Community Engagement Strategy

2020 - 2024

Mildura Rural City Council

1. Introduction

The Mildura Rural City Council (MRCC) Community Engagement Strategy 2020-2024 is designed to build on Council's progress and commitment to engage effectively with all members of community through our business delivery, decision making, services and governance.

Effective engagement is a means of ensuring that Council functions effectively on a daily basis, provides valuable services and makes informed decisions that reflect the diversity, expectations and circumstances of residents and communities across the municipality. It has the potential to be a catalyst for building and supporting local identity and social cohesion.

The 2020 -2024 Community Engagement Strategy, provides the next phase for planned effective, inclusive, transparent and accessible community engagement practice for our organisation.

2. Background

The Community Engagement Strategy 2014-2018 was a formative document developed to introduce consistent Community Engagement practice and principles across the organisation. It was designed to generate an organisational approach and foundation framework that focused on internal capacity building that led to planned, quality community engagement that was inclusive, accessible, coordinated and well communicated.

The Mildura Rural City Council LGA covers a vast geographical area (22,300 sq km) with a diverse population of 53,878 (2016 Census). Its unique composition and scale requires Council to respond to a wide range of community expectations and demands. Proficient and effective Community Engagement is an essential and powerful tool in understanding the range of communities with in the municipality.

Community Profile

53,878 POPULATION

51% FEMALE 49% MALE

39.5 YEARS AVERAGE AGE

MORE THAN 70 DIFFERENT CULTURES

16% BORN OVERSEAS

9% SPEAK A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH

5% OF PEOPLE LIVE WITH A DISABILITY

2,763 PEOPLE ARE OVER THE AGE OF 80

3. Vision

The Community Engagement Strategy 2020 -2024 is representative of Council's commitment in working towards its vision of:

'Making this the most liveable, people- friendly community in Australia'"

> "Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody."
> — **Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities**

Jane Jacobs OC OOnt was an American-Canadian journalist, author, and activist who influenced urban studies, sociology, and economics. Her book The Death and Life of Great American Cities argued that urban renewal did not respect the needs of city-dwellers. It also introduced the sociological concepts "eyes on the street" and "social capital.

4. Purpose

The Community Engagement Strategy 2020 -2024 intends to consolidate our commitment to human centered design, by embedding Community Engagement principles into our practices.

It is intended that this will ensure our Community Engagement practice is consistently meaningful, collaborative and user focused.

5. Aims

Based on the review of the Community Engagement Strategy 2014-2018 and through consultation with key internal stakeholders the following aims for the Community Engagement Strategy 2020- 2024 were identified:

- Developing strategies which embed Councils Community Engagement Principle statements into our organisational practices, policies and strategic plans.

- Building on the effectiveness and accessibility of online engagement for community and Council.

- Integrating Councils legislative obligations for effective community engagement in accordance with the Victorian *Local Government Act 1989* and other relevant legislations into our practice, policies and strategic plans.

- Development of strategies with actions to empower staff to be confident and effective community engagement practitioners

- Consistent organisational approach to community engagement practice through robust evaluation and a valuable measurement system

6. Review of the Community Engagement Strategy 2014-2018

The 2014-2018 strategy was heavily shaped by key themes that were supported by statements aimed at promoting sustainable outcomes that Council could aspire to through the implementation of strategy actions.

At the time it was envisioned that the 2014-2018 Strategy principle statements would be ongoing and would cycle through a process of continuous improvement into the next Community Engagement Strategy, however the impending Local Government Act Reforms have since emerged and will directly influence the principles underpinning the 2020-2024 Strategy. Fortunately the alignment between the Council and the proposed reforms is highly compatible and is expected to strengthen Councils Community Engagement commitment.

Table1. Community Engagement Strategy 2014-2018 Principle Statements

Community Engagement Strategy 2014-2018 page 11.

Theme	Principle Statements
Engagement Coordination	Internal collaboration and cooperation fosters coordinated engagement.
Inclusive and Accessible Engagement	Inclusive and accessible engagement, delivered in a timely and flexible manner acknowledges the diversity of our community.
Communication	Targeted and tailored communication is essential when engaging with the community. The engagement process involves listening, following up and providing feedback to close the communication loop.
Relationships	Meaningful, respectful relationships are crucial for engagement, as is developing new and maintaining existing relationships with community.
Engagement Planning	Engagement is purposeful and well planned
Methods, Tools, Techniques	Community engagement tools must be appropriate and applied to each individual situation.

Implementation

The Community Engagement Strategy 2014-2018 was implemented through the guidance and direction of the Community Engagement Strategy Implementation Team in the capacity of a long term steering group. The team was cross functional and met regularly (first monthly, then bi monthly) to progress the actions and monitor outcomes. This included reviewing actions, monitoring results, determining approaches to implementation and supporting activities as they emerge.

The team was essential in driving the momentum of the strategy, ensuring actions were successful, integrated and complemented other Council Strategies and Plans and were representative of a wide range of Council Branch views, ideas and needs .

The team reviewed the final results and provided feedback on the future opportunities, and influences that will shape the development of the Community Engagement Strategy 2020-2024.

Engagement Activity Outcome Summary

- 78 per cent of activities were completed over the life of the Strategy (18 of the 23 identified)
- 13 per cent of activities have commenced but will be expanded on in the Community Engagement Strategy 2020-2024 (three of the 23 identified). These three align with measuring engagement success
- 8per cent of activities have not been completed (two of the 23 activities) with one being unable to be attained and one being completed during the review process.

Key observations and outcomes from the Community Engagement Strategy 2014-2018 are summarised below:

- The principle statements successfully provided a valuable framework for community engagement, resulting in tools, techniques and methods that have successfully engaged community.

- Outcomes have been tested against the Victorian Auditor General Office - Public Participation in Government Decision Making - Best Practice Guidelines released in 2017. The guidelines provide direction for Local Government in preparing for the introduction of the Local Government Act Reforms. Council complies with all the best practice recommendations.
- Provided access to a range of effective tools, techniques and methods for community engagement across the organisation.
- Provided best practice community engagement training for staff at a range of levels across Council (87 staff and 6 Councillors completed training).
- Alignment of community engagement policy, procedures and processes to better coordinate, plan for and deliver community engagement activities across the organisation. (See Strategic Measurement System satisfaction results).

Opportunities for the future of Community Engagement

The review of the Community Engagement Strategy 2014-2018 identified the following key opportunities going forward. These themes will provide scope for the strategic plan proposal for the Community Engagement Strategy 2020 -2024:

- Imbedding Councils Community Engagement principles statements
- Expanding Online engagement resources and practice
- Reflecting community engagement legislations in practice
- Empowering staff to be community engagement practitioners
- Valuable measures and robust evaluation of community engagement
  Final Report Community Engagement Strategy 2014-2018

Our commitment to Community Engagement

7. What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement is a planned process that involves two way communication between Council and the people who will be affected by the decision.

Community input enables good governance and informed decision making - by sharing the responsibility for the decisions to be made.

"Community Engagement to me means hearing the voice of those we are talking about. Especially hearing from those with lived experience of the issue at hand. For example if we are talking about issues relating to children, we should be hearing the voice of our children"– Staff quote

Effective Community Engagement provides a range of information, opinion and evidence to guide decision making and enhance Council's ability to respond to community, it is not designed to replace the decision making responsibilities of a Council but allow Councillors to make informed decisions based on an understanding of community expectations.

There is range of levels for community engagement including informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering.

All the levels of engagement come with a goal and promise that Council has committed to.

Council uses the International Model of Public Participation (IAP2) to set the parameters of this commitment. IAP2 is recognised nationally and internationally as a model of Community Engagement Best Practice and is referenced and/or reflected at both a State and National Government level in Legislation, Policy and Guidelines.

iap2 Community Engagement Model

International association for public participation
AUSTRALASIA

Community leads

Community leads the engagement and the organisation is responsible for the action

Community Advocacy

Community leads the engagement and the community is responsible for the action.

Community Acts and Contributes

Shared Leadership and Action

Organisation leads

Organisation Implementation

Organisation leads the engagement and the organisation is responsible for the action.

Behavior Change

Organisation leads the engagement and the community is responsible for the action.

Organisation Acts

Community Acts

Organisation Leads-Organisatio Acts	Organisations lead engagement and seek input to shape the policies, projects and services for which they are responsible. This is a familiar and traditional approach to policy development, project management and service delivery.
	Engagement is used to both inform the community about proposed policy, project or propositions and to provide some input to the shape or execution of the policy, project or propositions.
	Final decision making sits with the organisation and its governors and the organisation is responsible for its action.
Organisation Leads-Community Acts	Organisations lead the conversation with communities and individuals take responsibility for action.
Community leads-Organisation Act	A community leads in the profile to identify, highlight and propose the action required to solve a problem or take an opportunity. To achieve the desired action requires the response of a local organisation. The community alone cannot achieve the desired results and therefore advocated for the organisation to act.
Community Leads-Community Acts	Communities can lead the conversation and have responsibility for the action.
	Communities in a range of areas, from sport and recreation to community wellbeing, environmental action and education are able to support, design, resource and deliver their own programs, services and activities. Community organisation and NGO's need to engage with community members to gather support, build understanding and commitment and to deliver the outcome.
Shared Leadership and Action	Leadership and actions can be shared, where communities and organisations participate and contribute to the decision, and also lead and take responsibility for action towards the outcomes
	The collaborative arrangement, shared decision making, management and responsibility for the delivery required to meet shared outcomes.

8. IAP2 Levels of Engagement

The International Association for Public Participation, or IAP2, is an association which aims to promote and improve the practice of public participation. The IAP2 has developed an engagement spectrum which is widely used to describe the different levels of engagement that can be applied in a given situation.

The spectrum is not intended to imply participation can only be linear, that one type of participation should be completed before progressing to another. It is also not intended to suggest that some types of participation are better than others, or that only one type of participation is appropriate for each process. Rather, different levels of participation may be used at different stages of the process, or regarding different components of the project.

Table 3: IAP2 Spectrum of Participation

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation Goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem alternatives, opportunities and or/solutions	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	To place final decision- making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public	'We will keep you informed'	'We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision'	'We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision'	'We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible'	'We will implement what you decide'

9. Legislative Context

1. **The *Local Government Act 1989* (incorporating reform - yet to be endorsed)**

   <u>Major reform No. 4 of 10.</u> Council will undertake deliberative Community Engagement process before adopting a four year Council Plan and a four year Budget so communities better inform strategic directions and pending priorities of Council. www.yourcouncilyourcommunity.vic.gov.au/exposure-draft

   <u>PART 3 Decision making</u>

   Council decision making practice will be transparent and use contemporary community engagement processes.

   The LGA draft bill requires Council's to have a community engagement policy which gives effect to the community engagement principles. The Engagement Principles have been prepared for a legislative purpose and to remain valid for a generation. For this reason they are succinct, high level and sustainable. They align with the Victorian Auditor General's Office of Public Participation Principles, which reflect the public sector values of responsiveness, integrity, impartiality, accountability, respect and human rights.

   - Division 1— Community accountability - 54 Community Engagement Policy;
   - (1) A Council must adopt and maintain a community engagement policy.
   - (2) A Community Engagement Policy must;
   - Give effect to the Community Engagement Principles; and
   - Be capable of being applied in relation to any of the Council's strategic planning or policy development; and
   - Describe the type and form of community engagement proposed, having regard to the significance and complexity of the matter, the subject of community engagement and the level of resourcing required; and
   - Specify a process for informing the municipal community of the outcome of the community engagement; and
   - Include any other matters prescribed by the regulations.
   - Without limiting the generality of subsection (2)(c), community engagement in the development of the Council Plan and the first Council budget after a general election must be undertaken in collaboration with the municipal community.

Local Government draft bill alignment of community engagement principles.

- **Clear remit** – A Community Engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope
- **Informed** – Participants in Community Engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation
- **Representative** – Participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the subject of the community engagement
- **Supportive and inclusive** – Participants in community engagement are entitled to support, to enable meaningful and informed engagement
- **Transparent and accountable** – Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement will influence Council decision making.
- **Other** – responsiveness is addressed through the requirement for councils to implement a Community Engagement Policy.

2. **Victorian Human Rights Charter**
   Human Rights in Action: Local Government milestones and how to meet them

The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 provides further requirements that relate to community engagement by stating "every person in Victoria has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to participate in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives" (s.18). This Act also includes provisions by which "every person has the right to freedom of expression which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, whether within or outside Victoria" (s.15).

https://www.vlga.org.au/sites/default/files/Human%20Rights%20and%20Local%20Government_0.pdf

The Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (AHRC Act) contains a limited definition of human rights for the purposes of that Act.

'Human rights' are defined by section 3 of the AHRC Act as the rights and freedoms contained in specific international instruments that are scheduled to, or declared under, the AHRC Act.

3.   Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986

Human rights milestones

This manual describes 13 human rights milestones to assist your local government to live up to its legal obligations under the Charter, and build a human rights culture within council and the community.

The milestones are broken down into distinct spheres of action: elected council, administration, community and third parties. *Figure 1* below shows the spheres of action and the areas of local government work that belong to each. These areas in turn inform the human rights milestones.
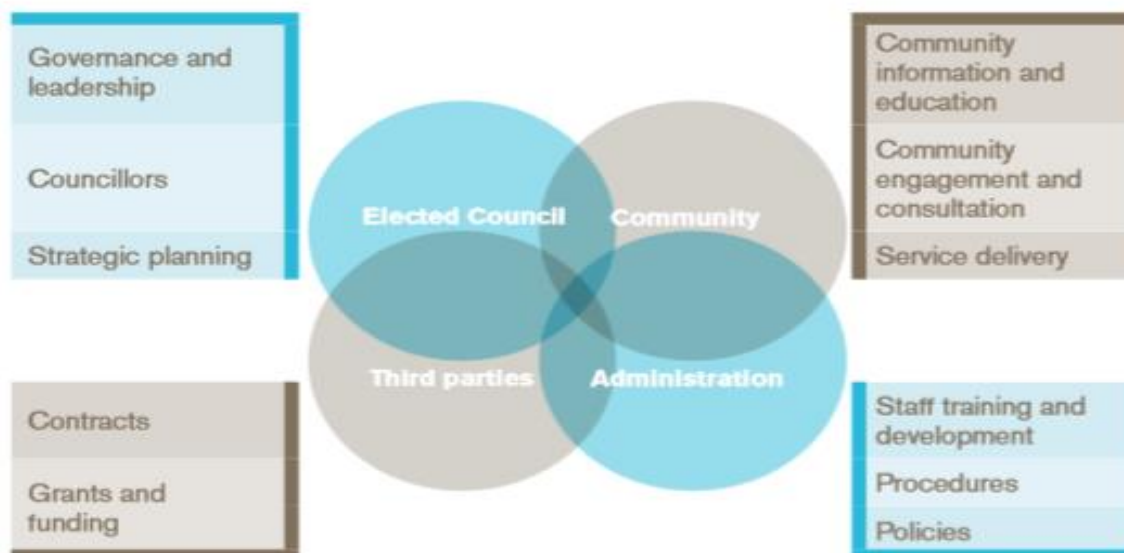
Figure 1: Spheres of action for human rights implementation within Local Government

4. **Racial Discrimination Act 1975**

   Gives effect to Australia's obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Its major objectives are to:

   - promote equality before the law for all persons, regardless of their race, colour or national or ethnic origin, and
   - make discrimination against people on the basis of their race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin unlawful.

5. **Sex Discrimination Act 1984**

   The *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* gives effect to Australia's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and certain aspects of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 156. Its major objectives are to

   - Promote equality between men and women
   - Eliminate discrimination on the basis of sex, marital status or pregnancy and, with respect to dismissals, family responsibilities, and
   - Eliminate sexual harassment at work, in educational institutions, in the provision of goods and services, in the provision of accommodation and the delivery of Commonwealth programs.

6. **Disability Discrimination Act 1992**

   The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person, in many areas of public life, including: employment, education, getting or using services, renting or buying a house or unit, and accessing public places, because of their disability.

7. **Equal Opportunity Act 2010**

   The *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* took effect in August 2011.

   The objectives of the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* are to encourage the identification and elimination of discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation and their causes, and to promote and facilitate the progressive realisation of equality.

8. **Age Discrimination Act 2004**

   The *Age Discrimination Act 2004* protects individuals from discrimination on the basis of age in employment, education, accommodation and the provision of goods and services.

10 Consultation – Listening

Community

Feedback received during the preparation of the Council Plan 2017-2021 further highlighted the importance community places on engagement and communication with Council. The Council Plan 2017-2021 consultation engaged residents from across the municipality to provide Council with confirmation and direction on service delivery for the next four years.

MRCC Council Plan 2017-2021 Community Engagement

Community feedback identified the top three areas as:
- More/better engagement with community
- Listen to community feedback
- Promotion of Council services, facilities and events

MRCC staff engagement

This is a MRCC staff focused strategy for community engagement it is intended to ensure alignment with legislation and industry best practice.

A number of methods were utilised to capture a representative cross-section of the organisation to ensure the information was statistically accurate, and the process was as accessible for participation as possible.

Methods to gather data:

- 2018 Community Engagement training – (participant survey data)
- Facilitated conversation groups – (Attended team meetings)
- Online Survey – Survey monkey
- Hard copy surveys
- 2019 Community Engagement training – (participant survey data collated)
- 2019 Community Engagement training session
- Workshopped facilitated conversation data with training participants
- Participant survey results– Survey response data collated

Methodology

The questions for this activity were devised to assess current engagement knowledge, and the consistency of practice within our organisation, in order to develop actions for this strategy to be based upon.

It was intended that the data gathered will provide a benchmark of current practices,

A. Assess the impact of the 2014-2018 strategy on MRCC Community engagement practice
B. Assess the organisations knowledge of IAP2 Community Engagement Principles and how they align with LGA community engagement principles
C. Determine the consistency of planned community engagement practice
D. Identify gaps
E. Identify opportunities for improvement
F. Determine actions for continuous practice improvement.

Results

2018/19 community engagement training

- Staff are seeking a detailed stepped approach to engagement (prompts)
- A highly visible organisational approach to planned community engagement
- Strategies and methods for effective engagement with community
- Opportunities for cross-team collaboration
- A centralised Hub to collate resources - templates, developed engagement plans and other information to support independence and confidence.

Survey and Facilitated Conversation results

1. **Current MRCC level of engagement activity**
   Conclusion:
   - Data indicates that the activities we currently regard as Community Engagement are predominately – not planned community engagement activities, but actually customer interactions (Customer Service)
   - 43.37 per cent of responses indicate engagement activity at the inform level

2. **Preferred methods for engagement**
   Conclusion:
   - **No.1- Multimedia sources:** Social media, radio, online survey polls, animation, info graphics

   - **No.2- Interpersonal delivery:** Text messages, phone, email, attending meetings,printed Materials (brochures, newsletters etc.)

3. **Influence engagement is having on service delivery**
   Conclusion:
   - There is an emerging level of knowledge - staff are steadily developing a sense for the importance for planned community engagement to inform work practices.

4. **How is our organisation planning for engagement**
   Conclusion:
   - An opportunity exists to increase the consistency and volume of planned community engagement activities.
   - It is still unknown as to when planned engagement is necessary.

5. **How do we measure the effectiveness of our engagement practices**
   Conclusion:
   - An opportunity exists for the organisation to improve our process for planning and evaluation of community engagement activities

6. **What does engagement success look like?**
   Conclusion:
   - An *opportunity* exists to improve our planning for engagement in order to feedback to Council and community on our findings in order to consistently close the communication loop, and inform community of how their input has shaped our decisions.

Our Strategic Direction

The Community Engagement Strategy 2020-2024 has been developed to achieve the following strategic outcomes through the implementation of the action plan below. They have emerged through the rigorous consultation undertaken and with incorporation of community feedback.

Mildura Rural City Council Strategic Outcomes:

1. Community Engagement will result in better decisions and service provision to our community.
2. Extend community participation beyond elections through deliberative community engagement which shapes Council Plans.
3. Community Engagement is valued as a strategic process to inform Mildura Rural City Council decision making processes.
4. Council will use the systems to support consistent best practice community engagement.
5. Council will use the tools, methods and techniques that support consistent and best practice community engagement.
6. Council staff will have the knowledge, skills and confidence to undertake effective community engagement activities.

What we will continue to do:

- Promote engagement opportunities
- Provide engagement mentoring
- Encourage use of the consultation calendar
- Offer annual Community Engagement induction training
- Monitor engagement framework (template's and resources and policies) to ensure they reflect legislation and industry best practice.

Community Engagement Action Plan

Strategic Outcome	Action	Measure/s	Implementation	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24
Mildura Rural City Council will use the systems to support consistent best practice community engagement	• Review Council Community Engagement policies.	• LGA compliance recommendations implemented	**Governance** Community Futures	O				
Mildura Rural City Council will deliver consistent Community Engagement activities that comply with Legislation and Best Practice, at the level appropriate for community impact.	• Review all components of the Community Engagement Guide including the; 　- Engagement Planning Model 　- Community Engagement Process 　- Community Engagement Template • Develop and implement continuous improvement plan	• Community Engagement Guide and components reviewed • Continuous Improvement plan developed and implemented. • Measure and track trends in staff undertaking planned engagement activities	**Community Futures** *Organisational Development* *Governance* *Corporate Services*	O	O	O	O	O

Outcome	Actions	Measures	Responsibility						
Deliberative Community Engagement, will enhance Council democracy, transparency, responsiveness beyond elections.	• Develop a reference tool to support compliance with deliberative engagement practice. (as per the LG Act)	• Deliberative engagement planning endorsed by Managers/supervisors for each identified activity prior to delivery.	**Community Futures** Department Managers/ Supervisors ELT Organisational Development	o	o	o	o	o	

	• Develop a highly visible engagement presence in community.
	- Close the communication loop
	- Create a consistent message to accompany the existing Council brand logo to be used on:
	   - Facebook
	   - Council website
	   - Media advertising
	• Utilise Council's existing website to develop a dedicated Community Engagement platform.
	• Develop a process to effectively manage online Engagement.
	(Action from 2014-18 Strategy)
		• Develop and implement mechanism for tracking and monitoring engagement activities delivered.
		
		• Community Satisfaction with participation in Council decision making.
		
		• Develop and implement mechanism for tracking and monitoring site traffic.
		
		• Build on existing Engagement Brand
			Community Futures IT Marketing and Communications
			
			Marketing and Communications
				o	o	o	o		

Community Engagement is valued as a strategic process to inform Mildura Rural City decision making process	• Include community engagement planning and measures into Council systems - Briefing notes - Council reports - Annual report.	• Community Engagement measures included	**Community Futures** Corporate Services		o	o			

Staff will have the knowledge, skills and confidence to undertake effective community engagement activities.	• Deliver a suite of training modules to suit the needs of individual teams.	• No. of staff attending • No. of sessions offered • Participant satisfaction • Level of training requested.	**Community Futures**	o	o	o	o	o

	• Utilise 'The Shed' to develop a dedicated Community Engagement planning platform.
	  - Collate all supporting documents and internal resources.
	  - Completed project plans, engagement and evaluation templates, best practice data
		• Promoted across the organisation
		• Platform designed
		• Measure and track use
			Community Futures
			IT
			Marketing and Communications
				o	o	o	o	o