U

360°

THE CITY *of*

Unley

Unley 360°
Communication
and Engagement
Strategy
2023-27

Kaurna Acknowledgement

Ngadlurlu tampinthi, ngadlu Kaurna yartangka inparrinthi. Ngadlurlu parnuku tuwila yartangka tampinthi.

Ngadlurlu Kaurna Miyurna yaitya yarta mathanya Wama Tarntanyaku tampinthi. Parnuku yailtya, parnuku tapa purruna yalarra puru purruna.*

We would like to acknowledge that the land we meet on today is the traditional lands of the Kaurna people and that we respect their spiritual connection with their country. We also acknowledge the Kaurna people as the traditional custodians of the Adelaide region and that their cultural and heritage beliefs are still as important to the living Kaurna people today.

*Kaurna Translation provided by Kaurna Warra Karrpanthi.

Introduction

The City of Unley recognises that effective communication is essential to building a strong, vibrant community. Good communication supports:

- Transparency about decision-making, resource allocation, and Council priorities—helping to build trust and credibility.

- Engagement by enabling community participation in decisions that affect them and their neighbourhoods.

- Improved decision-making by gaining a better understanding of community needs and concerns.

- Accountability by ensuring accurate, timely, and complete information is available to interested community members.

Purpose

This strategy aims to support good communications and engagement by:

- Providing structure and direction in a complex and challenging environment.

- Providing a roadmap to improve the quality, consistency, and effectiveness of Council's communication and engagement with the community.

- Considering the role that communications and engagement play in delivering the strategies identified in Council's four-year delivery plan.
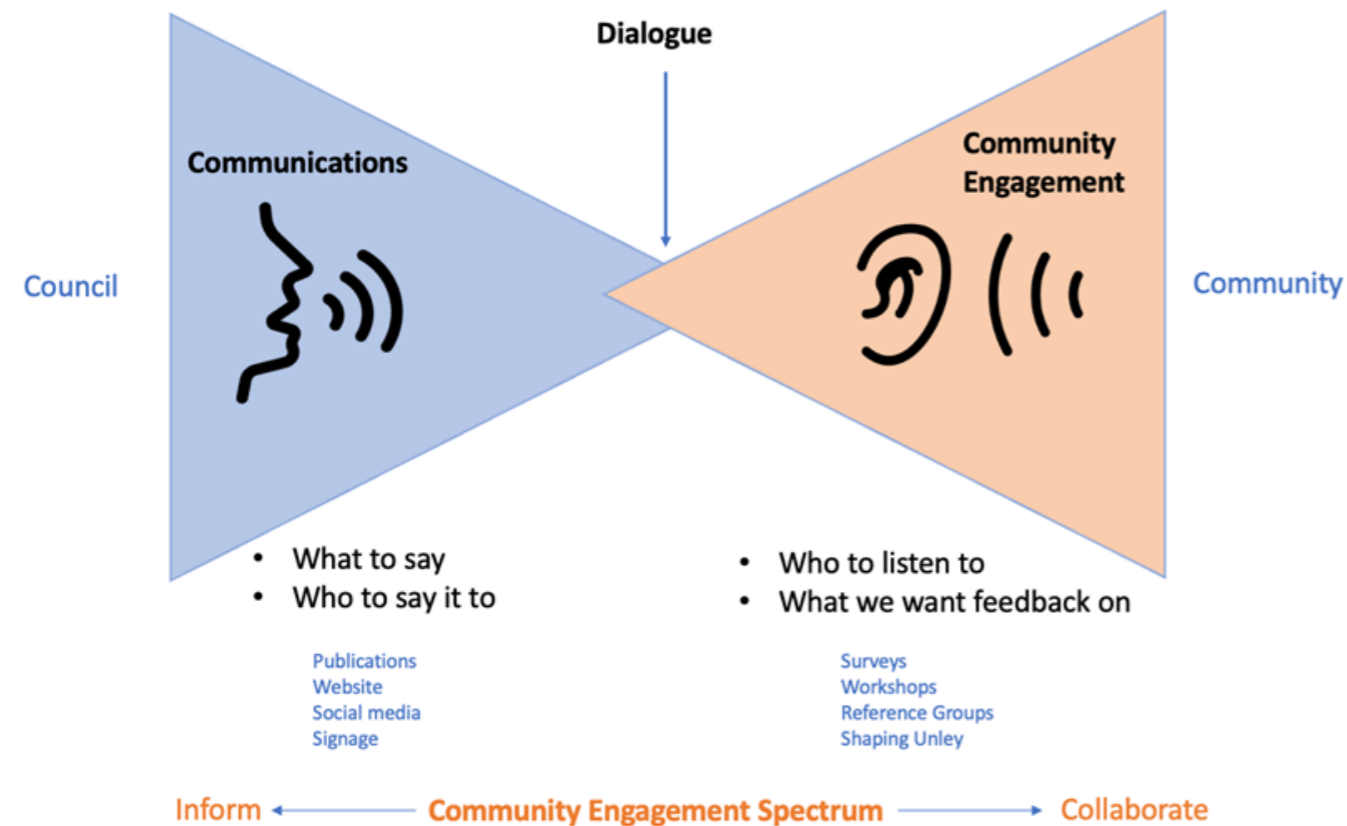
Communications versus community engagement

Communications and community engagement are two related but distinct concepts.

Communications generally refers to the dissemination of information to a specific audience or the general public. It can be undertaken via a range of different analogue and digital mediums, including printed materials, signage, websites, and social media. The goal of communications is typically to inform, educate, or persuade people.

On the other hand, community engagement refers to the process of involving people in decision-making processes that affect their lives. It is a two-way process that involves active listening, dialogue, and collaboration between individuals, organisations, and communities. Community engagement aims to build trust, foster relationships, and promote social inclusion by involving people in shaping the policies, programs, and services that affect them.

Communications can take place without community engagement, but community engagement cannot take place without communications.

Dialogue

Communications

Council

- What to say
- Who to say it to

Publications
Website
Social media
Signage

Community
Engagement

Community

- Who to listen to
- What we want feedback on

Surveys
Workshops
Reference Groups
Shaping Unley

Inform ← **Community Engagement Spectrum** → Collaborate

SECTION 1 - BACKGROUND

1.1 Our community profile

Located just four kilometres from Adelaide's CBD, the City of Unley covers an area of 14 square kilometres. It comprises approximately 18,000 rateable properties and infrastructure assets worth over $530m. It is divided into six council wards, represented by twelve councillors and a mayor.

Residents

According to the 2021 Census, the City of Unley has a population of approximately 39,000 people with a median age of 43.

City of Unley Population

- 0-9yrs: 9%
- 10-24yrs: 17%
- 25-44yrs: 25%
- 45-64yrs: 27%
- 65+yrs: 22%
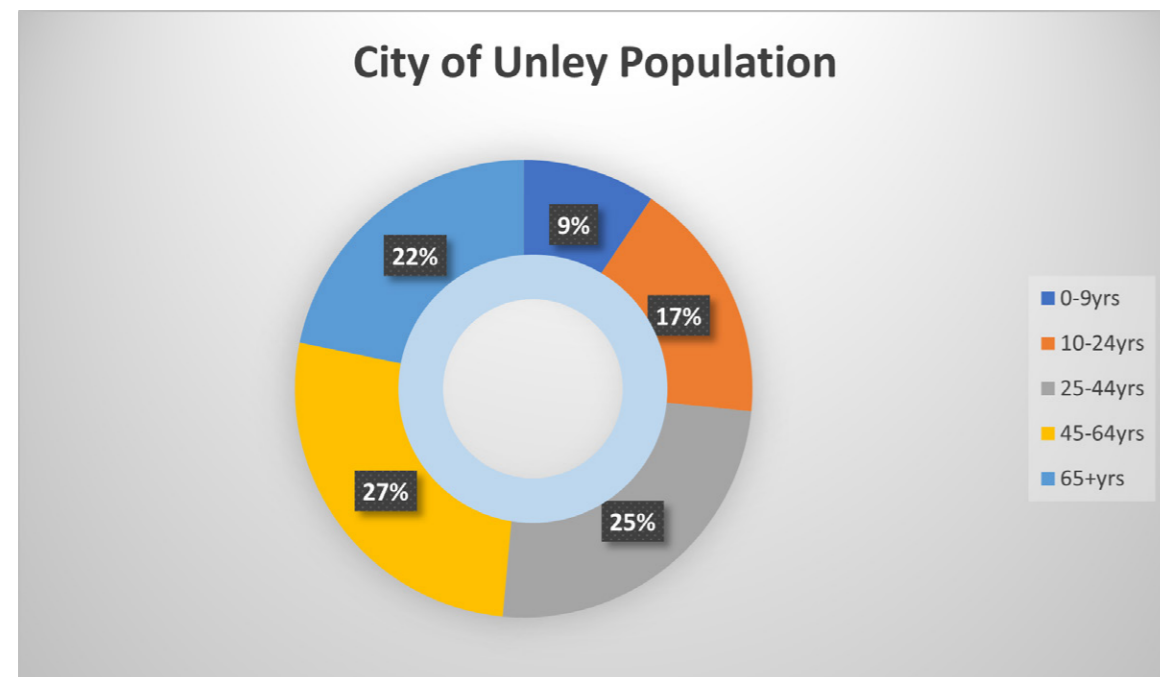
Education and income levels are high.

- 46.5% of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher
- 38.5% of the residents work in professional roles
- 35.5% of residents own their own home without a mortgage

Approximately 80% of working residents commute to jobs outside of the council area.

Just over one-quarter of residents were born overseas, with the UK, China and India representing the top three places of birth.

As a city-fringe area, Unley has a high proportion of medium-high density housing compared to greater Adelaide, which may be why 'lone person households' is the most common household configuration (28%), closely followed by 'couples with children' (27.8%) and 'couples without children' (26.5%).

Business

The City of Unley is home to 6,000 businesses, four vibrant mainstreets (each represented by an independent trader's association) and a growing number of business precincts. There are over 20,000 local jobs and the area has a gross regional product worth $3.27 billion.

The top three industries by employment are:
- Healthcare and social assistance
- Professional, scientific, and technical services
- Education and training

While the top three industries by output value are:
- Professional, scientific, and technical services
- Construction
- Healthcare and social assistance

Council plays a variety of roles in relation to business, from regulator to asset owner to advocate. For the 70% of businesses that are home-based and non-employing, Council is likely to have little direct impact on the way they work. However, Council decisions such as those affecting the public realm may have a significant effect on retail and hospitality businesses.

Clubs and community groups

Clubs and community groups are an essential part of the social fabric of the City of Unley. They are partners in helping Council achieve its community development and wellbeing goals.

As grassroots organisations formed by community members with shared interests, they can provide valuable input and feedback and help to engage residents in Council initiatives.

They are often based in Council-owned facilities, and some rely on Council grants for their ongoing viability.

There are over 40 sporting clubs in Unley that make regular use of Council's open spaces and sporting facilities, as well as 250 community groups ranging from community service based organisations, to recreation and religious groups.

Other stakeholders

Other important stakeholder groups include:

- Non-resident ratepayers – 25% of rate notices go to real estate agents and addresses outside of the City of Unley. Most of these go to landlords of residential properties who receive no direct benefit from services provided by Council.
- Visitors – the City's four mainstreets, Adelaide Showgrounds, and the adjacent parklands help to attract thousands of visitors who help support the local economy.
- Investors – Council's Economic Development Growth Strategy is targeting $900 million in development investment by 2025, particularly in mixed-use developments, retail facilities, and regeneration of local assets.
- Potential employees – in a tight employment market, Council is competing for skilled and experienced staff.
- Volunteers – approximately 250 people provide their time and skills on a voluntary basis to support City of Unley programs and services, helping to strengthen the bond between Council and the community.
- State and federal governments and other local government areas – Council must often collaborate with other levels and areas of government to implement its strategies and achieve its objectives.

Note: Staff communication is addressed separately through an internal communications plan and elected members have access to a purpose designed information hub.

Target audience heterogeneity

While it is useful to understand the composition of our community, it is important to note that the target audience for any given Council communication or engagement activity can be defined by a wide range of shared characteristics including interests, needs, occupations, abilities, gender, sexual orientation, age, and location.

1.2 The communications environment

Communications model

The local government communications model is uniquely challenging.

In conjunction with policy and political messaging, councils promote a vast range of services to a geographically bound but diverse audience. Council brands are strongly associated with their region or place identity and with the overarching brand of local government. Councils must also manage the ongoing tension of being both regulators and service providers. This complexity makes council brand and message management particularly difficult.
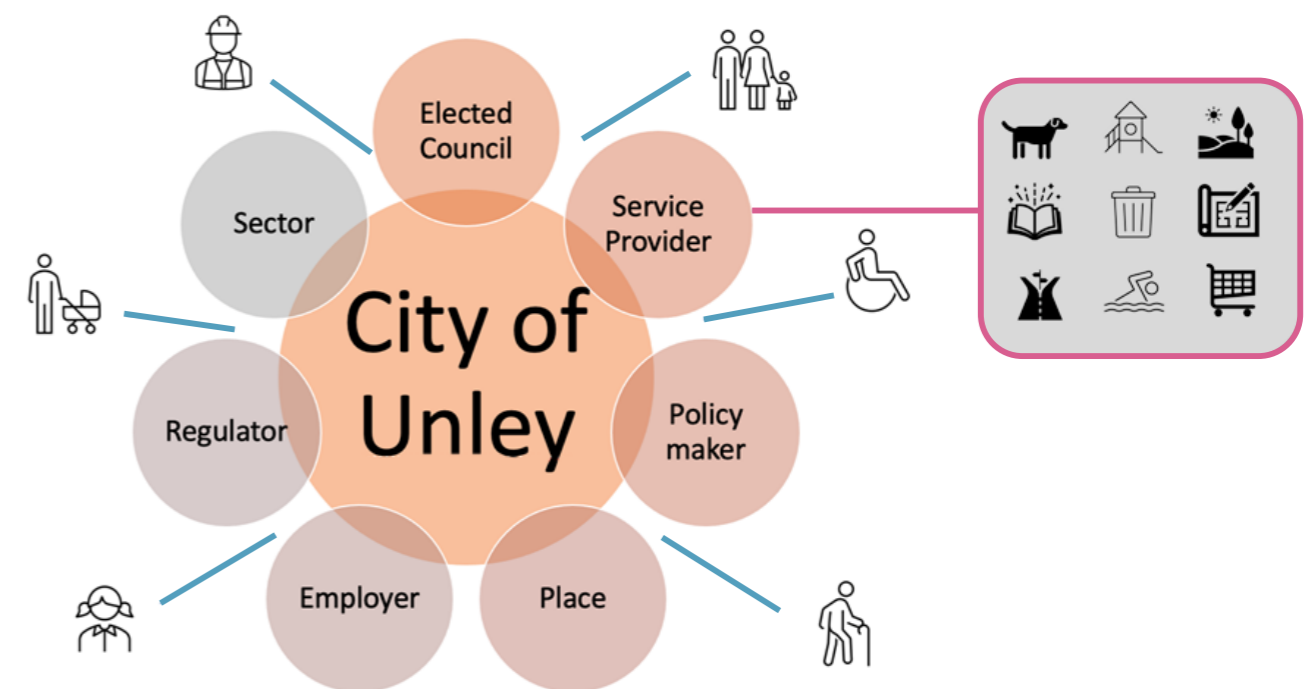
Media landscape

The Australian media landscape is constantly evolving. The recent demise of local newspapers such as the Messenger has left a gap in the coverage of local issues and made it more difficult to reach certain segments of the community.

Proliferating streaming channels, digital radio channels, and social media platforms have resulted in increasing audience fragmentation and message overwhelm has reached an all-time high. In 2007, market research firm Yankelovich estimated that the average consumer saw up to 5,000 ads per day. Although there are no official figures, the average person is now estimated to encounter between 6,000 to 10,000 pieces of communication every day.
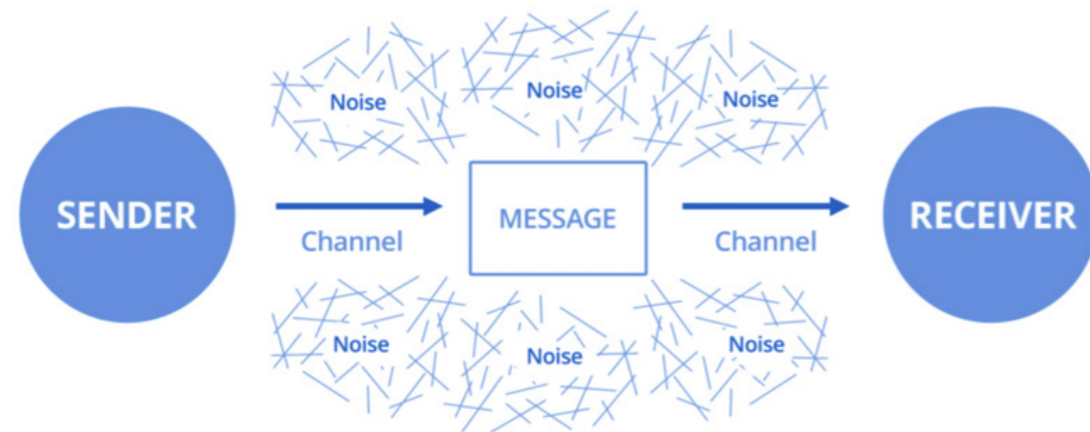
Communication mediums

In 2020, neighbouring council the City of Mitcham undertook research to understand how different segments of their community preferred to communicate with Council. The study, which is applicable to the City of Unley given its similar demographic profile, demonstrated that different age cohorts engage with the Council for different reasons and prefer different mechanisms and media for communication.

The report stated "The community voiced different desired communication mediums that varied by the age cohorts to which they belong. Website (41%) emerged as the most preferred medium to receive information from the council followed by email (39%), flyers/letter box drops (37%), Mitcham Community News (33%) and social media (30%)."

Younger people tended to prefer online mechanisms including social media, middle-aged people cited a preference for engaging via the website, while printed media remained strong amongst older cohorts.

This highlights the need to provide a range of ways for people to make contact and receive information from Council.

People will also be in one of three different modes when communicating with Council – seeking, receiving, or providing information – reinforcing the need for Council to use a range of mediums:

Mode	>>	Example Medium
Actively **seeking** information about a particular topic	>>	Council website, app, telephone, customer service counter, noticeboards
Passively **receiving** information from Council	>>	Letterbox drop, email, social media post, signage
Providing information to Council	>>	Telephone, app, email, Your Say, 1:1 meetings, street meetings, workshops

A current state assessment of communications undertaken in 2021 found that the City of Unley has a range of high-quality, mature communication assets and appropriate policies, tools, and templates in place, but that an opportunity exists to develop a centralised community database to support improved targeting of information.

Current perceptions of the City of Unley

While no formal research has been undertaken on the effectiveness of Council's communication or brand perceptions, customer service satisfaction scores provide a proxy measurement. Currently at 85%, these surveys show a high level of satisfaction with Council's services.

Terms such as leafy, affluent, and conservative are commonly associated with the City's brand identity and while Council has previously adopted the positioning lines 'City of Villages' and 'City of Opportunities', there is an opportunity to review the ongoing relevance and execution of these statements.

Staff and elected members believe that awareness of Council services and programs could be improved, yet participation is generally seen as good. Similarly, there is a desire by elected members to generate higher levels of engagement in community engagement activities.
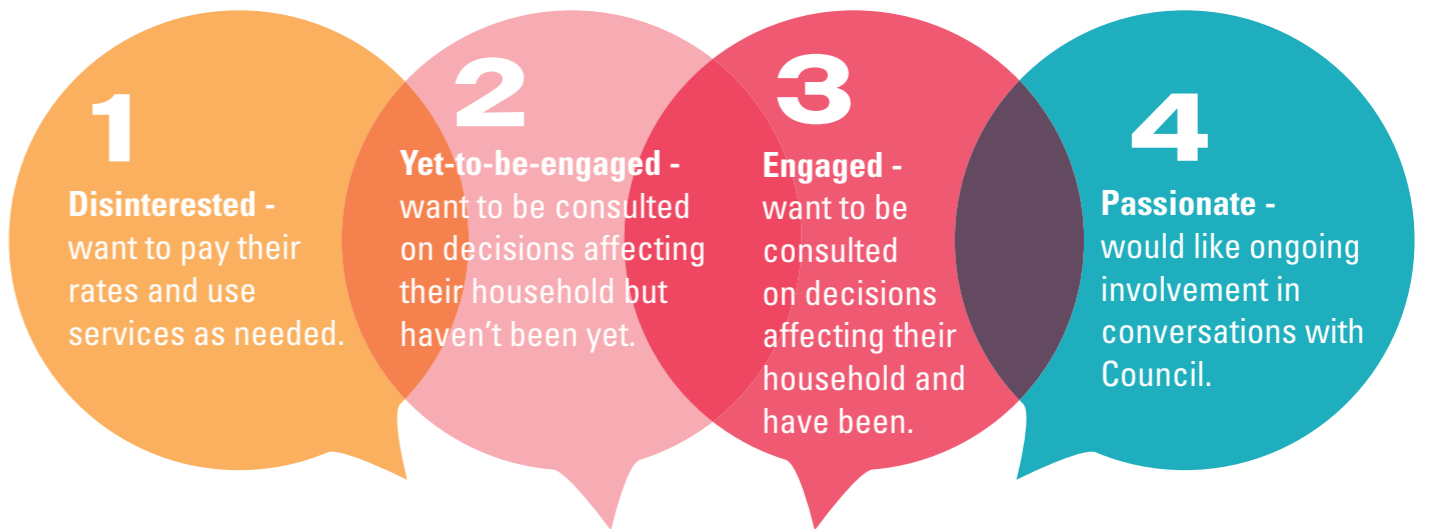
1.3 The community engagement environment

Councils are legislatively required to undertake community engagement on a limited range of issues. However, most, including Unley choose to engage more broadly in the belief that community involvement in decision-making is fundamental to good governance.

Levels of participation in engagement activities vary widely depending on a range of factors such as the nature of the issue at hand, the demographics of the community, and the level of effort required to participate.

People can be grouped into four categories in terms of their interest in engaging with Council.

1 Disinterested - want to pay their rates and use services as needed.

2 Yet-to-be-engaged - want to be consulted on decisions affecting their household but haven't been yet.

3 Engaged - want to be consulted on decisions affecting their household and have been.

4 Passionate - would like ongoing involvement in conversations with Council.

Level of interest	>>	Level of engagement
Disinterested	>>	Inform
Engaged + yet-to-be engaged on issues directly impacting me	>>	Consult
Passionate	>>	Participate

People are more likely to engage where an issue is directly related to their own wellbeing (sometimes referred to as the 'self-interest' hypothesis), however, engagement activities should be designed to maximise opportunities to participate, whether individuals choose to or not.

The design and interpretation of community engagement activities should also ensure that a diversity of perspectives are taken into account. By using a mix of quantitative and qualitative techniques and considering council's goals and the broader context when analysing results, council will ensure equal weight is not given to unrepresentative views.

Council must also consider the time and resource implications associated with community engagement. While community engagement yields many benefits, it is important to align the level and type of engagement with the nature of the issue and ensure that there are clear parameters so that the outcomes generated are achievable.

A recent review of the City of Unley community engagement toolkit found that it remains best practice and continues to support high-quality community engagement. The Shaping Unley process introduced in 2021 provides for an additional, deeper level of engagement with the community on complex and potentially polarising issues.

The review described a strong culture of engagement across Council and noted good utilisation of tools including the Your Say online community engagement platform.

1.4 Summary - challenges, strengths and opportunities
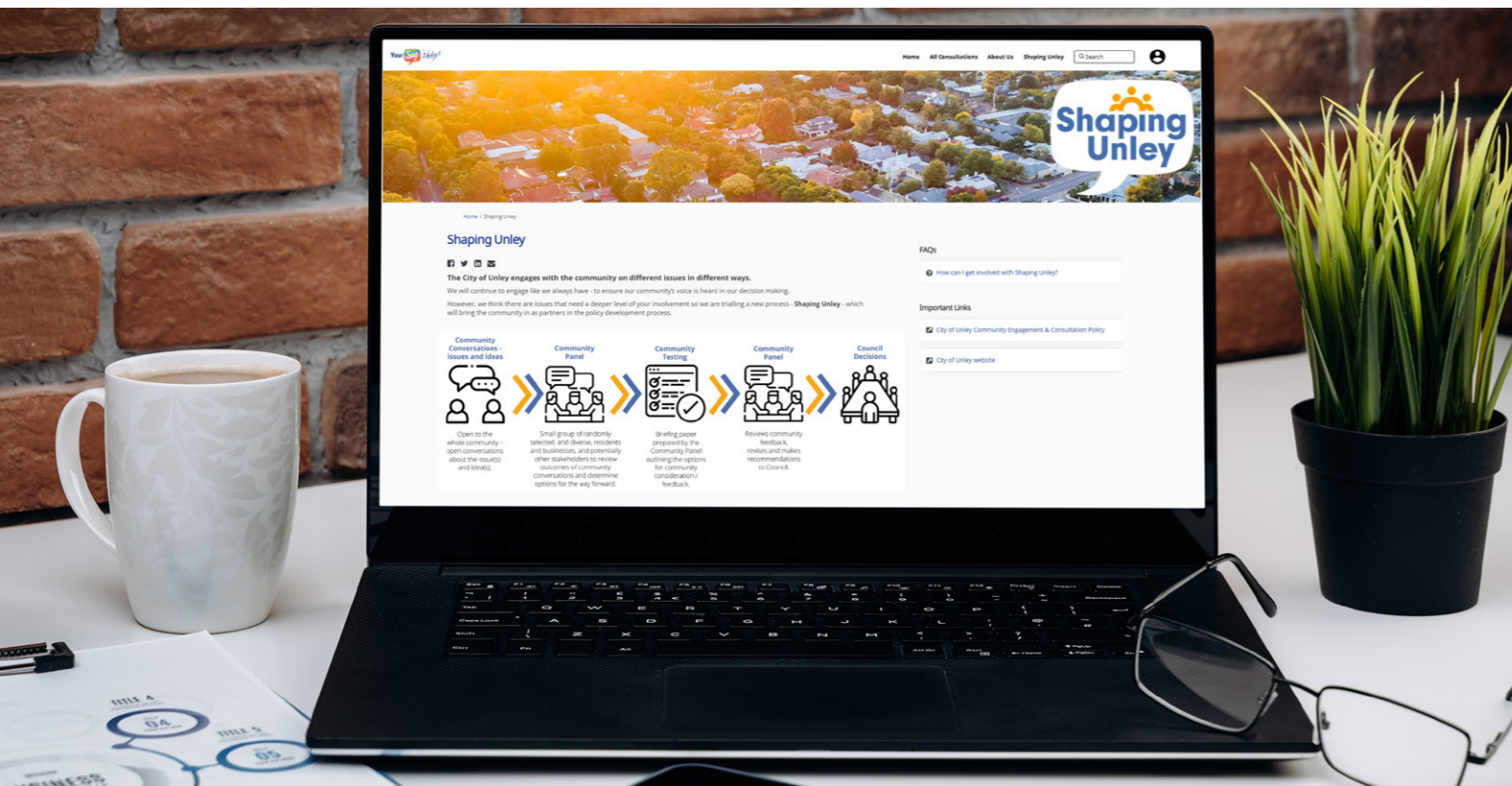
Strengths

- High levels of community satisfaction with Council
- Strong communications policy framework, tools, and templates
- High-quality, mature communication assets
- Strong culture of engagement
- Comprehensive community engagement toolkit and good utilisation of the Your Say online engagement platform.

Challenges

- Complex branding and messaging framework
- Highly fragmented and increasingly digital media landscape
- A wide variety of audiences with different channel preferences and different levels of interest in engaging with Council.

Opportunities

- Increase awareness of Council programs and services
- Consolidate brand positioning framework
- Improve targeting of information
- Increase community engagement participation rates
- Use the Shaping Unley process to deepen the level of community engagement on critical and sensitive issues.

2.1 Objectives

Objective 1: Enhance the reputation of Unley as a city that offers an enviable lifestyle, environment, business strength and civic leadership.

Objective 2: Increase awareness of Council's programs, services, and events.

Objective 3: Promote a greater understanding of the role and value of Council.

Objective 4: Enable community involvement in decision-making to support effective, sustainable, and responsible local government.

2.2 Communication and engagement principles

When communicating and engaging with the community, Council will apply the following principles:

- **Consistency** – with the organisation's values and brand attributes.
- **Transparency** – relevant, timely, accessible, and balanced information.
- **Inclusion** – using a variety of mediums and processes that enable people to access information and engage with Council in ways that suit them.
- **Authenticity** – honest, respectful communication with positive intent.
- **Community-first** – putting the community at the heart of communication and engagement.
- **Continuous improvement** – measuring and evaluating communication and engagement outcomes to continually refine and improve our approach.

2.3 Communication and engagement factors

When deciding what communication mediums to employ, the nature of the audience or stakeholder group and their preferred modes of communication will be one of our primary considerations.

When deciding at what level to engage, will also take into account:

- The level of difficulty involved in making a decision.
- The potential impact the outcome might have on stakeholders.
- The level of interest that stakeholders demonstrate concerning the decision.
- The geographic impact of the decision.

Example issues and events

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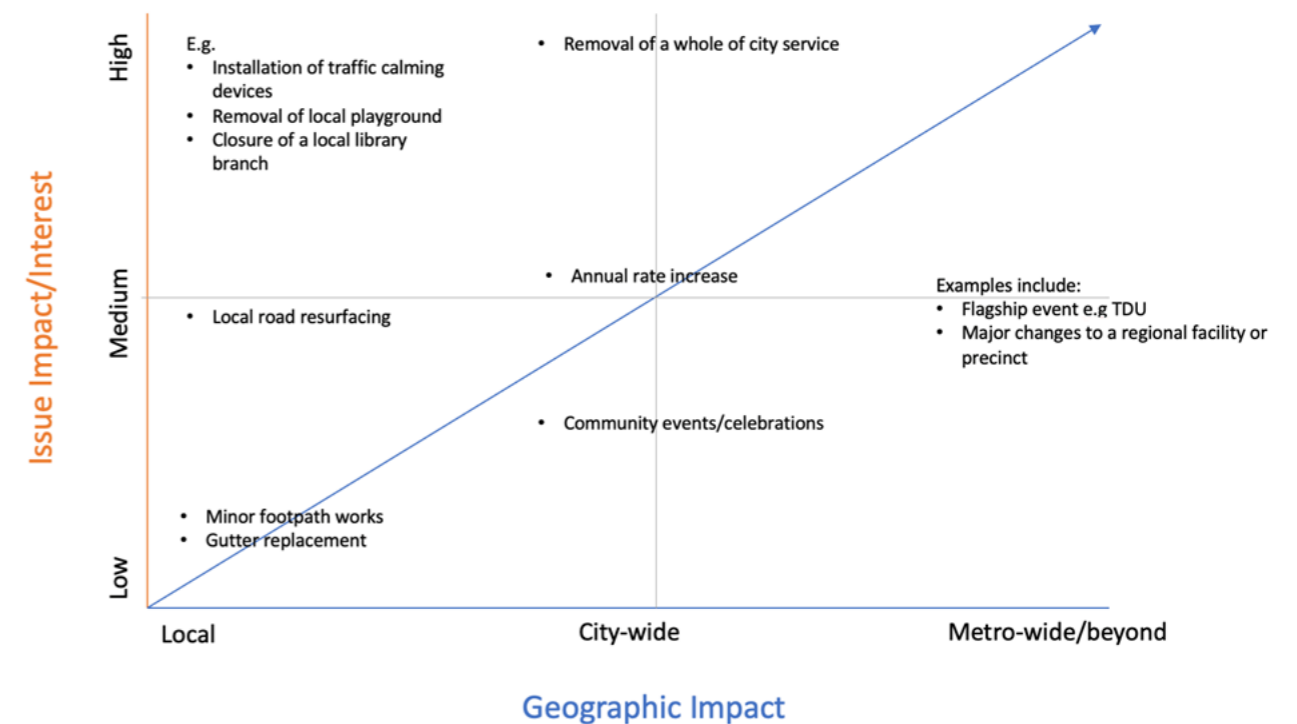
2.4 Engagement model

When engaging with the community, we will engage as early in a project's lifecycle as practicable, at the highest level possible, within legislative, time, and budget constraints, or explain to the community why not.

We will continue to employ an engagement model based on the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) model which is recognised as best practice and widely used by local and state governments in Australia.

The Unley model has been adapted from the original five levels of engagement to four.

1. **Inform**
2. **Consult**
3. **Involve**
4. **Collaborate**
5. **Empower (not applicable)**

This is consistent with the approach described in the South Australian Local Government Association's community engagement model handbook which notes "the IAP2 Spectrum includes Empower as a level of engagement whereby final decision making is placed in the hands of the public. Under the Local Government Act 1999, the only decision-making power which is likely to be placed in the hands of the public is that of electing council members every 4 years. The Act empowers an elected council in South Australia to make policy, strategic and budget decisions except where delegated to staff, a committee, or a subsidiary, but delegations for decision making cannot be made to the public."

Community Engagement Spectrum

Level 1 Inform	Level 2 Consult	Level 3 Involve	Level 4 Collaborate
Provide information that explains how and why a decision has been made	Obtain feedback on available options	Work with the community to understand needs and concerns and develop possible solutions	To partner with the public via the Shaping Unley process to explore each aspect of the decision including development of alternatives and identification of a preferred solution
We will inform when: • A decision is made for legislative, financial, or technical reasons. • There is no opportunity to influence the outcome.	We will consult when: • Input is required on concepts or designs • There is more than one option available • Final decisions are being shaped.	We will seek involvement when: • Issues and concerns are unclear • We need to understand the community's lived experience and local knowledge.	We will collaborate when: • We need stakeholders to talk to us and each other about complex and potentially polarising issues.
We will explain: • What decision was made • How the decision was made • The impact (if any) of the decision • Where further information can be found.	We will ask: • Are there any ideas to improve this? • Which option is preferred? • Why/why not?	We will ask: • What would people like to see happen? • What have we missed or not considered? • What's are the alternative ways forward?	We will ask: • What are the key issues? • What are the possible solutions? • What are your recommendations to Council?

2.6 Strategies and actions

In addition to the routine work of the communications team, the following strategies will be implemented:

Objective 1

Enhance the reputation of Unley as a city that offers an enviable lifestyle, environment, business strength and civic leadership.

	Strategies	Actions	Timing
1.1	Establish baseline brand measures	Undertake research to understand current perceptions of the City of Unley and its organisation and place brands	Medium
1.2	Review brand framework and guidelines	Review the City of Unley brand framework including organisational, employer, business, and place brand positioning and relationships	Long
1.3	Comply with DAIP requirements	Review brand and operational communications to ensure they meet Disability Access and Inclusion requirements	Short
1.4	Align strategic communication outputs	Improve forward planning processes to ensure alignment of communication messages and activities arising from Council's various strategies e.g. cultural, environmental and economic development strategies	Short
1.5	Develop a positioning campaign	Develop a low-cost positioning campaign/set of messaging to bring brand positioning to life Consider use of internal and external brand ambassadors to amplify messaging	Long

Objective 2

Increase awareness of Council's programs, services, and events.

	Strategies	Actions	Timing
2.1	Improve targeting of information	Develop a community database and associated protocols	Short
2.2	Explore new media partnerships	Identify and assess alternative non-traditional media partnerships to replace the Messenger	Long
2.3	Improve social media engagement	Trial increased use of short videos, polls, and other emerging tactics to improve social media engagement	Short
2.4	Review media monitoring service	Review the requirement for a traditional media monitoring service and explore alternative tracking mechanisms	Short
2.5	Measure and report the effectiveness of Council's communication and engagement program	Establish metrics and reporting protocol to track the effectiveness of Council's communication and engagement program.	Medium

Objective 3

Promote a greater understanding of the role and value of Council.

	Strategies	Actions	Timing
3.1	Review publications	Review the format, content and frequency of Council's publications. (print and digital)	Medium
3.2	Support development and promotion of online services portal	Work with ICT to develop and promote online services portal and/or app	Short
3.3	Leverage partnerships	Leverage partnerships with trader associations, sporting clubs and community groups to promote the role of Council	Long
3.4	Leverage LGA 'part of your everyday' campaign	Adopt/adapt/amplify LGA campaign messaging	Short

Objective 4

Enable community involvement in decision-making to support effective, sustainable, and responsible local government.

	Strategies	Actions	Timing
4.1	Implement the recommendations of the Community Engagement Toolkit Review	Implement the recommendations of the Community Engagement Toolkit Review including: • Moving the community engagement toolkit online • Endorsing an overarching principle to encourage greater community engagement • Developing clear roles and responsibilities statement for staff and elected members in relation to community engagement • Finalising a community engagement framework	Medium
4.2	Undertake a recruitment drive to build greater diversity in the community engagement database	Promote the opportunity to increase the participation in engagement activities such as Your Say Unley (Relates also to strategy 2.1 – improve targeting of information)	Short
4.3	Evolve the collaborative engagement approach	Refine the Shaping Unley model based on learnings from Tree Canopy on Private Land engagement	Medium
4.4	Deepen our collective understanding of the science behind engagement and interpretation of results	Analyse engagement activities and monitor sector research to continually refine our approach to engagement and how to interpret results.	Long

2.7 Resourcing

To implement this strategy, the City of Unley communications team will transition to a hybrid delivery model where an increased number of activities will be centralised. This will require increased resourcing and a review of the skills required within the communications team.

An internal training program will underpin the rollout of the updated community engagement toolkit and the communications team will educate staff about how to engage with the new hybrid delivery model.

To support delivery of this strategy, projects will be scoped where required to be considered as part of the annual business planning process.

2.8 Measurement and reporting

Progress against the strategies and actions outlined in this document will be reviewed annually. Success will be measured in terms of compliance to plan and effectiveness (as per action 2.6).

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