection to country for thousands of years. We pay our respects to their elders, past, present and emerging, as the keepers of the traditions, cultures and stories of a proud people.

INTRODUCTION

Ipswich City Council is committed to meaningful engagement with the community on issues affecting the city, and on local issues that significantly impact on the community. Public participation and engagement is the foundation of good decision-making, and is mutually beneficial to the community and council.

One of the ways that council engages with the Ipswich community is through its five (5) Community Reference Groups, which align to the standing committees of council:

1. Economic Development (Economic Development Committee)
2. Resilient Communities (Communities Committee)
3. Growth Management (Growth Management and Infrastructure Committee)
4. Environment (Environment Committee)
5. Transparent Governance (Governance Committee).

Council's Community Reference Groups aim to:

- Provide a deliberative forum for members to discuss issues of community interest;
- Draw on local knowledge and enhance community voice in decision making processes and outcomes; and
- Build community understanding of council's core business functions and specific projects or activities.

DEFINITIONS

Public Participation

Public participation is an action or a series of actions taken by community members and stakeholders to involve themselves in local affairs.

Community Engagement

Community engagement is a democratic process that allows people and decision-makers to have a dialogue and a 'stake' in the interests and issues that matter to them.

Council

The Ipswich City Council, being the local government for the City of Ipswich, and includes all employees of Ipswich City Council (full-time, part-time, temporary and casual) and consultants and contractors engaged by or associated with council.

Community Reference Group

A deliberative forum coordinated by council that includes selected community members who provide information, advice and views to council concerning specific issues, thereby enhancing decision making, and improving engagement between council and the community.

BACKGROUND

Community engagement is a legislative requirement under the Queensland *Local Government Act 2009* to ensure *democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement* for public participation in government decision making.¹

Advance Ipswich 2015 provides a shared vision for the community and council. Prioritising listening, leading and caring for our community,² it outlines council's commitment to providing comprehensive and meaningful community engagement to inform council decision making.

Council's Community Engagement Policy and Public Participation and Engagement Strategy articulates our engagement vision, goals and principles and guides the delivery of engagement processes across the organisation to ensure a consistent, transparent and effective approach to engagement with the Ipswich community.

COMMUNITY REFERENCE GROUPS

Community Reference Groups are a deliberative form of community engagement.³ Coordinated by council, selected members provide feedback to council in a structured forum, acting as advisors and representatives of their community. While Community Reference Groups do not hold decision-making power (as this function sits with council), the benefits of a community reference groups include:

- Providing a forum for members to discuss issues of community interest;
- Drawing on local knowledge and enhance community voice in decision making processes and outcomes; and
- Building community understanding of council's core business functions and specific projects or activities.

Council has five (5) Community Reference Groups, which align to the standing committees of council:

1.  **Economic Development (Economic Development Committee)**
2.  **Resilient Communities (Communities Committee)**
3.  **Growth Management (Growth Management and Infrastructure Committee)**
4.  **Environment (Environment Committee)**
5.  **Transparent Governance (Governance Committee)**

¹ *Local Government Act 2009* (Qld), s 4(2)(c).

² Available at https://www.ipswich.qld.gov.au/about_council/corporate_publications.

³ Ipswich City Council utilises the four key approaches set out in the Ontario Public Engagement Framework to guide our engagement with the community.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership on a council Community Reference Group is voluntary.

The membership of council's Community Reference Groups may comprise community members who represent the diversity of demographics, interests and knowledge within the community and/or representatives from community-based organisations and local businesses.

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST PROCESS

The membership of council's Community Reference Groups is determined through a public Expression of Interest (EOI) process which is undertaken every two years.

Interested community members are required to complete an EOI application to be considered for membership in the group. The EOI applications submitted are assessed by a panel comprised of council's community engagement officers based on eligibility criteria, responses to selection criteria, and representativeness, and then subject an internal council approvals process.

Council follows the below process when forming reference groups:

1. Internal council staff develop an EOI application and accompanying eligibility and selection criteria and for an internal assessment panel
2. The EOI and supporting document are open on council's public website for a minimum of two weeks
3. Interested and eligible community members complete and submit the EOI application forms by the close date
4. Submitted applications are assessed by council's selection panel according to the eligibility and selection criteria and representativeness
5. The panel provides a report recommending membership for each Community Reference Group and submits it to council's Chief Executive Officer for consideration
6. Council's Chief Executive Officer is responsible for approving the membership for each Community Reference Group
7. Successful applicants are notified by the chair of the selection panel
8. The names of each member of the Community Reference Groups are published on council's website.

ASSESSMENT OF EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

EOI applications submitted are assessed by a panel comprised of council's community engagement officers based on eligibility criteria, responses to selection criteria, and representativeness.

Eligibility criteria

Applicants for council's Community Reference Groups must:

1. Be 18 years or older;
2. Reside within the Ipswich Local Government Area;
3. Not be a current state or federal member, current councillor or current council staff member of Ipswich City Council;
4. If a former state or federal member, or former councillor allowed one (1) full term (of the relevant level of government to pass since ceasing this position; and
5. If a former council staff member of Ipswich City Council, allowed 18 months to pass since ceasing employment.

MEMBERSHIP (CONTINUED)

Selection criteria

Applicants for council's Community Reference Groups must, as part of their EOI application, respond to two questions relating to their interest in becoming a member of Community Reference Group and their current involvement and/or activity in the local community.

Responses to these two questions will be scored (out of 4) on the following basis:

Response	Score
No or low level of interest and participation. No relevant examples provided	1
Interest and participation demonstrated. Limited detail of relevant experiences and examples provided	2
High level of interest and participation. Relevant examples and experiences outlined	3
High level of interest and participation including detailed and relevant examples and experiences. Experiences, knowledge and insights linked to the groups' stated objectives	4

Representativeness

As much as is possible, council seeks to ensure that members of its Community Reference Groups are representative of the diversity of demographics within the Ipswich community. The following demographics will be reviewed with a view to ensuring appropriate representativeness:

- Age;
- Gender;
- Cultural background (consideration will be afforded to ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants are represented, wherever possible);
- Family composition;
- Housing tenure type; and
- Geography of the Ipswich Local Government Area.

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

Council is committed to implementing best practice principles for the management of its Community Reference Groups. This includes:

- Clearly establishing the **purpose and scope** of each Community Reference Group
- To the extent possible, council's Community Reference Groups are **representative** of the local community
- Member **roles and responsibilities** are clearly defined
- Each Community Reference Group has a **Terms of Reference**
- Providing a sufficient public **notice period** for EOI applications¹, coupled with **disclosure** of relevant supporting information
- Undertake a rigorous **selection process**, based on the ability of applicants to contribute to the objectives of the Community Reference Group, their ability to authentically represent the voice of their local community and to deliberate in accordance with the Terms of Reference
- **Adherence** to the Terms of Reference to ensure effective and efficient functioning of each Community Reference Group
- Regular **review** of the effectiveness of each Community Reference Group
- Regular public re-application process to ensure the community has a regular opportunity to apply.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Each Community Reference Group is governed by a Terms of Reference, which is available on council's website. The Terms of Reference support the effective operation of the Community Reference Group by outlining the operating conditions, including:

- Purpose, scope and objectives
- Membership – composition, size, roles and responsibilities of various members, leadership (Convenor and Facilitator), administrative support, term limitation, turnover, cease tenure or be removed
- Powers of the group
- Meetings – frequency, duration, agenda and minutes
- Disclosure – what information will be made publically available
- Record-keeping requirements
- Conflict of interest processes
- Contact details
- Review requirements and frequency.

REVIEW PERIODS

These Guidelines will be reviewed, at a minimum, every two years prior to each public Expression of Interest (EOI) process.

Version #	Date
1	7 March 2019
2	4 October 2019

¹ Two weeks is widely considered the minimum acceptable notice period.



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