

Business and Industry Engagement Framework

Purpose

The Business and Industry Engagement Framework (Framework) is designed to establish a structured, consistent and strategic approach to how Council engages with the local business community. This framework will guide the team's interactions, partnerships and communications with businesses across the region to ensure engagement efforts are purposeful, coordinated and responsive to local economic conditions.

Key objectives include:

- **Building Stronger Relationships:** Foster trust and collaboration between Council and the local business community through meaningful, two-way engagement.
- **Supporting Business Needs:** Ensure Council's programs, policies and services are informed by current business challenges, opportunities and aspirations.
- **Improving Responsiveness:** Create clear pathways for businesses to access support, provide feedback, and influence economic initiatives and decision-making.
- **Maximising Impact:** Align engagement activities with Council's economic development priorities and available resources to deliver tangible outcomes.
- **Enhancing Communication:** Ensure consistent and targeted communication that reflects the diversity of industries, business sizes and stages of growth across the municipality.
- **Encouraging Collaboration:** Strengthen connections between businesses, industry bodies and other stakeholders to foster innovation, investment and local job creation.

This Framework is built on the Council Plan 2025-2029, the East Gippsland Economic Development Strategy 2022-2032 and leans on findings from the 2024 Business Roundtables, the Economic Recovery Lessons Learned and the draft Business and Industry Engagement Framework prepared by Snowy Advisory.

Ultimately, the framework will help embed a culture of proactive, transparent and accountable business engagement within Council operations, supporting a resilient and thriving local economy.

Introduction

East Gippsland is home to a diverse and geographically dispersed business community, with over 4,500 registered businesses spanning a wide range of sectors. The region's economic base is underpinned by agriculture, forestry and fishing, construction, health, tourism and manufacturing. A significant proportion of local businesses employ less than 20 FTE, many of which are family-owned and locally operated, with varying levels of capacity and maturity.

Council plays a key role in fostering a vibrant and resilient business environment but must do so in a context of limited resources and increasing complexity of economic challenges and opportunities. Delivering meaningful engagement across such a large and varied region requires a strategic, scalable, and prioritised approach.

This Business Engagement Framework responds to that need by:

- Segmenting businesses in a way that recognises their diversity,
- Clarifying levels of engagement through a tiered model,
- Focusing Council's efforts where they can have the greatest impact, and
- Ensuring engagement is inclusive, consistent and aligned with Council's broader economic development objectives.

Through this framework, Council aims to do more with less—targeting resources, strengthening partnerships and building a more connected, informed and resilient business community across East Gippsland.

Framework Principles

The Framework is underpinned by guiding principles that provide a foundation for consistent, values-based engagement within the business community:

1. **Strategic Sustainable Economic Growth** – Focus on high-potential sectors and remove barriers to growth.
2. **Respect and Partnership** - Engage with respect and build genuine, long-term relationships
3. **Timely and Targeted Engagement** – Engage stakeholders at the right time and level.
4. **Two-Way Communication** – Engagement is a dialogue, not a broadcast.
5. **Clear Relationship Management** – Assign account managers to avoid fragmented communication.
6. **Consistency and Coordination** - Our approach is coordinated across Council for a seamless business experience.
7. **Transparency and Accountability** – Ensure consistent updates and reporting.
8. **Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusion** – Respect diverse perspectives and local contexts.
9. **Value Creation and Impact** - Our engagement aims to deliver real value and positive economic outcomes.
10. **Continuous Improvement** – Regularly review and refine engagement practices

Stakeholder Segmentation

To engage effectively and deliver meaningful economic outcomes, Council must understand the diversity of stakeholders that make up East Gippsland’s business ecosystem. These stakeholders range from micro and home-based enterprises to major employers, across sectors as varied as agriculture, tourism, health, and manufacturing.

By segmenting stakeholders based on business category, number of employees, industry, location and strategic relevance, Council can tailor its engagement approach to meet differing needs, build stronger relationships, and focus resources where they will have the greatest impact. This segmentation also supports more inclusive and equitable engagement, ensuring that all parts of the business community—regardless of size or visibility—can connect with Council and contribute to shaping the region’s economic future.

Segment Matrix

Dimension	Classification
Business category	Major, Growth or Foundation
Number of employees	#
Industry	ANZSIC codes
Location	Town/Post Code
Strategic relevance	High impact employers, transition-affected, innovation or high growth potential, export capable or market ready, investment or development partners, anchor tenants or precinct leaders, sustainability-aligned enterprises, workforce development collaborators, sector influences or peak bodies

The Business categories and Strategic relevance dimensions are outlined in more detail below.

Business Categories

Businesses are segmented into three categories:

Majors (100 employees)

A Major Business is defined as a strategically significant enterprise with a substantial operational footprint in East Gippsland. These businesses typically employ more than 100 people locally and are often recognised for their strong brand equity, category leadership, and long-standing commercial presence.

Key characteristics include:

- **Scale and Reach:** Operates at a national level, with head office and key decision-makers potentially located interstate.
- **Export Orientation:** Frequently engages in trade beyond East Gippsland, contributing to regional economic visibility and growth.

- **Market Maturity:** Demonstrates a sophisticated marketing strategy, clearly defined market segments, and well-established business relationships.
- **Governance:** May be privately held or publicly listed, with strategic decisions made across multiple jurisdictions.
- **Strategic Value:** These businesses are considered anchor institutions within the local economy and are prioritised for retention and proactive engagement.

Growth (20 – 100 employees)

A Growth Business is defined as a locally driven enterprise that is actively scaling its operations and is characterised by strong ambition, customer focus, and a clear strategic direction. These businesses typically employ between 20 and 100 people or are projected to reach this scale within 3–5 years.

Key characteristics include:

- **Growth Orientation:** Demonstrates a clear business plan and a strong desire to expand, particularly into export markets, even if not yet an established exporter.
- **Leadership and Vision:** Often founder-led or family-run, with the Managing Director playing a central role in shaping the company's direction and culture.
- **Market Focus:** Primarily rooted in the domestic market but actively building capability to compete beyond East Gippsland.
- **Business Maturity:** Operates with a defined customer base, a growing reputation, and a commitment to continuous improvement and innovation.
- **Strategic Value:** These businesses are key drivers of local employment and economic diversification and are prioritised for support and capability uplift.

Foundation (1-20 employees)

A Foundation Business is defined as a small-scale enterprise that contributes to East Gippsland's economic and community fabric, often driven by personal passion and lifestyle objectives. These businesses typically employ between 1 and 20 people, with many operating as sole traders or micro-enterprises.

Key characteristics include:

- **Purpose-Driven:** Business objectives may extend beyond profit, reflecting the personal values and life goals of the owner/operator.
- **Business Structure:** Often home-based or operating from small commercial premises within East Gippsland.
- **Planning and Strategy:** May not have a formal business plan but demonstrates commitment to their product, service, or community.
- **Ownership and Leadership:** Commonly founder-led, with deep local roots and a strong sense of identity.
- **Strategic Value:** These businesses are vital to the region's diversity, resilience, and local employment, and are prioritised for capability uplift and targeted support.

Strategic Alignment

In addition to business category, number of employees, industry and location, businesses can also be segmented based on their strategic alignment to Council's economic development objectives. This

lens recognises that some businesses—regardless of their size—have the potential to significantly influence local employment, innovation, resilience, investment, or transition outcomes.

- **Low relevance** businesses typically have limited economic reach or growth potential.
- **Medium relevance** businesses demonstrate moderate alignment with strategic objectives – they may contribute to key sectors, show growth or transition potential or be open to collaboration or capacity building.
- **High relevance** businesses are those with significant influence on local employment, investment, innovation or advocacy.

Identifying and engaging these strategically relevant stakeholders enables Council to focus its resources where they can have the greatest impact. This approach also supports more proactive collaboration on region-shaping initiatives and ensures alignment between business engagement and long-term economic priorities for East Gippsland.

Strategic Alignment	Examples
High impact employers	Major regional employers such as Patties Foods or local health services
Transition affected businesses	Businesses impacted by the native timber transition or energy policy changes
Innovation or high-growth potential	Tech-enabled start-ups, value-added food producers, advanced manufacturers
Export capable or market-ready businesses	Agribusinesses or manufacturers looking to expand into interstate or international markets
Investment or development partners	Landowners or developers progressing significant commercial or industrial projects
Anchor tenants or precinct leaders	Business operating in key industrial zones or town centres that influence broader economic activity
Sustainability-aligned enterprises	Businesses actively progressing circular economy, climate adaptation or eco-certification initiatives
Workforce development collaborators	Employers engaged with local schools, TAFE or workforce attraction efforts
Sector influences or peak bodies	Chambers of commerce, industry associations or cooperative marketing groups.

Tiered Engagement Model

Building on the stakeholder segmentation a tiered engagement model allows Council to tailor its approach to business engagement based on the category and strategic value of each business type. Recognising that businesses operate at different scales, with varying levels of complexity, ambition,

and strategic influence, the model ensures that engagement is purposeful, proportionate, and aligned with the region’s economic development priorities.

Tiered Engagement

Tier 1: Broad Reach – Inform & Connect

Purpose: To empower businesses by ensuring they have access to timely, relevant information and a clear, low-barrier connection to Council. This tier supports broad engagement across the business community, particularly sole traders and micro-enterprises, by providing consistent, accessible communication and visibility of opportunities.

This includes:

- Digital engagement through newsletters and social media
- Streamlined publications and website content
- CRM-driven communications
- Business directory listings
- Concierge support for general enquiries
- General forums and webinars

This tier primarily supports Foundation businesses and sole traders, offering accessible, low-touch engagement that builds awareness, trust, and connection. By leveraging digital channels such as newsletters, social media, and website content—alongside CRM-driven communications, streamlined publications, and concierge-style support—Council ensures that even the smallest enterprises are empowered to participate in East Gippsland’s economic development journey.

The intended outcomes of this tier include broad awareness of Council initiatives, grants, and support; increased visibility of opportunities and services; and a low-barrier entry point into Council’s broader engagement ecosystem. It serves as the foundation for inclusive communication and early-stage engagement, enabling businesses to stay informed and connected without requiring intensive interaction.

Tier 2: Targeted Support – Consult & Collaborate

Purpose: To deepen engagement with priority sectors and businesses that are navigating growth, transition, or specific challenges. This tier focuses on building stronger relationships and delivering tailored support that aligns Council services with industry needs.

This includes:

- Industry roundtables and working groups
- Surveys and targeted consultation
- Training, mentoring, and capability-building programs
- Business visits and one-on-one support

This tier primarily supports Growth-stage businesses, key sectors such as tourism, manufacturing, and agriculture, and businesses impacted by change (e.g. transition industries). Engagement is more

personalised and responsive, enabling Council to co-develop solutions, strengthen collaboration on local economic priorities, and enhance business capability and resilience across the region.

Tier 3: Strategic Partnership – Co-design & Influence

Purpose: To foster high-trust, strategic partnerships with businesses and stakeholders that have the capacity to influence long-term economic outcomes for East Gippsland. This tier focuses on collaboration at the highest level, enabling shared investment, policy alignment, and co-designed initiatives that support regional prosperity.

This includes:

- Direct representation in advisory committees or reference groups
- Co-design of initiatives and pilot projects
- Joint advocacy or investment attraction efforts
- Regular executive-level engagement

This tier is designed for Major businesses, anchor institutions, regional industry leaders, and peak bodies. Engagement is led by senior Council executives and is focused on long-term, high-impact collaboration. The intended outcomes include strategic alignment on economic development goals, shared investment in priority projects, and informed, forward-thinking policy and planning.

Business Engagement Matrix

aligning Stakeholder Segmentation and Engagement Tiers

Tier of Engagement	Business Category	Level of Strategic Relevance	Engagement Approach
Tier 1 Inform and Consent	Foundation Businesses	Low to moderate	Broad Reach. Newsletters, social media, online resources, concierge, general forums and events.
Tier 2 Consult and Collaborate	Growth Businesses	Moderate to high	Targeted Support. Industry roundtables, working groups, surveys, skills development, mentoring, business visits and one-one-one support.
Tier 3 Co-design and Influence	Major Businesses	High	Strategic Partnerships. Co-design of initiatives, advocacy, collaboration, executive level engagement.

Operationalising the Framework

Successfully implementing the Business Engagement Framework requires a coordinated, whole-of-Council effort that translates strategy into action.

This operationalising plan outlines the practical steps required to embed the tiered engagement model—aligned to Major, Growth, and Foundation business segments—into Council’s day-to-day

operations. It provides clear actions across five key areas: establishing internal foundations, stakeholder mapping, designing engagement activities, strengthening communication and feedback loops, and building team capacity. The plan supports a scalable model of engagement that prioritises impact and enables Council to build stronger, more productive relationships with business.

Step 1. Establish Internal Foundations

Establishing internal foundations seeks to ensure alignment, ownership and shared understanding across Council to support consistent and effective business engagement.

Action	Success Indicator
Finalise the Business Engagement Framework	Formal endorsement and clear mandate
Brief key staff to build understanding of their role in engagement and KPI alignment	Staff awareness and consistency
Develop internal guidelines for staff engaging with business	Shared tools and messaging templates
Integrate principles into existing workflows	Framework informs Council activities

Step 2. Stakeholder Mapping

Effective business engagement begins with a clear understanding of who our stakeholders are. Given East Gippsland's diverse and dispersed business landscape, stakeholder mapping is a critical step in ensuring Council's efforts are targeted, inclusive and impactful. This process involves consolidating existing business data and classifying businesses into the three core segments of the engagement model: **Major**, **Growth**, and **Foundation**. By layering this segmentation with industry, location and strategic alignment, Council can identify priority groups, engagement gaps and emerging opportunities.

Action	Success Indicator
Consolidate and clean existing business database	Comprehensive and accurate dataset
Segment business data by size, sector, location, growth aspirations and strategic relevance	Stakeholder map aligned with segments
Identify gaps in current engagement and data	Focus areas for proactive outreach

Step 3. Design Engagement Activities

With a clear understanding of stakeholder segments and strategic alignment, the next step is to design tailored engagement activities that reflect the varying needs, capacities and influence of East Gippsland's business community. By aligning each activity to the appropriate engagement tier—Inform & Connect, Consult & Collaborate, or Co-design & Influence—Council can ensure its approach is both targeted and scalable.

Action	Success Indicator
Develop annual engagement calendar across all tiers	Coordinated, proactive outreach. Calendar in place
Develop Tier 1 activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Business Matters newsletter Review and update online resources with clearer navigation Develop social media plan Promote business concierge services and info sessions 	Broad business community reached. Increased subscription, engagement and reach
Plan Tier 2 activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule industry roundtables Support sector forums and issue based working groups. Develop annual economic forum Develop calendar of business visits Review Investment Pipeline Communicate facilitation support 	Deepened engagement and targeted support.
Establish Tier 3 activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish strategic partnership meetings Connect into Council's Advocacy Strategy 	Key partners identified and engaged. Strategic input into Council initiatives and advocacy

Step 4. Feedback Loops and Continuous Improvement

Effective business engagement is not a one-way process—it requires open communication, active listening, and a willingness to evolve. To build trust and deliver value, Council must ensure that businesses not only receive timely, relevant information, but also have clear pathways to provide feedback, contribute ideas, and influence decision-making.

This step focuses on strengthening two-way communication and embedding continuous improvement into Council's engagement practices. By establishing structured feedback mechanisms, reporting transparently on outcomes, and regularly reviewing performance, Council can adapt its approach to stay responsive to the changing needs of East Gippsland's business community and ensure that engagement efforts remain meaningful, inclusive and outcomes-focused.

Action	Success Indicator
Launch feedback mechanism	Annual business survey developed. Feedback received and acted upon
Establish baseline engagement data and KPIs	Clear metrics identified
Develop half-yearly business engagement update reports	Council see transparent outcomes

Step 5. Building Team Capacity

Delivering consistent, high-quality business engagement requires more than a well-designed framework—it depends on the capability, confidence and coordination of the people implementing it. Building internal capacity across Council ensures that all staff involved in economic development, place-based initiatives and business-facing roles understand their responsibilities, use a shared language, and apply the tools and principles of the engagement model effectively.

This step focuses on equipping teams with the skills, resources and support they need to engage meaningfully with local businesses, while fostering a whole-of-Council culture that values responsiveness, collaboration and continuous learning. By investing in internal capacity, Council strengthens its ability to deliver impactful engagement and adapt to the evolving needs of East Gippsland's business community.

Action	Success Indicator
Provide staff training in business engagement techniques	Increased confidence and capability
Develop templates and toolkits for engagement	Consistent data collation, messaging and approach
Encourage cross-team collaboration and whole-of-Council engagement	Increased coordination and reduced duplication.
Promote an internal culture of customer service and responsiveness	Embedded values across organisation

Business and Industry Engagement Key Performance Indicators

To ensure that the Business and Industry Engagement Framework is delivering value to East Gippsland’s business community and supporting Council’s economic development objectives, a clear set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) has been developed.

These KPIs focus on measuring the reach, effectiveness and responsiveness of engagement activities. By tracking performance against these indicators, Council can assess what’s working, identify gaps, and continuously improve its approach. The KPIs also provide a transparent mechanism to demonstrate outcomes to stakeholders and inform decision-making, resource allocation and future planning.

Measure	Annual Targets
Industry Sector Roundtables	4 sector specific roundtables delivered with at least 20 businesses in attendance.
Economic Forum	Annual Economic Forum with at least 40 businesses in attendance.
New businesses have been engaged	20 new Major and Growth businesses have been engaged
Business intelligence recorded	100 business intelligence records created (including thought business concierge)
Unique visits	80 unique visits (all Major and Growth businesses visited as well as capturing Foundation engagements)
Investment Pipeline	10 new investment projects captured on the pipeline
Investment Facilitation	10 businesses provided facilitation support to navigate grants and/or approvals