

**POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE**



**Social  
Futures**

**COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT  
FRAMEWORK**

# Social Futures' Vision and Purpose

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Social Futures is a community-based not-for-profit organisation that envisages communities in which all people are valued and included. Our organisational vision is 'thriving people, strong communities'.

For more than 40 years we have been creating positive social change in regional Australia, working directly with individuals, families, communities, organisations and governments across our focus areas of:



**Disability inclusion**

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**Housing, homelessness and employment**

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**Families and children**

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**Young people**

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**Health and wellbeing**

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**Strengthening communities and sector leadership**

We are a regional leader and work alongside our partner organisations to strengthen and build capacity within the community sector by providing training, development and advocacy, and tailoring our programs to fit our diverse local communities.

Social Futures has a wide sphere of influence, spanning our diverse service users, community service providers, government (Federal, State and local), local and regional businesses, members of parliament, media, and our partners and collaborators in non-government organisations, businesses and community.

We acknowledge Australia's First Peoples and strive to create more opportunities to listen and learn from the ancient, yet timeless wisdom of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander way of knowing, being and doing in the world.

Social Futures believes that reconciliation is everyone's business. Our vision is for genuine relationships, strong partnerships and connection between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider Australian community. We acknowledge that access and connection to country, knowledge and people supports everyone's wellbeing.

# Why this framework is needed?

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Social Futures is committed to engaging with communities to inform our service planning and design and ensure continual improvements in the services we offer.

This Framework provides the basis for how we engage with our communities and how we encourage our participants and communities to become involved across the diverse range of Social Futures' services.

## The Framework

- clearly articulates to our participants, the communities in which we provide support, and our partner organisations, our commitment to engaging with our communities in meaningful ways, our approach, and the value associated with community engagement
- establishes a clear and consistent understanding regarding the high-quality approach to the design and delivery of community engagement, that is based on good practice
- sets out Social Futures' community engagement goals.

## The Toolkit

This Framework will be supported by a practical tool kit that provides methods, resources and useful links when planning and engaging with community.

It is a 'how to' for Social Futures' staff that are engaging with communities in which we work. The toolkit will be available in late 2021.



# What is community engagement?

Community engagement is central to ensuring our programs are meaningful, effective and meet the needs of the people in our communities. It can be defined in many different ways and can incorporate a range of different activities including information sharing, consultation collaboration and participation.

## At Social Futures, we define community engagement as:

The process of working together with our communities to identify, acknowledge and discuss issues that are important to them and work to co-determine opportunities that can improve community resilience and outcomes.

There are many ways in which we engage with our communities – the levels of which will differ in differing circumstances. For example:



**Providing high quality, accessible and relevant information** to enable community members to make informed decisions about their lives, e.g. through fact sheets and online resources, information days and stalls at community events.



**Establishing community advisory reference groups** to inform our practice and share learnings.



**Building partnerships** with community groups to raise awareness of key issues or address specific community concerns, e.g. building relationships with sporting clubs or local schools and community centres to hold events, fundraise or collaborate on specific activities.

Although this framework is focused on community engagement, we also acknowledge that every engagement activity presents the opportunity to build capacity in our communities.

## Social Futures views capacity building as:

Working with our communities to build resilient, cohesive and inclusive communities that enable individuals, families and communities to thrive and have the capacity to identify and respond to emerging needs and challenges. This process is about understanding local needs, services, challenges and opportunities to develop cohesive and inclusive communities.

Like community engagement, the way in which community capacity is built will differ in differing circumstances and within different communities. Some examples include:



**Working with local businesses, organisations and services** to build upon the ways they are accessible to people with a disability.



**Working with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities** to understand and implement better approaches for community to access services and create change.



**Working to upskill our sector** to meet the changes and challenges we face through our sector development work.

# Why we engage

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Relationships and relationship building is at the heart of what we do at Social Futures.

When we listen to the aspirations, concerns and values of our communities and incorporate these into our decision-making, we are able to better meet the needs of our communities resulting in better outcomes for individual, families and communities.

Engagement is critical in our work because:

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We believe that people within our communities are best placed to tell us what support and resources they need to address challenges in their lives, and to thrive.

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Only when we engage with our communities can we understand the strengths, resources and support that would best enable the development of strong relationships, participation in community life, work and education and higher levels of resilience.

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Engagement enables participants' voices to be heard and informs our practices, so our services are appropriate and effective.

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Engagement helps us raise awareness of our services and support, so that we may reach all those in our communities that could benefit from our services.

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It is important to note that engagement is also required in the strategic development of Social Futures. While engagement in this area is linked/underpinned by the values and practice principles noted here, it is considered a different area to community engagement with our population groups.



# Who we engage with

Social Futures seeks to connect with a broad range of community members, partner organisations, government and business representatives to ensure that inclusive and conducive engagement processes are present when delivering, sharing or developing our projects, policies and services.

Our key stakeholders include:



Diverse communities including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, LGBTIQAP+, people with disabilities, people from CALD communities, families, youth and children, and vulnerable groups



Funders



Our consortia partners, other services and non-government organisations and groups



Community leaders including Elders, youth and other representatives



Local and regional businesses



Government organisations, local councils and state and federal MPs



Research institutions



Media



# Our engagement goals

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Social Futures delivers many distinct programs, and each of these have their own goals and desired outcomes. Collectively Social Futures' purpose is to achieve positive social change in our communities. To that end, all services are united by the following community engagement goals:

**Build trust and relationships** based on a clear understanding of the communities in which we work so that we can positively contribute to people's lives

**Improve our services** to ensure they continue to meet the changing community needs

**Support people** in our communities to make beneficial decisions, be at the centre of their life and reach their potential

**Involve** community members so that they may increase their own resilience and participation

**Increase awareness of and engagement with our services** and of partnerships and collaborations between communities and organisations



# Our engagement commitments

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Our commitments to community engagement and ways of working when engaging with our participants, communities and other organisations, create a foundation for ongoing learning and improvement.

## **We commit to being:**

### **Purposeful**

Engagement activities will have clarity of purpose and inform the ways we work and ways to improve outcomes for participants and our communities.

### **Person-centred and community-informed**

Engagement activities and plans will be co-designed with members of our communities wherever possible. We will actively listen and work together with communities in engagement activities to ensure that capacity building occurs and the best outcomes result.

### **Culturally safe and respectful**

Engagement activities will be culturally safe and respectful for all involved. Our priority is to create opportunities to learn from First Nations Peoples, draw on lived experience in a safe and supportive way, be trauma informed and build on internal learnings and expertise.

### **Accessible and inclusive**

Engagement activities will be accessible and inclusive to our diverse communities, ensuring our approaches are customised to the needs of different communities.

### **Consistent, but still flexible and responsive**

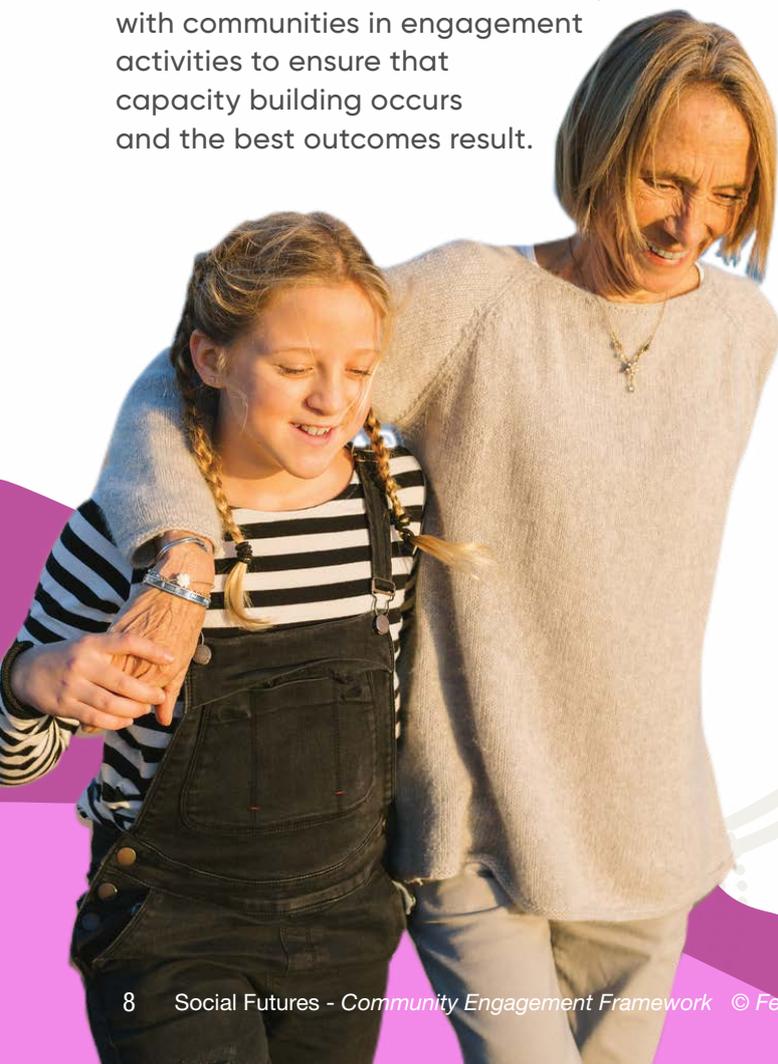
We will use tools and resources in a consistent way, while maintaining flexibility and responsiveness to best assist the communities in which we work. This acknowledges that the communities in which we work have their unique circumstances.

### **Relationship focused/connection based**

Engagement activities will use, build upon and develop appropriate relationships and connections, regardless of jurisdiction or geography. Time will be allowed to ensure that relationships can be developed, maintained and/or strengthened in ways that assist desired outcomes.

### **Effective, informed and responsive**

Engagement activities will be responsive and provide feedback to participants to ensure that outcomes are known and processes are documented.



# How we engage

## Our approach

Our approach to community engagement is founded on our core values and practice principles. In addition, engagement needs to be meaningful and useful to the tasks at hand. In that sense, as well as being values-based, our engagement activities are decision-oriented and objectives-driven.

### Our core values are:

#### Inclusion

Everyone matters

#### Integrity

Do what is right

#### Learning:

Getting better at what we do

Community engagement is designed and carried out in line with integrity, learning and inclusion in mind.

### Our practice principles are:



**The person** is at the centre, connected to people around them.

**We are active in** holding hope; building capacity; being curious; valuing culture.

**Our relationships** are collaborative, connected and respectful.

**Our practice** is evidence based with a focus on safety.

**Our three values** encompass all we do- integrity, learning and inclusion in our thinking, language and action.

## In line with our practice principles, we commit to the following ways of working:

### Best practice/evidence

The methods and activities we use in engagement will be based on practices that meet our internal values, are based on evidence with a focus on safety, and are known to deliver good outcomes. We will evaluate methods and update our knowledge base to ensure continuous improvement.

### Transparent and accountable

Engagement activities will be based on a clear and accountable plan that is consistent with Social Futures' values, practice principles and all information included in this Framework.

### Cross-program/collaborative

We aim for engagement activities and community capacity building activities to be collaborative and consistent across services.

### Acknowledgement of cultural load

We recognise that one of our greatest strengths is that we have cultural 'champions' across the communities in which we work. The organisation will acknowledge and embrace these relationships, while being respectful of cultural load.

### Resource effective

All engagement activities will be planned and delivered in a way that maximises desired outcomes, given the resources available for the program or service.

# Levels of Engagement

Engagement can occur at different levels depending on who we are engaging with and the purpose of that engagement.

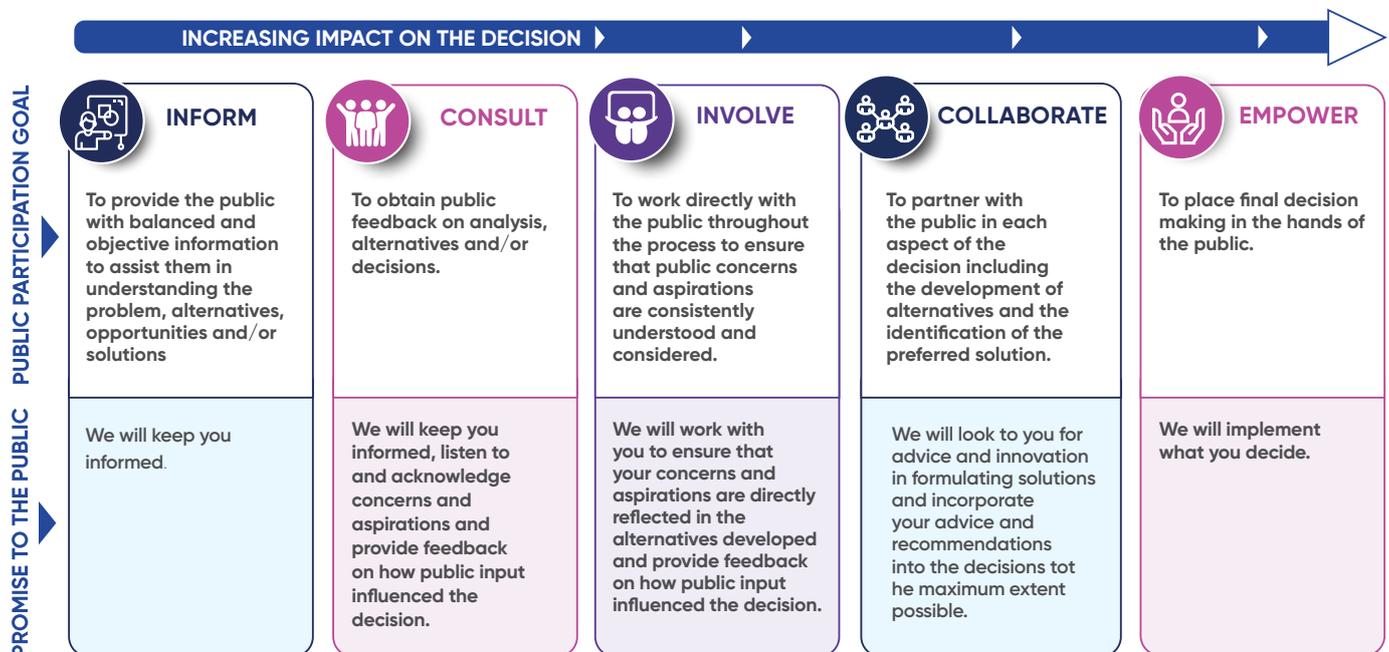
The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) is an international association of members who seek to promote and improve the practice of public participation in planning and decision making. The IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any community engagement activity. Importantly, the IAP2 Spectrum also sets out the promise being made to the public at each level of participation.

The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum is all about influencing decisions. Moving left to right on the Spectrum signifies increasing levels of community influence in the decisions being made – these can range from 'informing' the community to 'empowering' the community.

It is important to note that the level of influence will depend on the given context, and higher or lower levels of influence are not necessarily 'better' in any given circumstance. In addition, some activities could fall into multiple categories.

## IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.



International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org). For more information on the Spectrum, Code of Ethic and Core values see <https://www.iap2.org/page/about> and click on the Resources link.

Below are some examples of the types of activities under each level of engagement. Some activities fall under more than one level of engagement.

<p><b>EXAMPLE ACTIVITIES</b></p> 	 <p><b>INFORM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Factsheets</li> <li>• Online resources</li> <li>• Open days</li> <li>• Presentations to community groups</li> <li>• Media communication</li> </ul>	 <p><b>CONSULT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gathering feedback</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Submissions</li> </ul>	 <p><b>INVOLVE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holding workshops with community members or partner organisations</li> <li>• Advisory and reference groups</li> </ul>	 <p><b>COLLABORATE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative development of submissions to government</li> <li>• Information sharing meetings with government agencies, NGOs and networks</li> </ul>	 <p><b>EMPOWER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizen's Juries</li> <li>• Delegated decision making</li> <li>• Ballots</li> </ul>
Social Futures website and social media	✓				
Gathering feedback and complaints via services, website and social media		✓			
Transport Information Days		✓	✓		
Inclusive Employment Community Alliance		✓	✓		
NAIDOC Week celebrations		✓	✓	✓	
Northern Rivers Housing Forum awareness raising activities		✓	✓	✓	
LAC community reference group; headspace Youth Advisory Groups; RAP Aboriginal Advisory Group		✓	✓	✓	✓
Interagency meetings			✓	✓	✓
Better Chances Forum activities			✓	✓	✓



# Social Futures

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## POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE

Join us on



Ballina | Bathurst | Broken Hill | Byron Bay  
Coffs Harbour | Dubbo | Gosford | Grafton  
Lismore | Mullumbimby | Orange  
Tweed Heads | Wyong



We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land where we live and work and their continuing connection to land, water, sea and community. We pay respects to Australia's First Peoples, to their unique and diverse cultures, and to Elders past, present and future.