

## Litchfield Rating Community Reference Group

Council rates are a hot topic in all jurisdictions around Australia. True North facilitated complex discussion about Litchfield Council's current rating system.

### Project

In 2019 Litchfield Council reviewed its rating policy with the assistance of a Community Reference Group (CRG). The role of the CRG was to provide advice to Council about its rating policy from a representative selection of the Litchfield community.

True North Strategic Communication was engaged to design and facilitate the CRG discussions and prepare a report to Council. Eight CRG meetings were held over six months and were led by technical experts from a number of areas including rating structure, legislation and planning.

True North assisted the CRG in navigating and understanding complex rating topics. We did this by creating an environment where all members could constructively contribute to discussions and debate the merits of potential rating structures. True North identified different discussion formats to facilitate meaningful conversations that directly linked to the aims of the meeting.

### Challenges

The CRG brought people together with diverse backgrounds, values and beliefs. Having a varied group meant different opinions and viewpoints were represented and could be openly discussed. However, it also meant discussions had the risk of becoming too broad and straying off topic.

We established the following steps to ensure the process was productive and kept on topic:

- identify areas that are within and outside of the CRG Terms of Reference to build a shared understanding of the task
- agree on the items for ongoing discussion and those that need to be excluded
- identify focus areas for the CRG recommendations
- formulate and discuss recommendations
- vote on the recommendations.

Having a strong and clear process set out at the beginning meant CRG members knew what was expected of them and could be referred back to when discussions went off topic.

### Our three top tips for a successful facilitation:

When planning a facilitation, first understand the purpose, the people who will be in the room and the approach that best suits the conversation.

A facilitator is most effective when they are neutral and independent from the organisation and topic under consideration.

A facilitator's role is to ask questions, listen to responses, seek comments from others, probe for alternative views and encourage dialogue.

*International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)*

*Delivery was professional and timely.  
True North were approachable,  
reliable, flexible and readily  
available to support the project.*

**Silke Maynard**  
Interim Chief Executive Officer,  
Litchfield Council



### Outcome

The CRG made eight recommendations at the conclusion of the meetings. True North captured these recommendations and presented a final report to Council that was reflective of the CRG discussions and feedback. The report outlined the process undertaken and the issues debated, including topics that had varying viewpoints.

Council received the report and is taking the findings and recommendations into consideration to help develop a new rating policy.