

Stakeholder and community participation plan

For new schools and major school upgrade projects undertaken under Division 5.1 of the EP&A Act 1979

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Document version

Version	Date	Amendment
1.0	25/10/2024	Initial release



Introduction

At the NSW Department of Education (the department), our mission is to transform lives through learning. School Infrastructure is a division of the department and is delivering new and upgraded facilities to ensure every student has access to high quality, inclusive, and sustainable learning environments at their local public school. We do this by working collaboratively with our school communities and stakeholders to create learning environments across NSW for our students and staff.

This stakeholder and community participation plan (plan) identifies how and when stakeholders, including the community, can participate in the planning process for new schools and major school upgrade projects undertaken by the department under Division 5.1 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act (EP&A Act) 1979.

The community is classified as anyone affected by, or interested in the activity, including school staff, students and parents, individuals within the local community, community groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, peak bodies, and businesses.

Key stakeholders for new school and major school upgrade projects include school communities, local government and state and commonwealth government agencies and, service and infrastructure providers.

Division 5.1 of the EP&A Act allows the department to self-assess the environmental impacts of new school and major school upgrade projects, meaning that these activities do not require development consent under Part 4 of the EP&A Act.

Through the self-assessment process, the environmental impacts of school infrastructure projects will be assessed through a Review of Environmental Factors (REF), which is prepared in line with the [Guidelines for Division 5.1 Assessment](#). These [Guidelines](#) can be found on the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure website.

Some school projects will still need to be assessed through alternative planning pathways. This plan does not apply if the planning pathway for the activity is through exempt development, complying development, State Significant Development (SSD) or is declared to be State Significant Infrastructure (SSI).

How we build and upgrade schools

New school and major school upgrade projects are designed in line with the department's Education Facilities Standards and Guidelines (EFSG), which provide guidance for building school facilities based on a clear set of design principles and space requirements.

Our approach to school design has been informed by research to support current and emerging pedagogy, whilst maintaining flexibility to ensure individual schools needs are met.

Engagement principles

Our approach to stakeholder and community engagement is guided by the community participation principles of the EP&A Act.

The level of engagement and consultation undertaken reflects the level of potential environmental impact from the activity, including impacts on surrounding properties and the broader community, and the anticipated level of community interest.

Early stakeholder and community engagement

In some cases, the department will start engagement on a project with the school leadership and community, adjoining neighbours, local community, local council, and key state agencies during early project planning.

When engaging with neighbours, the department will consider what impact the development will have, including issues such as privacy, solar access, views and visual impacts, overshadowing, noise generation, hours of operation, traffic and parking impacts.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities play an active role in the development and delivery of infrastructure projects. Engagement can occur at various stages of an infrastructure project and be undertaken in different ways depending on the project itself and the views of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders, members and families.

A flexible approach will be adopted to setting times for communication and consultation, and the format in which sensitive information is shared, ensuring safe spaces for participation in the process are provided.

The Department's approach is in keeping with the concepts in the:

- [NSW Government Architect Connecting with Country Framework \(November 2023\)](#)

This provides guidance on good processes to inform the planning, design, and delivery of infrastructure. It emphasises the importance of early engagement with these communities to ensure better outcomes and to facilitate making decisions that affect Country in partnership with Aboriginal communities.

- [NSW Department of Education and NSW AECG Incorporated Partnership Agreement](#)

The NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated (NSW AECG Inc.) is the peak community advisory body to the department on Aboriginal education and training at all levels and in all stages of planning and decision making.

How we engage on school projects

School infrastructure projects that can be self-assessed by the department under Division 5.1 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act (EP&A Act) 1979 include:

- New government schools, whether temporary or permanent, in prescribed zones up to 4 storeys, or the height permissible by any applicable Environmental Planning Instrument (EPI).
- Alterations and additions to existing government schools, including new buildings at existing schools up to 4 storeys or the height permissible by any applicable EPI.

The department follows the [IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum](#) to assist with the planning and selection of public participation methods on our projects. For school infrastructure projects, the department primarily uses the "Inform" and "Consult" levels of the IAP2 spectrum, which allows for effective community engagement while ensuring projects stay on track within the constraints of timing, budget, and regulatory requirements.

By keeping the community informed and seeking their feedback, we ensure that their voices are heard, and their concerns are considered, while also maintaining the efficiency and technical precision needed for delivery of these projects. We aim to balance public input with the need for expert-driven processes to deliver infrastructure improvements efficiently.

Stakeholders and the community are consulted or informed throughout the planning process for school projects through a range of engagement methods including face to face meetings and briefings, community information sessions and communications such as project updates. A Project Reference Group is also formed for major projects to provide input from an operational, educational, change and logistics perspective into the planning phases of a project. Members of the group may include the project team, architects and other specialists, school and school community representatives.

Communication and engagement during public exhibition

The table below outlines how and when we will inform and consult the community and key stakeholders for self-assessed projects at the time of public exhibition.

	New schools	Major Alterations and additions
Inform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project webpage updates. Notification to adjoining neighbours, owners and occupiers, (up to 80m from the site boundary) inviting feedback within 28 days. Notification to the local council, relevant state and commonwealth government agencies and service providers. Project update to wider community. Public exhibition on the school project page of the department's website with link to the project documentation on the portal, for 28 days. Works notification to outline commencement of works after a 14 day notice period. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project webpage updates. Notification to adjoining neighbours, owners and occupiers, (up to 80m from the site boundary) inviting feedback within 21 days. Notification to the local council, relevant state and commonwealth government agencies and service providers. Project update to wider community. Public exhibition on the school project page of the department's website with link to the project documentation on the portal, for 21 days. Works notification to outline commencement of works after a 14 day notice period.
Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The community will be notified and invited to make written submissions. There is an opportunity for community input to shape some aspects of the project. Community information session (unless held prior to exhibition). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The community will be notified and invited to make written submissions. There is an opportunity for community input to shape some aspects of the project. Community information session (unless held prior to exhibition).

Additional engagement with community groups may be undertaken if deemed necessary.

Notification exclusion period

Formal notification of any application is not preferred to be undertaken between 20 December and 10 January, consistent with the practice of Department of Planning, Housing, and Infrastructure, and local councils. Exhibition of projects in November and December is to be concluded by 20 December or should include the entire exclusion period.

Public exhibition

Engagement during the assessment process is a formal process that is governed by the EP&A Act.

What will be publicly exhibited

All REFs for school infrastructure projects will be published on the NSW Division 5.1 Planning Portal. Projects which undergo public exhibition as part of their assessment will have all documentation associated with the project loaded to the planning portal and will remain on the website indefinitely.

All projects will have the final Review of Environmental Factors and decision documents uploaded to the planning portal and which will also remain on the website indefinitely.

Re-exhibition of any amended proposal may also occur. The period of re-exhibition, if required, will be determined by the department, and will be based on the nature, scale and likely impact of the amendment. If a community member has provided a submission on the original proposal, they will be notified of any re-exhibition, along with any other stakeholder/person who may be affected by the amendment.

How to make a submission

Anyone can make a submission of feedback for a school infrastructure project. When projects are publicly exhibited, the exhibition will include a guide on how to make a submission, along with details of where to lodge your submission.

Submissions made in relation to a public exhibition are public documents. As such, they may be published in reports. Where there is a requirement not to have personal information published as part of the submission, it should be marked as 'confidential'.

Post exhibition requirements

At the end of the public exhibition period, the REF report will be updated and finalised to consider any submissions made. The final REF report will identify any issues raised in submissions received during the public exhibition period, including how these issues have been considered and addressed in the assessment of the proposed activity.

Submissions include those from the community, community groups, businesses, local council, state and commonwealth government agencies, service and infrastructure providers and any other bodies or agencies.

A record of all engagements and consultations undertaken will also be kept.

Enquiries and complaints

Enquiries and complaints about school infrastructure projects can be made by emailing schoolinfrastructure@det.nsw.edu.au or calling 1300 482 651 between 9 am and 5 pm.

For projects in construction, a 24-hour contact number for the project site manager will be displayed at the site and can be shared with the community as necessary for any urgent issues that need to be addressed on site, outside of business hours.

The department will aim to reply to complaints within 10 working days. If additional time is required, the department will contact complainants to advise when a response can be expected.

All enquiries and complaints are logged on the department's database for school infrastructure projects.

The department's School Infrastructure division has a complaints management and escalation protocol for school infrastructure projects. Where complaints may not be resolved by the department to the satisfaction of the complainant, they will be advised to contact the NSW Ombudsman - <https://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/complaints>.

Freedom of information

The NSW Government is committed to improving openness, transparency, and ease of access to information. The department will aim to release as much government information as possible on a proposal, through its website, on the NSW Planning Portal or by request.

The *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (GIPA Act) establishes a proactive, more open approach to gaining access to government information in NSW.

Restrictions apply to accessing information only when there is an overriding public interest against disclosure of information.

More information on the right to access information can be found on this webpage:

education.nsw.gov.au/rights-and-accountability/information-access

Community members should contact the department directly if they want access to information on a proposal that is not found on their website.

