

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE

Background

Wellington Shire Council is committed to establishing and supporting strategies that encourage people to be proactively involved in the decisions that influence the future of their town. To enable this to happen, Council is supporting towns to establish Community Representative Groups. These groups encourage broad community involvement in the establishment of a community plan and work with council, service agencies and all levels of government to achieve the priority actions they have identify through the community planning process.

This Terms of Reference has been established to clarify the Community Representative Group process and the role they play in the development of community plans. The Terms of Reference ensures expectations are clear and encourages all involved to work together collaboratively for the good of the community.

Purpose of CRGs

A Community Representative Group (CRG) is a group of people committed to working with their community to identify key community issues and concerns and facilitate the community planning process.

The aim of a Community Representative Group is to bring about positive community change by:

- Ensuring as many people as possible have an opportunity to have their voice heard.
- Facilitating processes that will identify the *key concerns* of the broader community.
- Providing opportunity for the community to work together on matters relating to their future direction.
- Providing a link between the local community and government agencies.
- Overseeing the development of a Community Plan that captures the vision and hopes of the community, identifies key community priorities and suggests actions for addressing these priorities.

Role of Council

Wellington Shire Council will support CRGs by:

- Facilitating opportunity for all interested communities to establish a CRG
- Providing administrative support to the establishment of a new CRG if required.
- Providing an annual financial allocation to the CRG's to assist with expenses incurred by the process.¹
- Providing opportunities for skill development of CRG members through a range of processes including training sessions and information resources.
- Host a twice yearly forum enabling CRGs to discuss community priorities face-to-face with Councillors and Council Officers.
- Assist each CRG in the development of a Community Plan and the review process as required.
- Providing a process for feeding community plan priorities that are local government responsibility into council planning processes and communicating the results of this process back to the CRG.
- Assisting to connect the CRGs with relevant local and state government representatives to enable specific project advice.

¹ For further detail on financial support please refer to Appendix A outlining CRG structure and incorporation

- Keeping State Government informed about the CRG process and specific community priorities through the Wellington Resource Network and the Internet.
- Encouraging clear paths of communication between council and communities.
- Providing opportunity for CRGs to apply for seed funding through the Community Strengthening Support Fund to encourage and enable implementation of community plan priorities.

Role of the Responsible Council Officer

- Ensure CRG members are familiar with the Terms of Reference.
- Ensure that CRG's act within the Terms of Reference guidelines.
- Provide information and direction to guide the development of a community plan
- Provide a resource to CRGs to assist them to link with relevant agencies and government departments to assist community plan implementation.
- Provide limited administrative support.
- Provide assistance to the updating and review of community plans as required.

Please note: The role of the responsible council officer is to provide support and assistance to CRGs. It is not the responsibility of the officer to initiate action on behalf of the CRG. A facilitator will not take on an executive position with the CRG or advocate on their behalf.

Role of CRGs

The roles of the Community Representative Groups are:

- To initiate the involvement of a broad cross section of the community in the CRG process in accordance with the Terms of Reference.
- To oversee the development of a Community Plan.
- To assist and enable the implementation of community plan priorities by liaising with Council and other agencies on behalf of the broader community.
- To facilitate community action on issues and priorities identified through the community planning process.

Please refer to Appendix B for information concerning what constitutes a representative community group.

Structure of CRGs

Incorporation: Ideally CRGs should be working towards becoming incorporated bodies. This structure will ensure their independence and provides approved governance procedures. A financial allocation is made to support insurance for activities of the groups to cover members. Please refer to Appendix A for further information about incorporation.

Process for handling concerns not identified through the community planning process.

Community and CRG members are encouraged to use Council's Customer Action Request System (CARS) to handle individual issues. These requests can be made through the customer service line 1300 366 244, in writing to Wellington Shire Council or online at www.wellington.vic.gov.au

APPENDIX A

Incorporated Associations

The recommended governance structure for CRGs is an incorporated association. This structure will ensure the independence of CRG decision making and provide approved governance procedures.

Council has committed to support CRGs to achieve incorporation status by providing financial assistance to contribute towards the costs incurred.

The responsible council officer will provide each CRG with an information pack from Consumer Affairs Victoria which outlines the procedure for forming an incorporated group and some proposed model rules for CRGs.

Costs – set up

Initial Incorporation fee (as at Nov 2008)	\$113.50
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Costs - ongoing

Lodge annual statement (as at Nov 2008)	\$39.70
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Insurance

Council will support the provision of Public and Products Liability insurance for each of the groups to ensure that activities of the groups are covered by insurance.

Volunteer insurance (if deemed necessary) would be the responsibility of each individual group.

Appendix B

Achieving broad community representation? Why?

An important part of this process is the ability to demonstrate broad community representation and involvement.

The commitment of both local and state government to community planning is based on the assurance that community plan priorities reflect the issues and concerns of the broader community. Matters that are identified through community planning processes and have a clear directive or course of action should be pursued by the CRG. The CRG should seek to clearly and accurately represent the issues and priorities raised by the community in the community plan.

Table 1 is a checklist that allows CRGs to audit the composition of their groups and take corrective action where necessary.

Table 1 – What constitutes a healthy representative community group?

Question	Response	Corrective Action?
Does the composition of your representative group mirror your community? (Is the gender, age, ethnic and ability composition of your community faithfully represented?)		
Do all your local community groups have the opportunity for representation? Have you contacted them all?		
Is the group broadly representative of the community?		
Are people aware of the existence of the group and its purpose?		
What mechanisms are you going to put in place to ensure that the group is able to canvass and reflect community opinion?		
Are there people 'new' to your community involved?		
If someone new in your community wanted to get involved, could they?		
Do we have people involved in the group with project and management skills?		
Are the key sectors of the community represented: Community Business Sporting Education....		

Hard to reach groups

It is acknowledged that the input of certain groups within a community may be hard to access through the Community Representative Group process.

If this is the case other mechanisms may need to be employed to collect and present their input. Specifically the Wellington Shire Youth Liaison Officer will assist CRGs to collect youth input from their communities, the Wellington Access and Inclusion Advisory Group will coordinate input from people with disabilities and Local Indigenous Networks are also seeking to develop Community Plans for the Indigenous Community.

CRG's will be notified where these plans exist and measures will be taken to encourage and enable the linking of both planning processes.

Community Plans

A Community Plan is a written document produced by a local community that identifies the priorities of the community. Council has established a process for considering Community Plan priorities that are the responsibility of local government in its annual planning process.

Valid community plan priorities are established by:

1. Demonstrating how the broader community has had input into determining priority concerns and issues.
2. Once the range of information has been collected and the priorities identified there should be further opportunity given to the community to endorse the priorities either through a public meeting or a random survey conducted by CRG members.

Wellington Shire Council will continue to work with CRGs to assist them to link with relevant state government agencies in the implementation of community plan priorities.