

# Narrabri Shire

## 2025 – 2026



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## DOCUMENT CONTROL

Issue	Revision	Date	Description	Resolution
Draft	1	05/02/2025	Presented at Councillor Briefing	
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# Council's Values and Statements

## Values

Narrabri Shire Council's values are at the very core of what we do and help build and maintain our family friendly, cohesive and progressive culture. Council is a values-based organisation where all staff aspire to building trust with our community and partners by 'being the best we can'. Council achieves this by collectively fostering a culture where all feel supported. It is about building a way of working where we all give each other a helpful hand up.

Our values guide our behaviour, how we go about our work, how we engage with the community and each other, the choices we make and how we spend our time. Our values should be reflected in our everyday actions and decisions and by all employees, regardless of their position and whether with us for a short or long-term career.

<b>Courage</b>	We possess the ability to confront challenges, take calculated risks and speak up for what is right.
<b>Integrity</b>	We are honest, do what's right and stick to moral values.
<b>Unity</b>	We are connected and work together harmoniously.
<b>Respect</b>	We value people's contribution and opinions, leading to an environment of inclusiveness.
<b>Trust</b>	You believe someone will do what they say, be honest and act in a way that aligns with your expectations.
<b>Commitment</b>	We work together to achieve the same goals, share ideas openly and celebrate successes as a team.

## Vision

*"We are a community that is both vibrant and sustainable, where every individual feels connected and valued."*

## Acknowledgement Of Country

**"Narrabri Shire Council acknowledges Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia. We recognise the continuing connection to lands, waters, and communities of people of the Gamilaraay/Gamilaroi/Gomeroi/Kamilaroi Nation, and pay respect to their Elders past, present and emerging."**

Narrabri Shire Council acknowledges the various spellings of 'Gamilaraay, Gamilaroi, Gomeroi, and Kamilaroi' and as valid and interchangeable, guided by the Shire's Local Aboriginal Land Councils.

The Narrabri Shire has a rich history of culture. Council endeavours to unite the Community in preserving the unique heritage, celebrating community strengths and diversities, and achieving social justice by redressing past wrongs through Aboriginal Reconciliation

Council recognises the valuable contribution to the Narrabri Shire made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and looks forward to a future of mutual respect and harmony.”

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# Introduction

This Communications Strategy establishes a strong foundation intended to enhance Narrabri Shire Council's connection with its community. The strategy plays a vital role in supporting the implementation of Council's Community Strategic Plan by integrating intentional and transparent communication techniques into every facet of Council's activities. It also ensures alignment with key plans and policies, including the Community Engagement Strategy, Customer Service Charter and other guiding documents that shape our service delivery.

Effective communication is central to achieving Council's vision of a thriving and cohesive region. This strategy explores how communication efforts can consistently reflect the values that guide our organisation, while also aligning with broader principles that guide State and Federal Government communications.

Through clear, consistent and inclusive messaging, Council will better meet the diverse needs of its residents and stakeholders, fostering a deeper sense of trust and collaboration.

Recognising the dynamic nature of the communications landscape, the strategy also identifies and addresses challenges specific to our region. It sets out a practical action plan for 2025–2026, providing tangible steps to enhance the effectiveness of our communications. By doing this, Council will be in a strong position to stay relevant, interact with the public in an efficient manner and further establish itself as an open and community-oriented organisation.

## Background and Strategic Alignment

This Communications Strategy represents a significant milestone as Narrabri Shire Council's first formal approach to managing communications. While the strategy aims to address all key aspects of communication, its primary focus is on delivering tangible outcomes over the next two years. This ensures the strategy remains actionable and responsive to current needs, acknowledging that some areas may not be explored in as much depth during this initial phase.

To ensure alignment with Council's Delivery Plan, this strategy has been developed with a two-year timeframe. Future iterations will align with Council's four-year Delivery Plan cycle, enabling a more comprehensive approach that reflects evolving priorities. As new Delivery Plans are developed, the strategy will be reviewed and adjusted to ensure it remains relevant and continues to support Council's overarching goals.

The Communications Strategy is linked to Council's Community Strategic Plan, particularly in supporting *Goal Four: Civic Leadership*. It directly aligns with *Objective 4.2: A strong Council that advocates for the Community*, and *Strategy 4.2.3: Deliver clear and effective communication*. These objectives underline the central role of communication in strengthening Council's relationship with its residents and stakeholders.

Once adopted, this strategy will serve as a guiding framework for all internal and external communications. The Communications team will collaborate closely with every area of Council to ensure that the organisation's communication vision, principles and objectives are consistently upheld.

## **Legislated Principles**

There are no legislative requirements mandating that councils develop a communications strategy. However, adopting such a strategy represents best practice.

As a tier of government, it is beneficial for Council's communications to complement the strategies and approaches of state and federal governments where possible. The NSW Government's All-of-Government Communications framework provides a useful reference point, emphasising customer-centric communications. Its vision is to deliver first-class communications by placing customers at the centre of every interaction, with an objective to continually drive excellence through data-driven, impactful and coherent messaging.

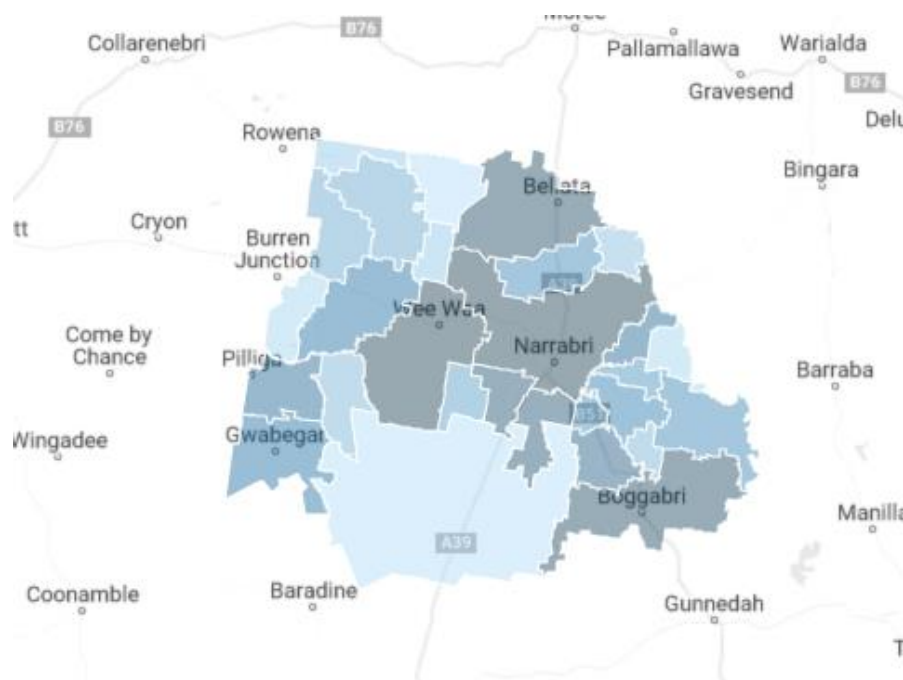
The framework's strategic pillars – customer-centric, connect and innovate – are underpinned by ambitions to deliver timely, integrated and continuously-improving communication. The six principles of customer-centric communication outlined in this framework (simple and accessible, timely, personalised, helpful, engaging and trusted) set a high standard that Narrabri Shire Council aims to reflect in its own communication practices.

Aligning with these state principles enhances the consistency and effectiveness of Council's communication efforts across all levels of government.

## **Our Community**

Understanding the unique demographics and characteristics of Narrabri Shire's community is crucial for delivering effective and inclusive communication.

The Shire's population of 12,703 is distributed across a vast geographical area of 13,031 square kilometres, with key population centres including Narrabri (7,327), Wee Waa (2,034) and Boggabri (1,203). This diverse spread brings both opportunities and challenges for communication.



Each community within the Shire has its own strengths and limitations when it comes to accessing information. Some areas benefit from dedicated local news outlets, while others face challenges such as limited internet connectivity and a lack of targeted media.

As a result, Council's communication strategy must adopt a tailored approach, incorporating both modern and traditional methods. For instance, in areas with restricted digital access, strategies like letterbox drops, posters in community hubs, and face-to-face engagement will play a vital role in ensuring residents stay informed.

The Shire's population profile further highlights the importance of diverse communication channels. With 20% of the population aged 0 to 14 years and 20% aged 65 and over, the need for accessible, multi-generational communication that caters to varying levels of digital literacy and preferences for receiving information is crucial.

A median age of 40, a near-equal gender distribution (50.4% male and 49.6% female), and a significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population comprising 14.8% of residents, means it is important that Council's communication also reflects and respects the cultural and social diversity of the community.

This understanding of our community's characteristics will guide Council in delivering communications that are not only relevant and effective but also foster a sense of inclusivity and connection across the entire Shire.

## Communications Vision

Our vision is to be a trusted source of information, fostering open dialogue and mutual respect with the Narrabri Shire community. Through proactive and inclusive communication, we will create a sense of belonging and partnership, ensuring that every voice is heard and every message builds confidence in our shared future.



# Communications Principles

## Our Principles

Effective communication is built on a foundation of clear principles, purposeful messaging and a tone that resonates with the community. Narrabri Shire Council's communications are guided by a commitment to being:

- **Relevant:** Our communications are designed to meet the specific needs and interests of our community, ensuring messages are meaningful and impactful.
- **Accurate:** We are committed to providing information that is factual and reliable, maintaining the integrity of our messaging.
- **Open:** We foster open channels of communication, encouraging dialogue and ensuring all voices within the community are heard.
- **Transparent:** Our processes and decisions are communicated clearly, promoting accountability and building trust with our residents.

These principles, embedded in key Council strategies and policies, underpin every interaction, ensuring that the community receives timely and trustworthy information.

## Our Key Messages

Developing key messages is essential for maintaining clarity and consistency across all communication channels, whether internal or external. These messages serve as a unifying thread, equipping Council spokespersons to confidently address public enquiries, particularly in complex or high-pressure situations.

To ensure alignment with Council's broader objectives, key messages will always link back to the core themes of the Community Strategic Plan:

- **Society:** Building an empowered, inclusive, and connected community
- **Environment:** Fostering a sustainable and compatible natural and built environment
- **Economy:** Supporting a strong, diverse and sustainable economy
- **Civic Leadership:** Providing strong leadership for the community

By embedding these themes into our communications, Council can reinforce its role as a cohesive and forward-thinking organisation, dedicated to serving the needs of its community.

## Our Tone

The tone of our communications plays a pivotal role in shaping how the community perceives and engages with Council. While some messages will naturally require a formal tone, there is ample opportunity to establish a unique Narrabri Shire Council voice that is both relatable and impactful.

Our tone will be:

- **Friendly:** Encouraging open and approachable interactions, making residents feel comfortable engaging with Council
- **Respectful:** Upholding dignity and fairness in every communication, ensuring all voices are valued
- **Authoritative:** Communicating with confidence and clarity, reflecting Council's role as a trusted leader, while remaining relatable and engaging
- **Positive:** Setting a constructive and optimistic tone that fosters a sense of pride and progress within the community

Through a deliberate and thoughtful approach to tone, Council aims to create a communication style that not only informs but also inspires, strengthening the bond between Council and the community it serves.

## Our Brand

The Communications team serves as the gatekeeper of Council's brand, ensuring that all branding is applied consistently and in accordance with established style guides. A strong, cohesive brand is essential for building trust and recognition within the community, as well as for presenting Council as a professional and unified organisation.

Narrabri Shire Council manages two distinct brands:

- **Narrabri Shire Council:** Representing the corporate identity of Council, this brand is used for official communications, governance matters and service delivery. It reflects Council's role as a civic leader and service provider for the community.
- **Narrabri Region:** This brand promotes the region as a destination, focusing on tourism, economic development and community pride. It highlights the unique opportunities and attractions of the Narrabri Shire.

Both brands play a vital role in communicating with different audiences and achieving Council's broader objectives. The Communications team ensures that each brand is used appropriately to maintain consistency, strengthen public perception and reinforce Council's strategic priorities.

## Strategic Objectives

Guided by our Communications Vision these strategic objectives provide a high-level guide as to the tangible outcomes that Council seeks to achieve through this strategy.

The Communications Strategy has four objectives:

### 1. Increased understanding and awareness of Council's role

Enhance the community's understanding of Council's role and responsibilities.

By providing clear, accurate and accessible information, we aim to strengthen residents' awareness of the decisions, services and initiatives that directly affect their daily lives. This will

help build a deeper sense of trust and confidence in Council as a transparent and responsive governing body.

## **2. Deliver proactive communication that is clear, consistent, and transparent**

Council is committed to being proactive in its communication, ensuring that residents are always informed and engaged.

By delivering clear, consistent and transparent messages, we will foster an environment of openness and accountability. This objective aligns with our vision to provide trustworthy communication that is rooted in the principles of honesty and accessibility.

## **3. Communications that are accessible and delivered through residents' preferred channels**

This objective focuses on tailoring our communication methods to match the preferences of residents, ensuring that information reaches them in ways that are meaningful and accessible.

Whether through traditional media, digital platforms or face-to-face communication, we will strive to meet people where they are, ensuring that all members of the community receive messages from Council in a manner that suits them best.

## **4. Ensure Council possesses the necessary capacity, confidence and competence to effectively implement the actions encompassed within the communications strategy**

Effective communication requires the right internal resources, training and support. This objective seeks to build Council's internal capacity to implement the communications strategy with confidence and competence.

By fostering a skilled, knowledgeable and motivated Communications team, we ensure that Council is equipped to manage the evolving demands of communications, stay ahead of emerging trends and continue delivering high-quality, impactful messaging.

# **Communications Channels**

Council currently has access to and utilises a range of communications channels.

## **Owned/Paid Channels**

Owned/paid channels refer to communications channels that Council has full content control over since we either own the channel or pay for content space across the channel. Below is a range of examples of the owned/paid channels we have access to:

### **Digital**

- Social media
  - Narrabri Shire Council Facebook
  - Narrabri Shire Council LinkedIn

- Narrabri Region Instagram
- Narrabri Region Visitor Information Centre
- Narrabri Libraries Facebook
- The Crossing Theatre Facebook
- The Crossing Theatre Café Instagram
- Website
  - Narrabri Shire Council website
  - Narrabri Region tourism website
- E-newsletters

## **Print**

- Newspaper advertising
  - The Courier
  - Wee Waa News
  - The Boggabri Green Flyer
- Posters/brochures
- Letters to residents
- Displays, signage and banners

## **Radio**

- Radio advertising
  - 2Max FM
  - Now FM

## **Face-to-Face**

- Customer Service
- Visitor Information Centre
- Community Engagement Events

## **Earned Channels**

Earned channels refers to media coverage earned through public relations work.

Our Communications team undertakes a large amount of public relations work including issuing media releases, supplying media statements, organising media opportunities and more.

To ensure maximum uptake of these stories across earned channels such as newspaper, radio and television, our Communications team fosters relationships with a range of journalists and media outlets across the Northern New England North West region.

## Internal Channels

There are also a range of channels that Council utilises specifically for internal communications including:

- Workplace
- Intranet – Narrabri Maang
- All Staff emails
- Notice Boards

## Implementation

The implementation process will be guided by a comprehensive action plan, which will provide a structured approach to enhancing Council's communication efforts over the strategy's two-year timeframe.

The action plan will outline specific, measurable actions designed to build a stronger communications framework, ensuring consistency, growth, and direction for the Communications team. This plan is not intended to replace the day-to-day operations of the Communications team but rather to complement and enhance their ongoing work. It will focus on initiatives that drive progress toward the strategy's objectives, fostering a culture of continuous improvement within Council's communication practices.

## Evaluation

The evaluation framework for this strategy will focus on both qualitative and quantitative metrics, aligned with the four strategic objectives:

### **1. Increased understanding and awareness of Council's role**

- Community communications survey:* Gauge residents' preferences on the communication channels Council uses, their perceived effectiveness of the channels and messaging that Council uses, and if there are any emerging channels that Council should be exploring the use of.
- Media analysis:* Track the volume and sentiment of media coverage relating to Council activities to assess public perception and understanding.

### **2. Deliver proactive communication that is clear, consistent and transparent**

- Timeliness and frequency of communications:* Evaluate the consistency and frequency of proactive communications such as media releases, newsletters and social media updates by producing monthly reports that assess the number of communications issued by Council.
- Internal transparency audits:* Review communications monthly to compare the percentage of proactive and reactive communications that are distributed by



Council, particularly in areas like decision-making and service updates. The greater Council's internal transparency, the more proactive communications that can be generated and thus, the more transparent the community will rate Council.

**3. Communications that are accessible and delivered through residents' preferred channels**

- a. *Accessibility audits*: Ensure all communication materials meet accessibility standards, including website compliance, readability levels and multilingual availability where applicable.
- b. *Engagement metrics*: Monthly reporting on social media and website analytics, along with event attendance and engagement analytics.

**4. Ensure Council possesses the necessary capacity, confidence and competence**

- a. *Staff training and development*: Track participation in communication training programs and workshops.
- b. *Internal feedback*: Conduct regular staff surveys to assess confidence and satisfaction with internal communication processes and tools.
- c. *Process reviews*: Annually review and refine communication workflows, ensuring that resources are optimally deployed to meet strategic goals.

## **Reporting and Continuous Improvement**

The outcomes of these evaluations will be reported quarterly to ELT and annually to Council. This reporting will not only track progress against the strategic objectives but also identify areas for improvement.

This strategy is designed to be responsive to community needs. The scheduled review of this document is 2026, in line with Council's Delivery Plan, however earlier reviews and updates can be undertaken on an as need's basis.

# Action Plan

## 1. Improve Council's use of social media platforms

Action		Detail	Budget	Resource	Timeframe
1.1	Develop a Social Media Strategy for Council	Create a document that provides guidelines and a framework for all Council social media channels to follow.	-	Communications Coordinator	Second Quarter 2025
1.2	Introduce a Narrabri Shire Council Instagram account	To reach and engage with more members of the community, an Instagram account would be beneficial to Council.	-	Communications Coordinator	Third Quarter 2025
1.3	Diversify the type of content used across Council's social media	Increase use of video and a wider range of photography/graphic design across social media.	-	Communications team	Ongoing
1.4	Identify learning opportunities for team members to advance their social media skills	i.e., State of Social 2025 conference. Social media is constantly evolving and attending conferences or short courses is a great way to keep up with trends.	\$1,000	Communications team	Ongoing – one event/opportunity per year

## 2. Adopt formal reporting process for each function of the Communications team

Action		Detail	Budget	Resource	Timeframe
2.1	Implement an annual Community Communications Survey	Working with Council's Community Engagement Officer, engage with the community annually to get feedback on	\$500 (annually for promo)	Communications Coordinator Graphic Designer	Annually

		Council's communications.		Community Engagement Officer	
2.2	Develop reporting templates for communications tasks	Create monthly reporting templates to be developed for social media, websites and media coverage.	-	Communications Coordinator	Templates: Second quarter 2025 Reporting: Monthly

### 3. Develop a Council content library for use in Council communications assets and documents

Action		Detail	Budget	Resource	Timeframe
3.1	Develop and continually update a Council photo library	Engage a professional photographer on a regular basis to take photos of the region and projects across the region.	\$2,000 (annually)	External resource	One day per quarter
3.2	Upskill staff mobile phone photography skills	Regularly provide tips and tricks via internal communication channels to staff on getting good images via their phones.	-	Communications Officer	Ongoing
3.3	Create a Public Photo Library	Engage our community via a community photo competition, i.e. a Scavenger Hunt or Shire Snapshot.	-	Communications team	Ongoing

### 4. Manage and/or support the implementation of marketing campaigns that support actions contained within Council's Delivery Plan and the Communications Strategy.

Action		Detail	Budget	Resource	Timeframe
4.1	Create and deliver the "Your	To support <i>Objective One: Increased understanding and awareness of Council's</i>	\$3,500	Communications team	Fourth quarter 2025

	Council" campaign	role, a campaign will be delivered that focuses on educating the community on what Council does and the people behind the work Council delivers.		External resource (video content creation)	Then on an ongoing quarterly basis.
4.2	Support the delivery of the Tourism Marketing Plan	The Communications team will support the NRVIC team in the delivery of their annual marketing plan, offering graphic design support and advice on different marketing approaches.	-	Communications team	Annually
4.3	Secure advertising space across local media including newspaper and radio	Council's Communications team will purchase advertising space across local newspapers and radio in bulk annually so that Council benefits from economy of scale and all areas of Council can promote necessary key messages at an affordable rate.	\$60,000	Communications team	Annually

## 5. Provide training and upskilling opportunities for Council's Communications team members

Action		Detail	Budget	Resource	Timeframe
5.1	Identify suitable content creation training and upskilling opportunities	Content creation is an ever-evolving space and there are continually new trends, platforms, and software available for communications professionals to use.	\$1,000	Communications team	Ongoing – one event/opportunity per year
5.2	Identify suitable graphic design training and	Council utilises the Adobe Suite of products for graphic design. There are constantly	\$1,000	Communications team	Ongoing – one event/opportunity per year

	upskilling opportunities	updates and new features that will improve the graphic design work the team produces. Having the opportunity and time to learn about these features is vital to the team being able to continue to deliver high quality work.			
5.3	Identify suitable writing training and upskilling opportunities	The Communications team produces a range of written content (media, reporting, speeches, etc.). It is vital the Communications team keeps up to date with what writing styles/trends are performing well with media to maximise the uptake of media pitches.	\$1,000	Communications team	Ongoing – one event/opportunity per year

## 6. Develop a strategic approach to internal communications

Action		Detail	Budget	Resource	Timeframe
6.1	Establish an internal communications working group	With a representative from each directorate, the Communications team will have a direct link to all areas of the business. This will increase the team’s ability to deliver proactive communications externally, while also ensuring that internal communications are meeting the needs of staff across the organisation.	-	Communications team  Staff representative from each directorate	Second quarter 2025



6.2	Develop and implement an annual internal communications plan	Using feedback from staff, work with working group to create a yearly plan for internal communications that ensures staff feel informed on Council matters.	-	Communications team	Annually (first plan to be implemented third quarter 2025)
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## 7. Share more proactive project and good news stories with the community

Action		Detail	Budget	Resource	Timeframe
7.1	Educate staff on the importance of communications and how to brief/provide updates to the team	To deliver proactive communications the Communications team need to have open channels of communication with project managers. By educating staff on the importance of communications, the steps the Communications team take to protect staff and the benefits of informing the Communications team as soon as possible, the Communications team will be able to build strong relationships with staff and improve the internal channels of communication.	-	Communications Coordinator All NSC Staff	First session completed by third quarter 2025  Ongoing sessions to follow:  -As part of new staff induction process  - Quarterly refresher for all staff via internal communications channels (Maang, email, videos)  - Presentations at departmental development days (P&S, ID, C&FS).
7.2	Review Council's Media Policy	With an increase in media engagement, a wider range of spokespeople will be required. Reviewing the policy to ensure it aligns with the sentiments of the Communications Strategy and supports	-	Communications team	Second quarter 2025

		the availability of multiple spokespeople across Council will be vital to achieving this action.			
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## 8. Support Council advocacy activities

Action		Detail	Budget	Resource	Timeframe
8.1	Conduct regular external scanning on community sentiment around key issues of interest and concern.	Routinely review communications from media outlets and community feedback and representations, including social media, as well as discussions with staff and Councillors.	-	Mayor and Councillors Communications team Staff representative from each directorate	Ongoing
8.2	Provide communications around critical issues.	Establish dedicated response teams or taskforces to provide clear, decisive actions to guide strategic communications.	-	Staff representative from each directorate Communications team	Ongoing
8.3	Establish the Councillor-only information portal	Establish a Councillor-only portal to keep the elected body informed in real time as to key and emerging issues, including urgent local concerns.	\$10,000	Mayor and Councillors ELT Communications team	Second quarter 2025



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